

THE SHAPELINESS OF THE SHEKINAH:¹
STRUCTURAL UNITY IN THE THOUGHT OF
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¹ Peter Steele, *The Autobiographical Passion: Studies in the Self on Show*, Melbourne University Press, 1989, 75-6. [*Autopassion*]. "Shekinah" - "God's glorious presence in our midst." *Concise Dictionary of Theology*, G. O'Collins, S.J. and G. Farrugia, S.J., Paulist Press, New York, 1991.

ABSTRACT

Peter Steele S.J. is a highly significant figure in contemporary scholarship, religious sensibility and poetic achievement. His work is available in a very wide range of writings, some published, much in archival situations. He matters by virtue of being a distinguished Australian academic, being widely published as a poet, and having theological and religious significance in at least three continents as a central figure in the Society of Jesus in Australia and New Zealand since the 1970's.

The challenge of addressing Steele's achievement lies in the fact that his religious insights form the basis of his poetic, academic and ethical imagination. The thesis investigates Steele's unifying vision as it is expressed by him in the many ways he encounters the contemporary world. It attempts to identify his position as expressing itself in his perception of the Divinity, particularly in terms of the concept of *radiance*. God is seen in Steele's writing to *radiate* into the world as Jester, Pilgrim / Expatriate, Celebrant, and Word or Witness.

To a certain extent each chapter follows a similar pattern of development. A radiant pattern is identified in and as of God, of Christ, of the Scriptures, of the saints (represented by the Jesuit martyr Edmund Campion) and of the writings of Ignatius Loyola. The *Spiritual Exercises* Steele regards as a guide and source of the relevance of the radiant character of God in the contemporary world. Importantly it is this radiant pattern that Steele also recognises in the work of other writers where he sees the presence of God in their poetry and prose.

Each chapter also has variations within this arrangement. These variations are appropriate to each chapter's subject matter and to the genre of Steele's writing under investigation. Chapter One describes these patterns basic to the thesis. Chapter Two, which investigates "the Jester", gives special attention to Steele's critical work on Swift. Chapter Three, which is concerned with the Pilgrim / Expatriate figure, compares the concept of exile and journeying within Steele's homiletics and his poetics. Chapter Four, "The Celebrant" is more concerned to examine some of

Steele's own poetry; and Chapter Five, which treats "The Word or Witness", considers Steele's work on Peter Porter in some detail. The thesis offers a study of a modern Australian religious talent operating intellectually, academically, imaginatively and spiritually and finding expression in many genres of writing. It also offers an interpretative perspective on these issues.

Peter Steele belongs to a community of writers internationally recognised for their classicism and contemporary sophistication. He shares with writers such as Peter Porter, Joseph Brodsky, Seamus Heaney and Derek Walcott a global perspective while remaining deeply committed to the significance of his own national, religious and cultural origins.

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² *Way*, 28, 2 (April, 1988), 118-126.

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³ *Quadrant*, 40, 3 (March, 1996) 16-17.

⁴ *Age*, (Saturday Extra), 21 October, 1995, 7. MS is entitled "Heaney Displayed", AJAF viii.

⁵ *Quadrant*, 37, 11 (November, 1993), 58-67.

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⁶ AJAF viii.

⁷ *Quadrant*, 37, 3 (March, 1993), 47-54.

ABBREVIATIONS

Australian Jesuit Archives Folio	AJAF
<p>[The AJA organises Peter Steele’s material into six folios with a supplement: [AJAF i-vi and <i>Supplement</i>]. Materials provided by members of the Society have been collected as Folio vii; and unpublished materials sent by Professor Steele have been collected as Folio viii. Both AJAF vii and viii have been sent to the Archives during 1997.]</p>	
<i>Jonathan Swift : Preacher and Jester</i>	<i>Swift</i>
<i>The Autobiographical Passion: Studies in the Self on Show</i>	<i>Autopassion</i>
<i>Expatriates: Reflection on Modern Poetry</i>	<i>Expatriates</i>
<i>Oxford Australian Writers: Peter Porter</i>	<i>Porter</i>
<i>Word from Lilliput</i>	<i>Lilliput</i>
<i>Marching On Paradise</i>	<i>Paradise</i>
<i>The Potomac Sheaf</i>	<i>Potomac</i>
“Singing for Supper”	“Singing”
“Why Stay?”	“Stay”
“Shifts of the Spirit”	“Shifts”
“The Poem of the Mind: (Variations on a Spanish theme)”	“Poemind”
“Before the Silences”	“Silences”
“A Spirituality of Change”	“SpChange”
“Going After the Eagle: Reflections on John’s Gospel”	“Eagle”
“Love and Death on the Longest Journey: Dante’s <i>Commedia</i> ”	“Love/death”
“Going Steerage in the Ark: Notes for a Priest’s retreat”	“Steerage”
“Haunting Presences: Four Gestures of the Imagination”	“Presences”

“The Radiations of Peter Porter”	“Radiations”
“The Shaft of Belief”	“Shaft”
“The Choices of Edmund Campion”	“Choices”
“Humour in Dissent”	“Humour”
“Circus Maximus: The Greatest Show on Earth”	“Circus”
“Three Christian Comedies: The <i>Divine Comedy</i> , the <i>Spiritual Exercises</i> and the <i>Mass</i> ”	“Christian Comedies”
“Between the Lake and the El: Two Ways of Keeping Faith”	“Lake/El”
“Poetry and the Hunger for Change”	“Hunger”
“A Week in Winter: Lines for a Snow Man”	“Snowman”
“Joseph Brodsky: 1940-1996”	“Brodsky”
“The Hopeful Exile: A retreat for an intellectual”	“Hopeful”
“In the Pen: 500 Hours”	“Pen”
“28 th October 1984: 30 th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy: The Old Place, St Algate’s”	“28 th October”
“Eve of Trinity Sunday: June 16, 1984. Mass for Business Managers of Sacred Heart Schools, Lake Forest Illinois”	“Eve Trinity”
“Images Fortunate and Unfortunate”	“Fortunate”
“Red Lights, Green Lights, Prophets and Universities”	“Red Lights”
“Derek Walcott: Prizing and Appraising”	“Walcott”
“Leaning towards the lyrical”	“Lyrical”
“Heaney’s Tenderness and Hope”	“Tenderness”
“Taking the Strain: The Prose of Seamus Heaney”	“Strain”

“Measures and Pleasures: Ancient Hopes, Modern Poems”	“Measures”
<i>Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness</i>	<i>Mysticism</i>
<i>The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus</i>	<i>Constitutions</i>
<i>The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics</i>	<i>Glorylord</i>
<i>The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ</i>	<i>Glorygod</i>
<i>St Ignatius’ Own Story As told to Luis González de Cámara With a sampling of his letters</i>	<i>Ownstory</i>
<i>The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Literal Translation and A Contemporary Reading</i>	<i>FlemingSpEx</i>
<i>The Fool and His Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jesters and Their Audience</i>	<i>Foolscepter</i>
<i>Perfect Fools: Folly for Christ’s Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality</i>	<i>Perfectfool</i>
<i>Opportunities For Faith: Elements of a Modern Spirituality</i>	<i>Opportunities</i>
<i>Letters of St. Ignatius Loyola</i>	<i>Letters</i>
<i>Peter Porter: Collected Poems</i>	<i>Porter Collected</i>

INTRODUCTION

Peter Steele has written a miniature autobiography covering some of the major events in his life up to 1993. It is entitled “Why Stay?”⁸ a piece of shorthand for “why stay a Jesuit when so many have left?”, the question the piece addresses in some detail. While the miniature offers the reader considerably more about its author than dates and facts, those very dates and facts will serve to introduce him.

Peter Steele was a week old when the second world war began. At seventeen he boarded a train to take the two and half day journey from his native Perth to Melbourne, where he joined the Society of Jesus. In 1962 together with his Jesuit scholastic peers, he began his studies at the University of Melbourne where, after taking his first degree, he became in accordance with his superiors’ decision a university teacher. By this time also, (the mid-sixties), having been, as he recalls, himself a “scribbler” at school and a “jotter” in the seminary, he became a writer, writing both prose and poetry, the latter under the watchful eye and friendship of former teachers who had become his senior colleagues in the Department of English. These were Vincent Buckley, Evan Jones and Chris Wallace-Crabbe.

He was ordained priest in 1970, and in his early thirties found himself an advisor to the Provincial; and following that, the superior to a house of younger Jesuits engaged in undergraduate studies. At the same time he was writing his doctoral dissertation and teaching full-time.

⁸ “Why Stay?”, MS 1993, AJAF viii. [“Stay”]

In 1984 when he was on a short list of two for the Chair of English at the same University, Steele's academic career was interrupted due to his appointment as Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus in Australia and New Zealand, a time of exacting administration and policy making, continuous personal contact and extensive travel at home and abroad. After completing the traditional term of his six years as Provincial, Steele resumed his teaching post at the University of Melbourne and began again to write poetry and criticism. In 1994 he was given a personal chair in English and in April, 1995, delivered his inaugural lecture "The Muse's Agenda: Gift, Plunder, Harvest".

Steele's international experience as a scholar included a sabbatical year at Loyola University, Chicago, in 1984 during which he wrote the Martin D'Arcy Memorial Lectures which he delivered at Campion Hall, Oxford, later that year. These lectures were subsequently published as *The Autobiographical Passion: Studies in the Self On Show* in 1989. He was Jesuit chairholder at Georgetown University for the duration of 1994. He has also lectured in Alberta and has frequently presented papers on Australian and Irish poetry in Dublin. He spent the first half of 1997 on sabbatical leave again at Georgetown University.

Prior to publishing any of his books of literary criticism, Peter Steele was primarily a poet. His poetry appeared in many journals and in several anthologies throughout the seventies. His first collection of poetry, *Word from Lilliput*, was published in 1973 and his second, *Marching On Paradise*, in 1984. A third collection, *Wampum*, and a fourth, *The Potomac Sheaf*, await publication; a fifth, with the working title, *Retrievals*, is in preparation. Steele's work is included in Wallace-Crabbe's *Golden Apples of the Sun: Twentieth Century Australian Poetry* (1980); Vincent Buckley's *Faber Book of Modern Australian Verse*, (1991), Les Murray's *Anthology of Australian Religious Poetry* (1991); Kevin Hart's *The Oxford Book of Australian Religious Verse* (1994); and Peter Porter's *The Oxford Book of Modern Australian Verse* (1996). New poetry continues to appear regularly in the Melbourne press and in journals.

Professor Steele's first book of criticism *Jonathan Swift: Preacher and Jester*, a version of his doctoral thesis, was published in 1978, and placed him at that time among the foremost contemporary scholars of Swift. His second book, *Expatriates: Reflections on Modern Poetry*, was published in 1985. In this work Steele selected twelve modern poems for criticism and interpretation and read them as members of a genre of poetry that he named the poetry of expatriation, an identification of the poets' yearning to be elsewhere or otherwise. In terms of published material *Expatriates* marks the beginning of Steele's individualistic prose accounts of his experiences of art (in particular literature). This originality in conceptualising and communicating is sustained throughout the book even though he writes it from within the orthodoxy of (Catholic) Christianity and from the perspective (as he declares) of "a child of the now-elderly New Criticism".⁹ Without attempting, as he calls it in the Introduction, "that chimerical ideal, all that need be said about a poem", without, that is, undue stress on a comprehensive critical appraisal of each poem, Steele reads the twelve poems with his particular emphasis on reflection and associative thought, and offers the reader the illuminations of life that obtain for him in the poetry.

The Autobiographical Passion: Studies of the Self on Show (1989) analyses autobiographical writing from authors as diverse as Boswell, Mussolini, Loren Eiseley, Ignatius Loyola and Andrei Sinyavsky, but does not rejoice merely in the historical, geographic or temperamental range of autobiographers read; rather, as Steele himself explains, the joy is in his finding that each of them proffers not only details of a life, but tensions between that life and the telling of it. "Re-reading the chapters...", he writes, "I see that what emerges often is riddle, quizzicality, and quirk. Good: these are the trace-elements of the poetic, without which all literature is lost".¹⁰

⁹ *Expatriates: Reflection on Modern Poetry*, Melbourne University Press, 1985, xii. [*Expatriates*]

¹⁰ *The Autobiographical Passion: Studies in the Self on Show*, Melbourne University Press, 1989, 2. [*Autopassion*]

Steele's contribution to the *Oxford Australian Writers* series, *Peter Porter*, published in 1992, follows the reflective nature of *Expatriates*. Steele calls it "a set of soundings of [Porter's] poetry, and some reflections on ways in which it may be related to other verse".¹¹ His aim in writing it, he says, is "to leave the reader both more at home and more alert in the presence of Porter's verse", which is accomplished to a large extent by the attentiveness with which Steele reminds the reader from the outset of the dominant influence of music in Porter's life and work and the power of music as a "hovering metaphor, a sponsoring presence" in the poetry.

Regarding published works on the writings of Peter Steele there have been reviews of his books, mostly brief and many aiming to account for collections of books such as the *Oxford Writers Series* or several volumes (in one case, twelve volumes) of Australian poetry. Apart from these and some journal articles including David Parker's "Speaking of the Self"¹² which in part deals with *The Autobiographical Passion*, it is sanguine to note what Steele has to say about both the writing of poetry and the availability of criticism today. As to writing poetry he complains that

The bitter, but by now commonplace truth is that to face into the vocation of poetry as Mandelstam did, at his life's cost, is in the present milieu of the West equivalent to diving handcuffed over a cliff.¹³

And apropos the availability of what, in the same article, he calls "taxing critique", elsewhere he laments that:

It was Thurber, I think, who said that publishing a book was like dropping a feather over the edge of the Grand Canyon and waiting to hear the echo. It is less funny after you have both published a book and seen the Grand Canyon.¹⁴

However this may be, it should be remembered that in addition to writing these published works, the hundred or more articles in journals, the papers presented at conferences and the collections of poetry published and unpublished, Steele, for some thirty years, has combined his practice as poet, teacher, and critic with his role as a

¹¹ *Oxford Australian Writers: Peter Porter*, Oxford University Press, 1992, 11. [Porter]

¹² *Meridian*, 9, 2 (October, 1990), 151-157.

¹³ "The contours of exile", *Eureka Street*, 3, 3 (April, 1993), 37.

¹⁴ "The Names of God; VII. Silence", *Madonna*, March, 1984, 24.

priest. He is an active homilist and has written hundreds of (largely unpublished) homilies, talks, addresses, retreat notes, reflections, and liturgies all of which leave the reader asking why such a priest would undertake the work of a Professor of English Literature?

Walter J. Ong S.J. argues that because God became incarnate in the cosmos, this cosmos must be understood “as well as thoroughly and as soon as possible” and that the “apostolate of the priest... is realized when [he]... integrates within his own person the knowledge which he is pursuing and developing in his field”. Ong continues:

It is good for the cause of Christ... that natural knowledge on a scale both massive and particularized coexist with the special participation in Christ which priests... are given. This co-existence can be achieved only within individual persons, in whom secular knowledge, with its grasp on the created universe, and Catholic faith, hope and charity, with their grasp on God, are simultaneously present.¹⁵

Pertinent though this is, the simple and yet not very simple answer is that Steele is a mystic, a contemplative in action,¹⁶ whose integrated life style allows him to return from the mountain top of his contemplative and meditative prayer to the market place of (among other places), the University of Melbourne.¹⁷ He has become, in accordance with the Ignatian tradition of practical mysticism, and under the additional influence of other mystical apprehensions of the world from Dante to Hans Urs von Balthasar in our own times, poet-priest or priest-professor instead of a man with two hats. He has resolved, in other words, the question of hyphenated priests¹⁸ one which

¹⁵ W.J. Ong S.J., *Catholic Crossroads: Religious Secular Encounters in the Modern World*, Collier Books, New York, 1962, 147.

¹⁶ “Contemplative in action” implies a mysticism of service in which the intention is to serve God in all endeavours. Thomas Merton, revising what he considered a previous error in his earlier work, points out that “It is all wrong to imagine that in order to ‘contemplate’ divine things... it is necessary to abstain from every kind of action and enter into a kind of spiritual stillness where one waits for ‘something to happen.’ In actual fact, true contemplation is inseparable from life and from the dynamism of life - which includes work, creation, production, fruitfulness, and above all *love*. Contemplation is not to be thought of as a separate department of life, cut off from all man’s other interests and superseding them. It is the very fullness of a fully integrated life. It is the crown of life and of all life’s activities.” “Poetry and Contemplation: A Reappraisal”, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed., Patrick Hart, New Directions, 1981, 339.

¹⁷ The evidence for this is the unpublished retreat notes some of which are addressed to the Deity, the reflections published and unpublished and the mostly unpublished homilies, talks and lectures.

¹⁸ Steele refers to the “hyphenated priest” or “hyphenated Jesuit” in an early memorandum entitled “Some elements in the education and formation of Jesuits”, 1971, AJAF v.

pertains to Ong's insistence "that natural knowledge on a scale both massive and particularized coexist with the special participation in Christ which priests... are given". Hence Steele integrates different disciplines and experiences as widespread as the canon of Western Literature, (ancient and modern), the Bible, Augustine, Aquinas and other doctors of the Church; and in the almost apologetic words of his introduction to his *Expatriates*, the ideas of "thinkers in other disciplines - theology, art history, medicine and political science among them".¹⁹ He integrates, as he says himself, all the "black lettering [that] has been, on the whole, luminous for [him]", both the "ancient monastic practice of *lectio divina*" and of "*lectio humana* - - a steeping of the soul in another soul, mediated by the word in all its fragility and all its vitality".²⁰

¹⁹ *Expatriates*, xiii.

²⁰ "Stay", 8-9.

CHAPTER ONE: RADIANCE AND THE TROPING OF THE GLORY OF GOD

Evelyn Underhill makes the claim for the mystics that “Filled with an abounding sense of the Divine Life, of ultimate and adorable reality, sustaining and urging them on, they wish to communicate the revelation, the more abundant life, which they have received”.²¹ This seems too grandiose a claim to make for a living contemplative in action.²² Steele’s own explanation of his joint pursuit as priest and academic will serve better. Speaking about his superior’s decision that he should be a university teacher, he says that it was, and still is, for him a “mysterious pursuit” and that it is “a point of intersection between the deep selves of the student and of the teacher, and of a world which, being created momentarily by God, is inexhaustibly self-divulging”. Steele claims that “To deal adequately with that situation as mediated in literature would need the attention of a genius who was also a saint” and confesses to being “at best a thoroughly sinful *apparatchik* of the imagination [which, to him] is a daily source of disconcertment”.²³

Nevertheless it can be said of Steele that the mystic who prays and meditates on the Scriptures is also the academic whose powerful conceptual abilities and communicative skills are informed by practice of meditative prayer. Steele now says of himself that in the sixties he “wrote too little poetry, and too much prose... but one frequent reason for the prosing was to try to wed secular with sacred...”.²⁴ That marriage has lasted to such a degree that it can be said that the Christ who is accessible to him in meditation on the gospels is the one he also encounters in the world: “The twenty or so students who will fill the room repeatedly throughout the

²¹ Evelyn Underhill; *Mysticism: A Study in the Nature and Development of Man’s Spiritual Consciousness*, 12th ed., Methuen, London, 1911, revised 1930, 172. [*Mysticism*]

²² Such embarrassment can be mitigated if one recalls that Underhill (*Mysticism*, 172) also claims that “No temperament is less slothful than the mystical one” whereas Steele repeatedly accuses himself of that vice and once told the students of Newman College that “If [he] had a coat of arms, everything on it would be couchant, except for a Giant Sloth, rampant”. “Shifts of the Spirit”, 1992, *AJAF* viii, 3. [“Shifts”]

²³ “Stay”, 9.

year will bring me the challenging face of Christ, but also the blessing face of Christ.” And it is the same for “the colleagues who come and go, the callers on the phone, even the questing selves implied by the hundreds of books on the shelves...”²⁵

These “questing selves implied by the books on the shelves” are no small part of the milieu in which Steele seeks to find the Divine. It could be said that the objective of his interpretative work is exactly the endeavour to find for himself and others the answer to his own frequently reiterated questions: “how and where are we to know God among us...”;²⁶ “how that presence is to be discerned...”.²⁷ Steele seeks to answer these questions by examining literature and, in his own words, “tracing” the Lord’s ways,²⁸ looking for “the indices of the Lord”;²⁹ observing “the Lord’s... patterning...”;³⁰ recognising the “emblems of God’s loving determination...”;³¹ understanding “the living emblem of his presence”³²; acknowledging “the insignia of resurrection...”; and generally identifying “the *vestigia dei*”.³³ All of which amount to his efforts to discover how things are in literature, and therefore in nature and humanity in relation to the Divinity. Speaking to American colleagues and students he once said:

When we have a really informed grasp of some particular matter, that tends to illuminate all similar matters - which turn out to be more numerous than we had thought. One pattern teaches us about another pattern, one configuration presses out into another. A great mathematician isn’t one who knows all the numbers, but one who knows how all the numbers are going to go: a great painter isn’t one who’s painted all the pictures, but one who, having dwelt on some particular matters, has come to learn how the universe appeals to be painted.³⁴

²⁴ “Stay”, 11.

²⁵ “Good Friday, 1993”, AJAF viii, 3.

²⁶ “The Shaft of Belief”, 1982, AJAF ii, 6. [“Shaft”]

²⁷ “Shaft”, 8.

²⁸ “The Poem of the Mind: (Variations on a Spanish Theme)”, 1974, AJAF vii, 17. [“Poemind”] c.f. “...our tracing through of the bible is always a quest for Him...”. “Shaft”, 2.

²⁹ “Shaft”, 2.

³⁰ “A Spirituality of Change”, *The Way*, 34, 1 (January, 1994), 49. [“SpChange”]

³¹ “Poemind”, 6.

³² “Poemind”, 4.

³³ “Before the Silences”, AJAF vii, 16. [“Silences”]

It should be stressed, however, that Steele's fascination with patterns and configurations is always accompanied by the realisation that "all tracing of [the Lord's] ways, by research and speculation, is vain unless undertaken in prayer to the God of glory".³⁵

Steele is not alone in thinking of theological matters in terms of patterns or configurations. He is aware of famous precedents where mystical writers resort to patterns. Sometimes these precedents are verticals such as G. E. Ganss notes in Ignatius' thought: "his thought can be observed to start with the Trinity and move downward toward service to men for the sake of glory to God, rather than with creatures and then upward toward God...".³⁶ Occasionally they are in the form of a cross such as in Hans Urs von Balthasar's claim: "The vertical form of the Son of God who descends from the Father and goes back to him would be illegible without the horizontal form of historical fulfilment and of the mission entrusted to the Apostles".³⁷

More frequent in Steele's work is evidence of his attentiveness, for the purpose of describing theological matters, to configurations of *radiance* in the sense of "sending out rays of light"; and "shining brightly"; and to *radial* formations in the sense of "proceeding or issuing as rays from a common centre" or "Pertaining to light in the form of rays"; or "Arrayed like rays or the radii of a circle; having the position or direction of a radius".³⁸

The first example is John's in the fourth gospel, the subject of Steele's long reflection "Going After the Eagle", in which he sees John's Christ as "the real 'perpetual light'

³⁴ "Wield of a Life, Wield of a World: Second Sunday of Easter, 1994", Dahlgren Chapel, 1994, AJAF viii, 1.

³⁵ "Poemind", 17.

³⁶ Saint Ignatius of Loyola, *The Constitutions of the Society of Jesus*, trans. G.E. Ganss, S.J.; The Institute of Jesuit Resources, St. Louis, 1970, p.332, note 4. [*Constitutions*]

³⁷ H. U. Von Balthasar, *The Glory of the Lord: A Theological Aesthetics*, 7 Vols., trans., Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, ed., Joseph Fessio, S.J., and John Riches, T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1982, Vol. I, p.513. [*Glorylord*]

³⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*.

radiating into the days of airports and deadlines, surprise and disappointment”.³⁹ The second is Paul’s visionary experience on the Damascus road which introduces Steele’s reflection, “The Shaft of Belief”, in which Steele defines “shaft” among other things as “a plan or diagram showing direction... a beam or ray...” and from which he proceeds to speak of “the great blaze of the divine” and “the *vestigia* of the Lord who make his way through Paul’s physical and mental life... always directing him”.⁴⁰ The third example is Dante, whose pilgrim also recalls Paul’s experience,⁴¹ who Steele observes, “loves *Gestalten*” and whose *Commedia*, he believes, reveals an “investment in system [which] has at least this degree of theological intent, that it tends to fortify the conviction that there is a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them as we may”.⁴² The pilgrim’s visionary perception in Dante’s *Paradiso* of a radiant God, “the Love that moves the sun and the other stars”, is something of a refrain in Steele’s works.

A fourth example for the use of radiance as a pattern to figure the power and character of God is found in Steele’s own Jesuit tradition in the writings of Ignatius Loyola. It should be remembered that Ignatius recalls in his dictated autobiography that there was an occasion when

there was represented to his understanding with great spiritual delight the manner in which God had created the world. It had the appearance of something white out of which rays were coming, and it was out of this that God made light.⁴³

There was the further time for Ignatius at Manresa where on hearing Mass

during the elevation he saw with the inner eyes of the soul something like white rays that came from above.⁴⁴

³⁹ “Going After the Eagle: Reflections on John’s Gospel”, 1981, AJAF viii, 5. [“Eagle”]

⁴⁰ “Shaft”, AJAF vii, 1-2.

⁴¹ Apropos Canto XXX , 46-51, Mark Musa explains: “The light that dazzles the pilgrim’s eyes recalls St. Paul’s experience recounted in Acts 22:6-11: ‘And it came to pass, as I made my journey and was come high unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from Heaven a great light about me... And when I could not see for the glory of that light...’” *The Divine Comedy*: Vol. III: trans. Mark Musa, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1986, 359.

⁴² “Love and Death on the Longest Journey: Dante’s *Commedia*”, MS 9. *Religion, Literature and the Arts Project: Australian International Conference 1996, Conference Proceedings*, RLA Project, Sydney, 1996, 56. [“Love/death”]

⁴³ *St. Ignatius’ Own Story As told to Luis González de Cámara With a sampling of his letters*; trans. W. J. Young S.J., Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1956, 22-23. [Ownstory]

⁴⁴ *Ownstory*, 23.

Consequently when in the *Spiritual Exercises* Ignatius comes to image the munificence of the loving God he employs the pattern of radiance and reminds his directees

to look how all the good things and gifts descend from above, as my poor power from the supreme and infinite power from above; and so justice, goodness, pity, mercy, etc.; as from the sun descend the rays, from the fountain the waters...⁴⁵.

A fifth example for the use of radiance to explain theological matters is found in the twentieth century in the work of Hans Urs Von Balthasar. A former Jesuit, Balthasar uses the concept of radiance abundantly to describe his contemplative experience of God's glory in the world, one which is a particular blend of both Johanine (the glory of Christ as the light of God shining into darkness) and Ignatian ("all good things and gifts descend from above... as from the sun descend the rays") perceptions of the form and content of God's presence and action in the world. In his minor and major works Balthasar constantly employs images of radiance, like Ignatius' sun, to conceptualise theological matters such as the Incarnation:

Beyond all creaturely hopes and expectations... the revelation in Christ was to bring together in one divine and human Head everything heavenly and earthly, which is thus endowed by grace with a crown the radiance of whose glory... was to shed its rays over the whole of creation.⁴⁶

Or the living presence of God in creation:

what Christ brings with him is not primarily his historical environment, but the world of creation and of redemption as a whole. His form imparts to the things of the world the right distance (from him and each other) and the right proximity (to him and each other). The believer does not *believe* all of this; he *sees* it. He is allowed to see it when he believes and, in a definite, dark, and distorted way, even when he refuses to accept the evidence of faith. This his sensory environment, in which he lives and with which he is apparently wholly familiar, is through and through determined by the central image and event of Christ, so that, by a thousand open and hidden paths, his wholly real and corporeal sense-experiences bring him into contact with that central point. In this he stands in the same space and in the shared time of creation as the Prophets and the Apostles, and here it is almost a matter of indifference whether he possesses the sensory contemporaneity of the eyewitness: he stands

⁴⁵ David Fleming, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius: A Literal Translation & a Contemporary Reading*, The Institute of Jesuit Resources, St. Louis, 1991, 142. [FlemingSpEx]

⁴⁶ *Glorylord*, I, 431.

in the world which has been determined and established by the appearance of God and which is oriented to that appearance. The reality of creation as a whole has become a monstrance of God's real presence.⁴⁷

Or the apostolic activity of the disciples:

the disciples that are sent out might almost be said to be only the rays which the sun sends out from its own brightness, so that what becomes visible in this radiance is not the ray itself but the one that radiates.⁴⁸

Or the variety of theological approaches within the church:

The cosmological and anthropological deductions drawn by the Fathers of the Church and the great spiritual teachers are disposed round that centre as though in the form of a monstrance⁴⁹ designed to hold up the eucharistic heart to our view. They are simply functions of that centre....⁵⁰

After a longstanding Ignatian environment (in particular the practice of the *Spiritual Exercises*⁵¹) which has included an enthusiastic reading of Von Balthasar,⁵² Steele's thought is partly vertical. Like Ignatius, he starts with God and considers the effects of his incarnational action in Christ and Christ's effect on men and women.⁵³ He is

⁴⁷ *Glorylord*, I, 419-420.

⁴⁸ *Glorylord*, I, 419.

⁴⁹ "(Lat. *monstrare*, 'to show') The sacred vessel used for exposing the Blessed Sacrament for veneration.... It has a wide base, a stem with a knob, and a glass enclosure through which the Host... may be viewed. The enclosure is usually framed with ornamental rays of silver or gold." *Modern Catholic Encyclopaedia*, ed., Michael Glazier and Monika K. Hellwig, E. J. Dwyer, Sydney, 1994, 584.

⁵⁰ H. U. Von Balthasar, *Love Alone*, trans. and ed. A. Dru, Herder & Herder, New York, 1969, 123.

⁵¹ The *Spiritual Exercises* as set out in the manual of St. Ignatius of Loyola are structured into four *Weeks* or periods during which the retreatant meditates upon the gospels and during which he or she is to practise a specific activity appropriate to the week at hand. The *First Week* asks the retreatant to be aware of God's love for him or her and to examine his or her rejection of that love through sin. It includes the exercise of the *Fundamentum* (the *Principle and Foundation*) by means of which the retreatant orients his or her life around an acknowledged centrality of God and service to God; and the *Examen* by means of which the retreatant purifies the self and prepares to make a *General Confession*. The *Second Week* focuses on the life of Jesus from the Nativity through the public ministry. It involves the retreatant performing both the *Kingdom* exercise (in which the kingship or leadership of Christ is acknowledged and responded to by the retreatant who agrees to follow Christ) and the exercise incorporating *three degrees of humility* (which culminates in the retreatant's desire to accept poverty with Christ and his or her wish to be rated as foolish for the sake of Christ). The *Third Week* centres on the death of Jesus and the *Fourth Week* which centres on his Resurrection, brings the retreatant through to joy. The *Contemplation to Obtain Love* (the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*) which is usually offered at the end of the Fourth Week, asks the retreatant to be aware of the fountaining gifts given to him or her by God and to consider in return what he or she might offer to God. As a recipient of Divine love the retreatant returns his or her love to the Creator.

⁵² See for example Steele's, "Edmund Campion", (Campion College, circa 1970, AJAF viii, 3.) in which Steele notes Von Balthasar's stressing "the way in which some saints at least have a certain thematic importance in the Church, the way in which each provides some leit-motif: but he stresses too that this is utterly christological and theocentric."

⁵³ *Cons*, Part III, [288] - 26.

interested in the vertical heritage - from God to Christ,⁵⁴ to the apostles and disciples, to Ignatius, to other Jesuits, to exercitants of the *Spiritual Exercises*, (which includes all kinds of people religious and lay) to their participation in the affairs of the world, including the writing and reading of poetry.

More significantly however, Steele's thought frequently turns to the concept of radiance with the focal point of that radiance firmly fixed on God or the incarnate God, and with radial emanations from that centre to the world, to the apostles, to the disciples, to all people and to their affairs including their art, in particular, their literature, especially poetry. These that follow are some of Steele's ideas which draw on the concept of radiance for their expression.

First, for Steele, God is seen as a radiant God.⁵⁵ His radiance is his immanence throughout creation. He is

as intimately radiant through all existence as radioactive material is through some small part of existence.⁵⁶

Secondly, in the Incarnation people are "haunted"⁵⁷ (a word Steele often uses in the same sense as he uses "irradiated") by Christ who proffers the same divine radiations:

[Some writers are] haunted by him in his humanity and in his offering the radiations of divinity.⁵⁸

At the crucifixion, the Perfect Fool, the humiliated and crucified Christ is God's radiant form in the world since

⁵⁴ Although it must be stressed that for Steele knowledge of God is frequently dependent on knowledge of Christ: "To know Christ is to know God." ("The Ironic Heart", 1975, AJAF vii, 7.) "Christ does not seem to have made suggestions. Is this a trait of God's?" p.10.

⁵⁵ The Trinity is not a subject for consideration here. Let it suffice to say that Steele includes the Spirit in his concept of a radiant divinity. Speaking of Rupert Mayer, SJ, he says, for example: "... in the mysterious zone of life and being in which Mayer now lives, in that more full-blooded mode of existence than flesh and blood can stand, irradiated by the Spirit, this person... prays for us all immediately before the Father." ("The Choices of Edmund Campion", 1987, AJAF viii, 1.) ["Choices"] See also "28th October, 1984: 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time", AJAF iv ["28th October"]; and "Funeral Mass for F.G. Steele: 6 May, 1985", AJAF viii.

⁵⁶ "Going Steerage in the Ark: Notes for a Priest's Retreat", AJAF vii, 16. ["Steerage"]

⁵⁷ See below pp. 253-255 for a discussion of "haunting".

⁵⁸ "Singing for Supper: The Word and Its Flesh", 1975, AJAF vii, 2. ["Singing"]

there was little glory in the dying of the one who lived and died pro nobis. God's radiance is in the world (as in the Johanne stress), but it is in the world as the world goes: only God's folly is to be where the fools are, his impotence is to be where goodness is annulled.⁵⁹

Thirdly, the evangelists are recipients of the divine radiance. The Bible is written, Steele says, by men who are rapt:

And they are rapt predominantly, at least in the New Testament, in the glory of the Lord. It is not that they see him as Le Roi Soleil, though sometimes in part they do: it is that they find to their astonishment that he is radiant all about them....⁶⁰

Fourthly, Steele says that Ignatius recommends his exercitants to contemplate God's "historic generosity" and figures it as a "radiant fountain":

The image of the radiant fountain in the Contemplation is one which has, as it were, been evolving throughout all the earlier courses of the exercises, just as the images of the radiant Lord have been evolving all throughout the earlier courses of the gospels.⁶¹

Fifthly, all Christians are implicated in the divine radiations. Down through the centuries this "has been the Christian pattern from the first", that is to say that

Out of the mystical comes the missionary: the love of God radiated into our own hearts in prayer prompts our own radiating of it abroad.⁶²

Sixthly, the divine radiance suffuses people generally and things generally. Due to the repercussions of "good things and good people" (even in practical matters such as universities keeping their integrity and disseminating insightful knowledge) the radiance from God permeates the world:

good things and good people, radiate themselves...⁶³

Ultimately, Steele thinks of literature as radiating, irradiated, or as both. Noting the photograph on the jacket of Robert Hughes' *Barcelona*, which reveals "the beginnings of pavement radiating out into the city as a whole", Steele makes the telling observation that "this is evocative of the spirit of the book".⁶⁴ Expounding his poetics (or less formally his understanding of poetry) Steele holds that poetry is itself

⁵⁹ "Singing", 17.

⁶⁰ "Steerage", 18.

⁶¹ "Poemind", 17.

⁶² "Stills of Jesus: Bread and Prayers: Matt. XIV: 13-23", AJAF iv, 2.

⁶³ "Fifth Sunday, Year B", Dahlgren, 1994, 2.

⁶⁴ "Ports of Entry", *Eureka Street*, 2, 6, (July, 1992), 31.

an illuminating and outreaching entity *per se*. It has a “radiant body”.⁶⁵ It is one of the “good things” in the world that participates in the divine emanations.

Of W. H. Auden’s “Whitsunday in Kirchstetten”, for example, Steele notes how the poem allows the secular and the profane to become sacred and

ventures... to instance some of the ways in which God invests the commonplace with uncommon significance, and irradiates the unremarkable flesh with the singular word.⁶⁶

Of Josephine Jacobson’s peacocks (in “The Mexican Peacock”) Steele remarks:

For (Flannery O’Connor, to whom the poem is dedicated) they seem to have been that radiant presence which Josephine Jacobson takes them to be; as such, they were enduringly what they had been taken iconographically to be by earlier Christian writers and painters - emblems of God in his glory.⁶⁷

And finally of the work of Peter Porter, writer of “The Irradiated Poem”⁶⁸ and of these lines from “Vienna”:

Poets with the tic, the spade
Bearded patriarch, who raised to the nth.
The power of love, these came

Here like spokes to their axle.⁶⁹

....

of such a poet, Steele writes “The Radiations of Peter Porter” where he saliently explains:

My title is designedly ambiguous. To speak of radiation may be, as in early uses of the word, to indicate that which goes out as radius, spoke-wise. What I have to say of Porter’s poetry will, I hope, instance that in his regard. But to our ears radiation is more likely to denote those rayings which we know as dark or light, as malign or benign. What we call “the nuclear age” may be little understood by most of us, but it is big with significance for all of us. A moment’s reflection shows us all as siblings of the ray. More than that: we know that controlled exposure to one kind of radiation may make for life, whereas uncontrolled exposure will make for death. Associating this with the singular powers of the laboratory,

⁶⁵ “Haunting Presences: Four Gestures of the Imagination”, *Quadrant*, 37, 3 (March, 1993), 47. [Presences]

⁶⁶ “Singing”, 23.

⁶⁷ “Singing”, 17.

⁶⁸ P. Porter, *The Chair of Babel*, Oxford University Press, 1992, 28-29.

⁶⁹ P. Porter, *Collected Poems*, Oxford University Press, 1983, 49.

we can with a more ultimate accuracy associate it with the more singular powers of the sun. But whether we think of nature's initiatives or man's, we know that whatever radiates bears in it the potency of its source and the promise or menace of its identity.⁷⁰

Leaving aside (and to be treated in Chapter Four) the notion of “negative radiation” as raised by Steele with respect to Peter Porter, it is clear from all of the above statements that what Steele delineates by *radiance* or *radiations* is no less than the *glory* of God, that is, the power, character and known action of God. These radiant images can be seen as Steele's statements that, to his mind, there is in the apprehension of the radiant entity (whether a person, a person who is a writer, a city, a poem, an autobiography, a fictional character, a painting, or an event) the perception of the presence of the glory of God. This in fact is Steele's *whole project* - an attestation to his apprehension of the presence of the glory of God in the world.

This synonymy between the concept of *radiance* and the glory of God together with the words traditionally used in their context - the Aramaic *shekinah*, the Hebrew *kabod* and the Greek δ - is explained in some detail by A. M. Ramsey in his *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*. Ramsey analyses the use of δ in the Septuagint where he explains it translates the Hebrew *kabod* (in the sense of “the character and might” [of Yahveh] and in the sense of “the radiance of His presence”).⁷¹ It was also used, he says, to translate the Aramaic *Shekinah*, “a way of speaking about God such as conveys the truth of His omnipresence, accessibility and special activity within the created world without infringing the doctrine of His transcendence”,⁷² and is best explained by Ramsey's recourse to the caviller's

⁷⁰ “The Radiations of Peter Porter”, *Westerly*, 29, 3 (1984), 65. [“Radiations”]

⁷¹ Arthur Michael, Ramsey, *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ*, Longmans Green, London, 1949, 24. [*Glorygod*] Ramsey notes that in “the post-exilic writer of Isaiah lx” whom he cites on Jerusalem as the scene of the glory of Yahveh, “the idea of radiance has the greatest prominence. Indeed, in the *kabod* of Yahveh radiance, power and righteous character are inextricably blended; and the word thus tells of a theology in which the attributes of God in Himself are inseparable from His attractiveness and saving activity in the world. Israel's knowledge of God's glory has its corollary in Israel's obligation to reflect God's character. If, for instance, she cares for the poor and the naked, she has the promise: “Then shall thy light break forth as the morning, and thy healing shall go forth speedily; and thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the LORD shall be thy reward (Isa. lviii, 8).” p.14

⁷² *Glorygod*, 19.

question: “How many Shekinahs are there?” and the Rabbi’s response: “How does the sun get into that man’s house?”⁷³ Hence Ramsey explains:

the two conceptions, kabod and Shekinah, which are properly separate in meaning as in language, came to be fused together by Greek-speaking Jews.

When he considers the etymology of *δόξα*, its roots being in “to think”, and “to seem”, Ramsey states that:

The makers of the Septuagint... were faced with the need for a Greek word to translate the Hebrew kabod; and they used the word *δόξα*. By so using it they gave it a sense totally different from its original meaning in Greek literature. No word in the Bible has a more fascinating history. That a word which meant human opinion or human reputation should come to express the greatest theological ideas both of the Old Testament and of the New is one of the most signal instances of the impact of theology upon language.⁷⁴

And that:

There is no evidence for thinking that the word is originally connected with light or radiance.

Nevertheless from the point where Ramsey begins his study of *δόξα* in the New Testament, both *δόξα* and *radiance* are inseparable. He writes:

We have seen how the kabod of Yahveh includes ideas of power, character, radiance, and physical accessibility which can be neither wholly disentangled nor set in historical sequence. We have seen how the Greek word *δόξα* finds a new meaning to express the Biblical conception in its variety and unity, and to provide a pattern upon which the New Testament writers could work. Then came the revelation of glory in the Gospel. Still the ideas of power, character, radiance and physical accessibility are included, for if the physical suggestions of glory are now made utterly subordinate to its ethical and transcendental aspects they never wholly disappear. To the last man’s quest remains what it was in the days of Moses - the seeing of God. The Christian does not despise as carnal the ancient longing: ‘Shew me, I pray thee, thy glory.’⁷⁵

Additionally Ramsey stresses the Christian identity between the glory of God and that of Christ:

⁷³ *Glorygod*, 19.

⁷⁴ *Glorygod*, 23.

⁷⁵ *Glorygod*, 82.

In so far as *ó* is the divine splendour, Jesus Christ *is* that splendour. And in so far as a state of light and radiance awaits the Christian as his final destiny, that light and radiance draw their meaning from the presence and person of Christ. Hence new possibilities of language emerge: such is the place of Jesus Christ in relation to the divine glory that it is possible to speak of *the glory of Christ*, and by those words to mean no less than the glory of God Himself.⁷⁶

Varying the nomenclature as often as the occasion arises Steele mostly uses a range of English forms: “glory”; “the known character and action of Christ”;⁷⁷ or “the known character and action of God”;⁷⁸ “that personal power that held Paul”;⁷⁹ “the sharing of some of that power with us”;⁸⁰ “God’s energetic splendour”;⁸¹ “the glory of the Lord”;⁸² “the glory of God”;⁸³ “the presence, and the character, of God in the world”;⁸⁴ “the radiance or glory of God”;⁸⁵ or “God’s radiant presence”.⁸⁶ (Steele can also stress the identical glory of God and Christ: “the power and the love of God, alike and identically, are displayed in the dying [that is, of Christ] among us”.⁸⁷) When he does use the Aramaic *Shekinah*,⁸⁸ it is not for the precision of speaking about that which cannot be spoken about without impairing the doctrine of Yahveh’s transcendence, as Ramsey understands it; it is in one instance to give a very disconsolate and distant (in time or space) connotation as to where the divinity can be thought to be: “The Shekinah, the glory of the Lord, can come to seem nothing but a faded dream, or nothing but an attribute of a God very far away, very retired in the future”.⁸⁹ Or at another point it is used (as in the citation appropriated in the title of this thesis, “the shapeliness of the *shekinah*”), not merely for its alliterative appeal, but to allow Steele to make something analogous in the design of the words to the

⁷⁶ *Glorygod*, 28.

⁷⁷ “Poemind”, 8.

⁷⁸ “Poemind”, 8.

⁷⁹ “Shaft”, 5.

⁸⁰ “Eagle”, 3.

⁸¹ “Steerage”, 3.

⁸² “The Hopeful Exile: A retreat for an intellectual”, 1974, *AJAF* viii, .9. [“Hopeful”]

⁸³ “Hopeful”, 9.

⁸⁴ “Servants of the Unknown God in Australia”, 1986, *AJAF* v.

⁸⁵ “Fr John Casey S.J., R.I.P.”, 1985.

⁸⁶ “Angels and Others”, Newman, 96, 1.

⁸⁷ “Steerage”, 15.

⁸⁸ “Singing”, 17; *Autopassion*, 75-76.

⁸⁹ “Singing”, 17.

design of the print of Herbert's altar poem, "Easter-wings" to which he is referring. For Steele there is no distinguishing between the *shekinah* as a concept pertaining to the Hebrew Scriptures while retaining *glory* for the gospels, as these instances of the use of *shekinah* indicate, the one in the context of a discussion of Ignatius' *Exercises* and Christ, the other in the context of George Herbert's "Easter-wings". There may of course be a gesture of ecumenical graciousness towards Judaism on Steele's part in the latter instance where Herbert's life and poetry are discussed in the context of "the 'vast, untrellised vine / Of scroll-and fretwork, a Jesse's family tree'" of Anthony Hecht's salute to George Herbert.⁹⁰ And it is even possible with respect to the other use of *shekinah*, given Steele's associative mind, that the Judaic nature of the surname of the poet, Josephine Jacobson, whose work (dedicated to the Catholic writer, Flannery O'Connor) he is discussing in the context of the *Exercises*, also provokes him into using the ancient word.⁹¹

Whatever his nomenclature for the glory of God, there is observable in Steele's oeuvre a sustained delineation of the shapeliness of that radiant glory which is achieved by the overall pattern configured by the structural unity of his thought. While the matter of Steele's unity of thought is complex, the pattern it forms can be thought of as being something like a child's drawing of the sun on which there is a large circle from which emanate spokes or projections around the circumference. More appropriately the pattern can be likened to the seemingly infinite radiating lines of light emanating from the central dove in Antonio Gervasio's painting, *The Holy Spirit*⁹² or to Steele's own description of "The delicate lines that compass Christ in glory" in Rembrandt's work.⁹³

This radial pattern, of course, is prevalent in the Christian milieu - in architecture, artifact and art, in the beams radiating from cupolas, in the sun-shaped medieval monstrance to expose the host, and in the rays emanating from the "sacred

⁹⁰ *Autopassion*, 75-76.

⁹¹ "Singing", 17.

⁹² See Special Enclosures, illustration 2.

⁹³ "A Season in Retreat: Beatitudes", *Marching On Paradise*, Longman Cheshire, Melbourne, 1984, 37. [*Paradise*]

monogram” to the faces of the angels and saints in the baroque frescoes of the Gesu.⁹⁴ It also figures on St Bernadino’s disk which is inscribed with the “sacred monogram” where Christ’s name is centred within the circle from which flaming projections radiate out into the world. Given the fact that Ignatius told Luis González de Cámara late in life that “he... still had many visions, especially that in which he saw Christ as a sun...”,⁹⁵ it is not surprising that it was Bernadino’s disk that was adopted by Ignatius as the device of the Society.⁹⁶ (See illustration 1.⁹⁷) How this radial pattern operates in Steele’s thought to organise his motifs and to endorse his major theme, the perception of the radiant glory of God in the world, requires a further look at the theology of the Transfiguration.

Steele speaks of the event as follows:

The gospel story is one about Christ’s becoming, for an unprecedented moment, radiantly luminous. It is impossible to picture this without theatricality. What is being signalled is, surely, a plenitude of life, just as our sun offers us all the conditions of our vitality in the form of radiant energy. For that one moment, the few disciples are being given access not just to the comrade and the brother and the mentor, but to the Lord - the Vitalizer, the Sun.

⁹⁸

This transfigured face of Christ Steele calls “the insignia of divinity”.⁹⁹ Von Balthasar also stresses the biblical event of the Transfiguration as a manifestation of God’s glory in a radiant form. Like Arthur Michael Ramsey¹⁰⁰ before him Balthasar downplays the importance of seeing the event as merely a prefiguring: “an anticipation of the eschatological manner of existence after the Resurrection”¹⁰¹ and stresses the event’s importance as a revelation: “the transfigured Christ is the God who reveals himself by condescending to become man”. He reasons as follows:

⁹⁴ The centre of these designs is sometimes trinitarian as in Goya’s *The Adoration of the Trinity*; and sometimes it is representative of the Spirit, as, for example, in the minor cupola of the Siena Duomo where radiating beams project from the dove in the centre of the structure.

⁹⁵ *Ownstory*, 70.

⁹⁶ J.C.J. Metford, *Dictionary of Christian Lore and Legend*, Thames & Hudson, 1983, 47 and 159-160.

⁹⁷ Illustration 1 shows a photograph of a fresco of the seal of the Society of Jesus dating from approximately 1605. This fresco was found in recent years under two coats of whitewash in a room which St Ignatius used as a private chapel and in which he died. *A Guide to the Rooms of St. Ignatius Loyola*, Thomas M. Lucas, S.J., Sograrò, Roma, 1990, p.18.

⁹⁸ “Blinding Lights”, *Madonna*, August, 1995, 11.

⁹⁹ “Blinding Lights”, 11.

¹⁰⁰ *Glorygod*, 119.

¹⁰¹ *Glorylord*, I, 670.

It is to this that the traditional elements of the event of transfiguration point: the high mountain common to theophanies (such as Moses and Elijah had seen on Sinai and on Horeb: this is why they appear here together with Christ); the dazzling white garments usually worn by heavenly apparitions...; the face like the sun, an attribute of the divinity (Ps 84.12) and of the glorified Lord (Rev 1.16); the bright overshadowing cloud, a traditional image of the divine glory: ...and the three 'booths' that Peter wants to erect and which recall the Feast of Tabernacles, which itself reminds us of the fact that God's glory has pitched its tent among men....

For Von Balthasar the shining face of Christ informs Peter, James and John that he is God become man, but more particularly, the shining face, besides being a "metamorphosis"... from the servant-form that is seen into the form of God which ordinarily goes unseen", is the means of teaching them "to read and understand the servant-form as the very form of God". Von Balthasar makes the significant claim that:

Everything about Jesus which appears to be his 'nature' must now be interpreted by the disciples' faith as the action and love of God.¹⁰²

Thinking of the action and love of God appearing as Christ's nature, Balthasar might have said "The shining face of Christ... besides being a 'metamorphosis'... from the servant-form that is seen into the form of God which ordinarily goes unseen" is the means of teaching them "to read and understand" not only "the servant form", but also the shepherd form, the pilgrim form, the teacher form etc. "as the very form(s) of God"; since the dazzling face of divinity, or as Steele puts it, Christ's "becoming radiantly luminous", his taking on "the insignia of divinity", concealed all of these attributes of Christ as well as that of servant.

For Steele the form of God in the world is a radiant Christ the perception of whose attributes contributes to some knowledge of the overall radiance, the glory (the character and action) that Christ both shares with God and imparts to the world. In the structure of Steele's christological and soteriological (though unsystematic)

¹⁰² *Glorylord*, I, 671.

thought, God's descent into the world in the form of Christ can be seen to ray out¹⁰³ into various principal qualities. Christ is (because God is) critic, teacher, servant, shepherd, seeker, prophet, victim, perfect fool, expatriate / pilgrim, Word, healer, celebrant and so on.¹⁰⁴ In Steele's unified structure of thought these aspects of the character (glory) of God can be seen to be troped as radiations, emanations, rayings, emissions of the glory of God out into the world of men and women, their concerns and their art, particularly their literature. Thus Steele takes up these divine radiations, these attributes of God and Christ, and makes his recurrent motifs from them.

Further Steele observes the irradiating effect of these divine emanations as they emanate from Christ to encounter the evangelists and permeate their writings: they find "that... [god] is radiant all about them...".¹⁰⁵ He notices the way the radiations permeate the lives of the saints: he writes about Ignatius and his thinking for his men as set out in the *Constitutions*, and he writes about Ignatius and his thinking for all christians as set down in his *Spiritual Exercises*: "The image of the radiant fountain in the Contemplation [to Obtain Divine Love in the *Exercises*] is one which has... been evolving throughout the... exercises, just as the images of the radiant Lord have been evolving all throughout... the gospels".¹⁰⁶ He also observes how the rays touch people: "the love of God radiated into our own hearts in prayer prompts our own radiating of it abroad";¹⁰⁷ and how people pass on the radiations: "...good things and good people, radiate themselves".¹⁰⁸ And he observes in his criticism the effect of these divine radiations on the work of artists, particularly writers and poets: "...God invests the commonplace with uncommon significance and irradiates the unremarkable flesh with the singular word".¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Steele incidentally speaks of "the globe... raying out its pioneers" ("Silences", 4) and of "The visual versions which ray out of it [the doctor's caduceus in Ben Belt's 'The Repellant']". *Expatriates*, 146.

¹⁰⁴ See Special Enclosures, diagram A.

¹⁰⁵ "Steerage", 18.

¹⁰⁶ "Poemind", 17.

¹⁰⁷ "Stills: Bread and Prayers: Matt. XIV: 13-23", AJAF iv, 2.

¹⁰⁸ "5th Sunday, Year B", Dahlgren, 1994, 2.

¹⁰⁹ "Singing", 23.

It should be said that this structure of thought is not “skeletal structure”.¹¹⁰ Nor is it what Steele has in mind when he claims for a certain poem: “The poem’s design... becomes pervasively, one of the poem’s tropes...”,¹¹¹ (since there he refers to the architecture of the work and not to the architecture of the thought). Rather the structure of Steele’s thought is achieved by the radiant patterning set up by his major theme, the central apprehension of the presence of God’s glory, in unison with his recurrent motifs, the radiating separate attributes of that glory.

This thesis will attempt to show that Steele’s major project, the discerning of the presence of the radiant glory of God in the world is troped in a sustained way by the unified radiant pattern of his theocentric, christocentric, and soteriologically directed thought. It should be stressed, however, that this pattern is less an authorial blueprint according to which Steele’s works are written; more appropriately it is a cartographer’s impression of the country of Peter Steele which when mapped or chartered will explain his concept of presence of the radiant glory of God. Only four of the numerous rays, the numerous qualities of God - roles of Christ - will be examined owing to obvious constraints and to the fact that in many cases roles such as Prophet, Servant, Healer, Teacher, can be seen to be subsumed¹¹² under the four headings - “the Jester”, “the Expatriate / Pilgrim”, “the Celebrant”, and “the Witness or Word” - which are four are dominant concerns in Steele’s writing.¹¹³

One thing more pertaining to Steele’s structure of thought should be said. There is operating from the centre of this structure the magnetizing force of God, which

¹¹⁰ Steele claims that “the suppleness and vivacity of any linguistic work are deployed only through its skeletal structure and its nervous vitality”. “Strangely Enough: George Steiner’s *Real Presences*”, *Scipsi*, 6, 2 (1990), 220.

¹¹¹ “Derek Walcott: Prizing and Appraising”, *Quadrant*, 38, 9 (September, 1994), 56. [“Walcott”]

¹¹² “The World According to God” (Newman, 1992), gives an instance of how Christ, described by Steele as prophet, comes very close to having all the attributes of Christ, the Jester: “He has a prophetic perversity, a visionary contrariness. He insists on his right and duty to reverse the way what we sometimes call ‘the world’ sees things. He says, in effect, ‘I know that the common wisdom is that all that makes for command, security, and self-possession is a good thing, and all that undermines these is a bad thing, *but I say to you ‘it is not as you think, look!’*’ ‘Blessed are you who are poor, hungry, grief-stricken, and hated’: it is very strange, very unsettling talk. It is like the view from inside the mile-thick ice, like the view of the earth from the moon: and it is offered as the view of the world from God’s eyes.’ In Chapter Two, this citation “It is not as you think, look!” will be seen to be a refrain, borrowed by Steele, (*Expatriates*, 33) from Ricardo Quintana (*The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift*, London, Methuen, 1953) who uses it to speak of Swift. See below p.71. Steele uses it constantly when he is in the mode of considering the role of the jesterly, iconoclastic, quizzical and ironic observers of the world.

attracts the individual from the outer limits of each of the rays and invokes the individual to participate in the characteristics, the life of, the centre, and which is no less than the divine transforming power with which individuals are free to cooperate.¹¹⁴ Von Balthasar explains it as he discusses the phenomenon of Christian contemplation:

Christian contemplation is the opposite of distanced consideration of an image: as Paul says, it is the metamorphosis of the beholder into the image he beholds (2 Cor 3.18), the ‘realisation’ of what the image expresses (Newman). This is possible only by giving up one’s own standards and being assimilated to the dimensions of the image.... The image unfolds into the one contemplating it, and it opens out its consequences in his life. It is not I who draw my consequences from what I have seen; if I have really seen it in itself, it is the object of my vision which draws out its implications in me.¹¹⁵

Within each spoke of Steele’s radial structure of thought there will therefore be seen that an Ignatian movement from God to the individual is answered by a responsive movement from the individual to God. Hence within each “raying” or projection from the theocentre there is required a response from the individual to God. If Christ for example is perceived as “Pilgrim” then the itinerant nature of Christ is seen to invite the individual to travel, that is to change and grow, and to yearn, and hope for the paradisaical destination; if Christ is seen as “Celebrant” the individual is encouraged to proclaim (even in the teeth of disaster), the possibility of retrieval from deathly to lively situations. In this way for Steele all the radiating projections from God in the centre of creation and incarnation, apprehended in mystical contemplation, invite a responsive action, a movement towards that centre from the church of individuals, from the community of individuals, from the individuals, themselves¹¹⁶ and (their religious affiliation or avowed lack of it notwithstanding), from artists and writers.

¹¹³ See Special Enclosures, diagram B.

¹¹⁴ “Only pilgrims come home, only those who are home-bent have a good footing in a world both so familiar and so foreign.” (“Reveries and Colloquies”, 1976, AJAF viii, 3.)

¹¹⁵ *Glorylord*, I, 485. A. M. Ramsey, (*Glorygod*, 52.) cites 2 Cor 3.12-18 and comments: “ We all... have our eyes fixed upon the mirror in which the glory of God is reflected, and as we gaze on that mirror we are already being transformed into His likeness and brought, more and more, to share in the glory.”

¹¹⁶ “Poemind”, 17.

Since Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* have been for forty years the guiding principle by which Steele has practised meditative prayer it is appropriate that the organisation of a discussion of his perception of the separate rayings emanating from his theocentric focus should align itself with the order of the *Four Weeks* of the *Exercises*. Hence Ignatius' *First Week* which calls for personal introspection and provocation (something Steele calls "a troubling of the roots"), in the *exercitant* or person at prayer, suggests that the first of Steele's structural rayings to be examined should be the one which is considered under the auspices of the provocative and troublesome figure of the "Jester". The *Second Week* during which the exercitant is invited to follow Christ's itinerant ministry suggests that Chapter Three be devoted to "the Pilgrim or Expatriate", while the *Third and Fourth Weeks* in which the exercitant contemplates respectively the death and resurrection of Christ suggest that a discussion of "the Celebrant", that proclaimer of retrieval from death to life, should constitute Chapter Four. Chapter Five will examine "the Word" to whom and to which the *Exercises* are indebted in their entirety.

CHAPTER TWO: THE JESTER

always making trouble, always kicking up the turf into which the grain might fall.¹

Christ was and is the living embodiment of critique, judging the living and the dead....²

In short, this poem [Auden's "The Shield of Achilles"] is one in which there are second thoughts, or alternative perspectives, with regard to its own vision. It is what might fairly be called an embattled poem.³

One attribute of God (one aspect of his glory) given particular emphasis in Steele's writings is his foolishness combined with his "jesterliness". God for Steele is not only a fool, "a Divine idiot who can't learn anything except loving",⁴ he is also a type of jester, a God who "has things up his sleeve".⁵ The ultimate consequence of Steele's perception of this Divine attribute is that when he observes holy folly (detached selflessness in the service of God regarded by the world as foolishness) or when he perceives instances of jesterly provocation, quizzicality, self-criticism or introspection, he apprehends either in that folly-for-Christ, or in that jesterly activity, some evidence for the presence of the glory of God in the world.⁶

¹ "Eagle", 12.

² "Hopeful", 18.

³ "The Heroic", A lecture to 2nd and 3rd year students, University of Melbourne, 7 March, 1995, AJAF viii, 16.

⁴ "Sam and Georgina", 1996.

⁵ "Eve of Trinity Sunday: Mass for Business Managers of Sacred Heart Schools", Lake Forest Illinois, 1984, 1. ["Eve Trinity"]

⁶ John Saward in his *Perfect Fool: Folly for Christ's Sake in Catholic and Orthodox Spirituality* [*Perfectfool*] describes the history of the religious fool: the hagiographical genre, not of doctor, virgin, martyr, but of Fool-for-Christ as it exists in the Eastern Orthodox and Catholic traditions. He discusses the similarities between the wild, itinerant poets of early Christian Ireland and the long-haired Muscovite holy fool, ("something so apparently Eastern, so Byzantine, as folly for Christ's sake, is also one of the features of a Christian tradition in the very Far West... in Ireland.") He examines the nature of holy folly as practised by hermits such as the eleventh century Carthusians and in modern times, for a few years, by Thomas Merton. Saward notes the Cistercians' idea of themselves as God's jesters - "For what else do worldlings think we are doing but playing about, when what they desire most on earth, we flee, and what they flee, we desire? We are like jesters and tumblers, who, with heads down and feet up, exhibit extraordinary behaviour by standing or walking on their hands.... This chaste and religious game he plays who says: 'We are made a spectacle to angels and to men' (1Cor.4:9)", (p. 58). Saward also discusses the Franciscan tradition of becoming a fool for Christ's sake - "If St. Bernard of Clairvaux is God's jester, then St. Francis is his minstrel and troubadour". (p.84). He relates how on one occasion St. Francis and Brother Ruffino "preached naked and [were] mocked by the people who thought they 'had gone mad out of an excess of penance'"; but when Francis spoke to them of Christ's nakedness and humiliation the people were said to have wept and repented. Saward cites from St Francis' address to the Pentecost chapter of 1222: "My brothers, my brothers, God has called me by the way of simplicity and humility, and he has shown this way in truth for me and for those who want to believe in me and imitate me. And I do not

This chapter is concerned with Steele's perception of the jesterly beam emanating from God into the world and imparting to all people the divine capacity on the one hand for holy folly, and on the other for critical appraisal. In particular, the concern is with Steele's perception of how that double quality is imparted to Christ, to the disciples, to Ignatius in his writings (especially in the *Spiritual Exercises*), to the sixteenth century Jesuit (Edmund Campion) and to writers in general. Before this is examined, it will be important to look at the figure of "the Jester" who by dint of his analytical and dialectical skills has the puzzling and double task in Steele's work of exposing one kind of (knavish) fool and provokingly calling another type of (holy) fool into existence, and who sponsors everything that is provocative, challenging, quizzical, all that is, in Steele's choice of Hopkins' words "counter, original, spare, strange".⁷

The Jester in Steele's early experience:

Both Steele's early Jesuit formation and his post-graduate studies established the Jester as an important figure in his work. Joining the Society of Jesus was a commitment to an organisation whose founder once bore the unshaven, taloned and unkempt external signs of holy folly,⁸ and who, even after abandoning these externals of folly for Christ's sake, wrote into his *Constitutions* the advice that members "would

want you to mention to me any other rule.... The Lord told me that he wanted me to be a new fool; and he did not want to lead us by any other way than by that learning." (*Perfectfool*, 85-6). Saward also notices that Francis is in the tradition of holy folly in that he is a practitioner of joy in the gospel. The followers of St. Francis, he says, were encouraged to be God's jongleurs. ("The jongleur was essentially an itinerant entertainer.... He could be a jester, clown, tumbler, dancer, actor, mimic, minstrel, singer or poet." (p.87). In Australia today Steele refers to Peter Porter as a "jongleur d'homme" (*Peter Porter*, Oxford University Press, 1992, 45) and Michael Griffith sees Francis Webb as influenced by St. Francis of Assisi in his role as "Le Jongleur de Dieu". (*God's Fool: The life and poetry of Francis Webb*, Collins Angus and Robertson, 1991, 168-208.)

⁷ Steele recalls Hopkins' praise of "all that was 'counter, original, spare, strange'" and says that Hopkins "might have been playing apologist for humorists...". "Humour in Dissent", *The Way*, 28, 2 (April, 1988), 121. ["Humour"]

⁸ See *Perfectfool*, 106, for Saward's reference to the long-haired Ignatius. Steele also plays with the idea of the appropriateness of external signs such as an "unbarbed and feral" appearance as an appropriate image of the prophet, John the Baptist; but he withdraws the idea as unsuitable since he says: "if that were all there were to him, he could be accommodated easily enough: the figure of the Wild Man has found an honoured, indeed a domesticated, place in western thought and imaginings, and it was not long before hippiedom was sold by the yard." ("Eagle", 9.)

wish to suffer injuries, false accusations, and affronts, and to be held and esteemed as fools...”⁹ By the time Steele began work on his doctoral dissertation (some twelve years or more after joining the Society) he would not only have been formed according to these *Constitutions*, but would also have been encouraged by the *Spiritual Exercises* to desire “to be considered worthless and a fool for Christ”.¹⁰ Steele’s early Retreat Notes are concerned with what he calls the “Ignatian wildtalk about a thirst for being poor and insulted with Christ poor and insulted”.¹¹ They regard Christ in the tradition of the “purest fool”¹²: he is “a buffoon”, “a pathetic fool”, “a bloody fool” and they iterate such resolutions as “we shall all have to become fools”.¹³

In addition to this, Steele’s training in the use of the *Spiritual Exercises* encouraged him to practise the daily *Examen*, an introspective, critical scrutiny of the self intended to purge the individual of the folly of pride, complacency and so on. He had been trained, in other words, to be on the alert for self-deception. As he writes, “in people to whom deception comes naturally - (that is in people who are as Swift says, in the state of ‘being well-deceived; the serene and peaceful state of being a fool among knaves’) - the cardinal need is... rescue”.¹⁴ Steele came to associate such rescue from self-deception (by means of introspective self-analysis) with the provocative function of the fool or jester - an imagined figure such as the unseen and unsteady prompter of introspection in his early poem “Fool”.

and for all that you are at home in the cage

⁹ *Constitutions*, [101] pp.107-8. See *Perfectfool*, 104, for an account of the Jesuit tradition of holy folly. Saward sees the spirituality of Ignatius Loyola as closely resembling the Russian tradition of holy folly. Referring to Dostoevsky’s *The Idiot* Saward comments on the contemporaneity of eastern and western practice of holy folly with particular reference to the Jesuit tradition. He claims: “Dostoevsky did not know that, within the Jesuit tradition he so despised, a spirituality had developed which more closely resembles his own vision of the compassionate folly of the cross than that of any of the other Western saints we have so far studied. At precisely the same time when Pascal was anticipating Dostoevsky in his onslaught on the amorality of Jesuit casuistry, there were sons of St Ignatius engaged... in a spiritual descent into hell, in an exploration in faith of the very depths of human experience, even of madness itself. Just as Dostoevsky portrayed the ideal Christian as an ‘idiot’, so these Jesuits celebrated, both in literature and life, the vocation to folly for Christ’s sake, the wearing of the ‘purple livery’ of his humiliation.”

¹⁰ *FlemingSpEx*, 103. q. v. the *Spiritual Exercises*, [168].

¹¹ “Steerage”, 12.

¹² “Circus Maximus: The Greatest Show on Earth”, circa 1970, *AJAF* vii, 8. [“Circus”]

¹³ “Steerage”, 14. q. v. “Circus”, 3.

¹⁴ “Hopeful”, 10.

of your ribs, the one at your back is turning you out,
is leaving you, patchy and ringing, atop
the trembling platform where a tightrope ends;
and someone, yourself, is beginning to shrug,
smalleyed, bigmouthed, footsure, a natural,
keeping in line as he fleers across
and yawns at gravity.¹⁵

For Steele in the early seventies, however, the general notion of the fool was already a complex one, ranging on the one hand from the idea of the Purest Fool in Christ-crucified and an imitative response to that holy folly, to on the other hand notions of ubiquitous human folly and the idea of the fool or jester figure as its castigator. Occasionally for Steele the figure also came to stand for the human propensity to be “a being-in-between” - “hovering between God and Mammon, ...providence and fate, ...allegiance and disaffection”.¹⁶

At the time Steele was writing these early pieces he was at work on his doctoral dissertation which became *Jonathan Swift: Preacher and Jester*.¹⁷ In this work Steele traces the double literary impulses of Swift to write as priest and jester. But in the course of his research into the history of fools and jesters and their multiple roles, Steele also came under the influence of William Willeford's book *The Fool and His Scepter: A Study in Clowns and Jestors and Their Audience*.¹⁸ Willeford tells the history and the continuing story of fools, jesters and clowns from ancient times to today. And although he finds some basic differences between fools and jesters and clowns (just as he does between, for example, Medieval and Eighteenth Century forms of them), there are such overwhelming similarities between these figures that Willeford is able to make his study a general search for the answer to the questions:

Why is the fool, as bumpkin, merrymaker, trickster, scourge, and scapegoat, such an often recurring figure in the world and in our imaginative representations of it? Why do fools

¹⁵ “Fool”, *Word From Lilliput*, The Hawthorn Press, 1973, 21-22. [*Lilliput*]

¹⁶ “Poemind”, 7-8.

¹⁷ At the Clarendon Press, 1978. [Swift]

¹⁸ Northwestern University Press, 1969, reprinted 1980. [*Foolscepter*] In conversation only a few years ago Steele still referred to this work as a very important book in his life. Steele also writes that: “I am glad to say, there is accumulating a handsome set of scholarly reflections on the social identity of the fool..”. “Humour”, 123.

from widely diverse times and places reveal such striking similarities? Why are we, like people in many other times and places, fascinated by fools?¹⁹

The answers of course constitute Willeford's book. But in brief they pertain to the fact that previous ages saw folly as "one of the supreme facts about human nature", that "some of the forms [of the fool that emerge from such a study] ... are... attributes of folly as an abiding possibility of human experience".²⁰ This for Steele was not only confirmation of something that was available to him through his Ignatian spirituality, an awareness of general and personal folly; it was also confirmation of what was obvious in his study of Swift's vision. In *Jonathan Swift: Priest and Jester*, he says: "...the notion... that the worst suspicions about folly will probably come true in Swift's world, needs to be insisted upon. It chimes with William Willeford's allusion to the fool-world in which we have '...folly as a reality that cannot be captured in a description, as it belongs too much to the basic texture of our lives'".²¹ While Swift was assuring Steele that folly is everywhere, the Ignatian formation was particularly alerting him to watch for it in the self; while for Steele, Swift as "jester" was castigating that folly himself, Ignatius's teaching was recommending an imitation of holy folly which the ways of the world would see as folly *tout court*.

Steele's terminology

Essentially it appears that in his writings Steele, after Willeford, is prepared to use the terms "fool", "jester", "clown", and "buffoon" in merging and interchangeable ways for overlapping and protean roles.²² Steele refers to Willeford's work in two contexts and in a third alludes to "scholarly reflections on the... fool"²³ and in each of these

¹⁹ *Foolscepter*, xv

²⁰ *Foolscepter*, xvi.

²¹ *Swift*, 53. Steele cites from *Foolscepter*, xvii.

²² Willeford has classified the various types and forms of the fool figure starting with the Oxford English Dictionary's definitions of fool: 1. One deficient in judgement or sense, one who acts or behaves stupidly, a silly person, a simpleton. (In Biblical use applied to vicious or impious persons.) 2. One who professionally counterfeits folly for the entertainment of others, a jester, a clown. 3. One deficient in, or destitute of reason or intellect; a weak-minded or idiotic person.

²³ "Humour", 123.

three contexts implies an interchangeability of the terms fool and jester and clown. First, in his article, “Humour in Dissent” Steele writes of “clowns” and of “fools” and summarily of “The charge against fool or clown or wag or jester...”;²⁴ secondly in *Jonathan Swift: Preacher and Jester*, Steele claims that the fool can be “invoked as part of an intellectual dialectic”,²⁵ as in for example Leszek Kolakowski’s essay “The Priest and the Jester”²⁶ and so describes the *fool* by reference to writing on the *jester*; and thirdly in his “The Novel as Celebration”, where the article by Kolakowski is cited together with Willeford’s book, to describe both “jester” and “fool” without drawing distinction between them.²⁷ It should be stated, however, that this basic interchangeability of names for the Jester is complicated in the major work of the early Steele by his necessarily exercising some caution in his terminology.

In *Jonathan Swift: Preacher and Jester* what Steele has in mind in regarding Swift’s performance as jesterly is, among other things, Swift’s delight “in a world which should, were we nothing but rational beings, merely bewilder and dismay”;²⁸ his savouring “to the point of aesthetic relish, the things he is ostensibly denouncing”;²⁹ and his delight “in metamorphosis”.³⁰ Add to these the fact that Swift is easily angered and easily delighted;³¹ that he is “intrigued by the array of human types”;³² and that he is ready “to play the buffoon”.³³ In principle Steele is careful to refer to the Dean as preacher and jester, (perhaps following Kolakowski’s lead in commenting, in another context, on “priest and jester”) - rather than preacher and fool, although, as we have seen, Steele is happy to draw on Kolakowski’s description of the jester to add to his [Steele’s] stock of detail on the fool. Speaking of the fool, Steele says:

²⁴ “Humour”, 119.

²⁵ *Swift*, 13.

²⁶ Leszek Kolakowski, “The Priest and the Jester”, *The Radical Imagination*, ed. Irving Howe, New York, 1967, 90-111.

²⁷ “The Novel as Celebration”, *Twentieth Century*, XXV (Summer, 1970),174.

²⁸ *Swift*, 7.

²⁹ *Swift*, 8.

³⁰ *Swift*, 10.

³¹ *Swift*, 9.

³² *Swift*, 9.

³³ *Swift*, 9.

He may be invoked as part of an intellectual dialectic - as he is, for instance, in Leszek Kolakowski's essay on 'The Priest and the Jester'.³⁴

The complication arises owing to Steele's purpose, which is to examine Swift as preacher and jester with regard to four motifs, the first of which is "Fools" where the motif explains Steele's restraint in interchanging "jester" and "fool" with reference to Swift. Acknowledging Willeford's (and Welsford's³⁵) work and what emerges from their studies, "the ambivalence, and the durability, of the professional fool", and an understanding of the fool as more than the stereotypical "celebrant of chaos", Steele sees Swift as the professional fool which he calls "jester" so as to avoid confusion with Swift's villainous subjects, "those whom Swift would call fools... [Those] born to the condition".³⁶ Steele persists in naming Swift as "jester", implying a professional, skilful, element in his writerly antics and in naming Swift's subjects as "fools" in the sense of "knaves". What Steele is dealing with is one kind of professional fool figure or Jester (in addition to the preacher) writing about other kinds of fools or knaves.

Steele complicates this further, however, by his additional concern to analyse the knavishly foolish. In finding these fools of intrinsic dialectical import, as being for example, natural and culpable, commonplace and outrageous, Steele is describing them in the manner Kolakowski describes the novelist, namely in dialectical terms, although for Kolakowski, the jester is one arm, the priest, the other arm of the antithesis. The matter increases in complexity when, for example in a passage from *Mr Collins's Discourse on Free Thinking*,³⁷ Steele reveals Swift employing the device of "the fool on folly".³⁸ Here we have Steele writing about Swift, as jester and preacher, using the device of the fool, Mr Collins, on the folly of others. It is only at the end of the Chapter on Swift as jester and preacher presiding over his foolish characters that Steele, commenting on Swift's pretence as "simpleton in not seeing the

³⁴ Swift, 13.

³⁵ Enid Welsford, *The Fool: His Social and Literary History*, London, 1968.

³⁶ Swift, 13.

³⁷ Steele cites from *The Prose Writings of Jonathan Swift*, ed. Herbert Davis and others, Oxford, 1939-68, IV, 29.

³⁸ Swift, 14.

point of some piece of wickedness or folly”, is prepared to play on the idea of Swift as also being a fool, “the classic bitter fool”.³⁹

Generally and to eschew further unwarranted complexities, this discussion will treat the names “fool”, “jester”, “clown”, as being for Steele synonymous. Having said this, however, it is clear when Steele’s dismissive use of, for example, “clown” to mean “idiot” and “unthinking” is obviously not what he means when he elaborately describes the novelist as “a blend of priest and jester”.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, if one considers Steele’s classes of fool - ranging from Christ as “the purest fool” through to the traditional holy fool of particular importance in Orthodox Christianity, to the court-jesterly fool and including Swift, “a great savant of fools”,⁴¹ if these are considered as a genre, there is room for some interweaving and overlapping of types and terms and the naming of the type is not so important for present purposes as is the membership of one of the classes of fools.

The function of the Jester in Steele’s article “Humour in Dissent”:⁴²

Steele’s article, “Humour in Dissent”, culminates some eighteen years of thinking about the fool and his antics and how they can be seen to serve (besides entertain) humankind. Although it refers principally to “humorists”, rather than “fools”, it is Steele’s most definitive and concise articulation of the function of the fool. (Steele speaks of “humorists” but, as suggested above, indicates the generality of his subject by commencing with a “clown” and referring from time to time to both “fool” and “jester”.) The major functions of the fool as Steele deals with them in this piece are four-fold.

³⁹ *Swift*, 59.

⁴⁰ “The Novel as Celebration”, 173. See below p.67.

⁴¹ “A Play of Mind: The Language Game”, *Melbourne University Magazine*, 1970, 19.

⁴² “Humour”, *Way*, 28, 2 (April, 1988), 118-126.

First, the clown provokes introspection, insight and self-knowledge. He is the one (as Steele says of the humorist) to “come good with insight”.⁴³ He is “revelatory”,⁴⁴ because like the performer William Kempe, (who in life was “ebullient”, “Prosperous and famous”, and in death was registered only as “William Kempe, a man”), the clown’s “antics” include an “interplay between proficiency and mortality”. He also sponsors a complex and critical view of the self which Steele figures in metaphorical terms:

Thinking very well, or very ill, of our own behaviour or our own insights, we must leave him [the clown] kicking his heels outside. It is when we are in two minds about ourselves that we find him after all at our side.⁴⁵

The mind, Steele maintains, can be seen as a “tumbler”⁴⁶ and “thought, and perhaps feeling”, he regards as “constantly fissiparous”. Often declaring that we are “cruciform physically”,⁴⁷ Steele defends the individual’s right to be so in heart:

we are cruciform in mind: Lord knows, we are so in heart, else every spiritual director would be out of a job: mind and heart conspire to play what we tellingly call ‘merry hell’ with our stable self-appraisals.⁴⁸

Why the jester is seen to sponsor this situation is that, as Steele says metaphorically:

Our dreams attest, or protest, that we are more sardonic, head-tilting, body-canting, world-flipping, than the daylight’s respectabilities declare....⁴⁹

Here it can be seen that Steele’s setting up of the miniature dialectic between “attest” and “protest” succinctly bears out the embattled state as it is defined in the language of the clown’s antics. The Jester reveals and condones the individual’s tensional state within. He is the antithetical arm to the dialectic and more besides.

Part of the way he does this, and this is his second function, is by being a dissenter - “at least a potential dissenter”.⁵⁰ He has a capacity to unearth the antithetical nature of

⁴³ “Humour”, 121.

⁴⁴ “Humour”, 118.

⁴⁵ “Humour”, 118.

⁴⁶ “Humour”, 120. Steele also applies the term, “Tumbler” to the autobiographer. q. v. *Autopassion*, 72.

⁴⁷ See for example “Humour”, 118.

⁴⁸ “Humour”, 124.

⁴⁹ “Humour”, 124.

things, (Steele would also say, the “pluriform” and possibly “protean” nature of things), and this capacity is symbolised not only by his light and dark costume but also by his mind. Steele images this capacity by referring to the alternating light and dark “diamond” patterns in the fabric of a traditional costume:

As, in the classic costume of the Europe clown, dark and bright lozenges play against one another, so is his mind costumed. He has a dappled habit, and it is there to stay.⁵¹

The clown’s “warrant” for contrariety and dissension, Steele says, is taken from the person who, when asked “to go straight on”, is as prone to “go crabwise”.⁵² This contrariety is needed “to give ourselves a chance”.⁵³ Plying metaphor upon metaphor, Steele sees the dissenter as a “sprite”, or “perhaps our truest guardian angel” whose task is that of “adding scholia to our theses, Jeeves-like coughs to our Woosterian affirmations”.⁵⁴ Finding samples of the pithy statements from *The Oxford book of aphorisms*, “troublesome” in that “They disturb our rights”, Steele once again plays the tumbling jester himself and retorts to his own statement that “and it is one of our rights that they should”.⁵⁵

Another of the Jester’s means (and this is his third function discernible from “Humour in Dissent”) is his facility for providing - to the writer, poet, moralist, observer of human behaviour - the Archimedean Point. Steele introduces the matter by saying:

Archimedes, reportedly, said that he would move the world if he had a place to stand on: but it is a commonplace of intellectual commentary that, while most of us at times share the Archimedean ambition, we can no more stand clear of the world, ludicrous or luminous, than he could.⁵⁶

Which problem Steele wittily applies:

Some years ago, in St Louis, I bought a postcard which showed Manhattan by night, photographed handsomely from above, in all of what the unkind would think of as its self-

⁵⁰ “Humour”, 118.

⁵¹ “Humour”, 119.

⁵² “Humour”, 118.

⁵³ “Humour”, 119.

⁵⁴ “Humour”, 124.

⁵⁵ “Humour”, 126.

⁵⁶ “Humour”, 123.

congratulating glory. Far in the distance in the night-sky was that well-known planet, the Earth. The joke was on Manhattan, palpably: but was there no joke on St Louis?

In raising this problem of the Archimedean point - where to stand, how to be, if one is to criticise the world - Steele joins a tradition of writers such as Erasmus, whose character Folly allowed that “men of wit”

may poke fun at the general manners of men with impunity, so long as their licence does not extend to outrage.⁵⁷

Closer to our own time and place, Vincent Buckley criticised A. D. Hope’s “unbalanced satire”, finding it

a statement of revulsion which itself comes to seem repulsive, the suggestion that a God’s eye view is being taken of a human situation. And this we cannot allow; we cannot defer to a criticism of human folly which goes so far as to express disgust with life itself, and to condemn, by defacing it, the human image.⁵⁸

As we have seen Steele is aware of a corollary to this state of affairs in his observation that Swift savours “the things he is ostensibly denouncing”.⁵⁹ And while at one stage of his study Steele argues for Swift’s “fusion of the preacher’s and the jester’s perspective”,⁶⁰ he discovers that it can also be the case that it is the preacher in Swift who denounces, while the jester relishes. This appears to license Swift’s relish by isolating the jester from the man who preaches:

The preacher regards the vicissitudes of folly with a dignified indignation that the permanent order of affairs should be overset, and that incidental distresses should follow; the jester gazes wryly at the spectacle of these incursions and traces them unflinchingly through their course. For him, the ferment is less an ill to be deplored than a sight to see. He is a lesser figure this time than the preacher, but he is there, the connoisseur of folly.⁶¹

In “Humour in Dissent”, however, Steele finds another answer to the problem of the Archimedean point, and this through the example of William Kempe. The article argues that Kempe is both fool and man. The fool who criticises his audience on stage

⁵⁷ D. Erasmus, *The Praise of Folly*, Princeton University Press, 1941, 33.

⁵⁸ Vincent Buckley, *Essays in Poetry*, Melbourne University Press, 1957, 151.

⁵⁹ *Swift*, 8.

⁶⁰ *Swift*, 33.

returns to the green room aware that, as a man, he also deserves the criticisms and insults that he has been hurling towards his audience:

The fact is... that the affronts brought to the others by the fool are ones which he also suffers in his own being. That commonplace, the greenroom fool whose downturned mouth mirrors, as on some horizon, the uptilted lips displayed on stage, is not only generally historically true: it is founded on the daily experience of millions.⁶²

On stage the satirist, in the form of the jester or clown, has found the Archimedean point from which to move the world. Once back in the greenroom the point vanishes.

The fourth function of the fool outlined in Steele's article is his capacity to prompt a personal "conversion". The need for conversion leads Steele to consider situations where needing conversion means "needing insight". Speaking about the individual and the cruciform heart Steele recalls a dictum of Augustine's:

'See! very fools take Heaven by assault, where we, the wise, are sunk into the pit.'⁶³

And laments:

That parting of the ways goes on daily, nightly, in our own beings.

There are some, he believes, who do not suffer from this internal "parting of the ways", they "talk things up as if it is not so for them", and "make their own... the riddles of Jesus and Paul" to the point of becoming fanatics. The concept of fanatics facing fanatics Steele depicts as ludicrous, deserving of ludicrous, sibilant language and a ludicrously embattled syntax:

one sees sinful and therefore silly men and women, facing other sinful and therefore silly men and women, battering away at one another, all of course claiming to be licensed by the Spirit....⁶⁴

The overall outcome of the clown's successful efforts is to provoke "conversion": "that jester's flip to the heart, which would lay them open to an ampler insight or a

⁶¹ *Swift*, 33.

⁶² "Humour", 123-4.

⁶³ "Humour", 124. This cry is reiterated in Steele's "The muses' gatekeeper", (*Eureka Street*, 1, 8, 36) where he claims that Porter's poems "keep telling us" that "fools and criminals scale ladders which the good distractedly hold...". Porter, however, Steele says, combines this view with "incursions of zest and brio".

more profound allegiance”.⁶⁵ The humorist’s tricks of converting are, Steele says, his “skewing our view away from its customary doggedness into something like insightfulness”;⁶⁶ his saying “It will not be all right... as he gestures, damningly, at any feature of our unfinished condition”;⁶⁷ his “being secretly in league with the Lord of Critique”;⁶⁸ and his style, which can “take you by the sleeve and haul you around to think again...”.⁶⁹ Steele’s description of the humorist’s jesterly actions *skewing... away, gestur[ing] damningly, being secretly in league with, tak[ing] you by the sleeve and haul[ing] you around*, is itself a jesterly way, almost an entertaining way, of talking about conversion to insightfulness. In describing the way in which the humorist’s role is conversional, Steele is playing the Jester himself.

The piece moves to a conclusion with the mention of H. L. Mencken, who, Steele says, dispensed cigar-stubbing admonitions to his staff and yet could write: “If, after I depart this vale, you ever remember me and have thought to please my ghost, forgive some sinner and wink your eye at some homely girl”. Mencken, says Steele, “is a reminder that humour’s ‘perversity’ may often take compassionate forms” and in this vein, and less than apologetically, Steele “move[s] automatically” to Christ.

And if it seems an odd usage to move automatically from Mencken to Jesus the Lord, that seeming must stem from a very unalert sense of what that Lord had to represent, which is to say to reveal, to us. The curlicue of shaving over his carpenter’s ear, like the cigar-stub jammed into Mencken’s journalistic mouth, signalled industry, mortality, commonality. The one would be blown away, as the other was burned away, in the winds of time: but the eyes of both men gazed at the peculiar human performance, as well as being met by the all-creating and all-knowing eyes of the Father. Mencken died for nobody, and nobody died for Mencken - nobody but the all-important One.⁷⁰

⁶⁴ “Humour”, 124.

⁶⁵ “Humour”, 124.

⁶⁶ “Humour”, 125.

⁶⁷ “Humour”, 125.

⁶⁸ “Humour”, 125.

⁶⁹ “Humour”, 125.

⁷⁰ “Humour”, 126.

The article's ostensible role, to delineate the roles of the jester (clown, humorist), as: provoking insight; dissenting from accepted norms; providing the Archimedean point for the criticism and castigation of folly; prompting personal conversion; turn out, however, to be only the means to another end. The subject matter of the humorist and his roles and functions has itself been an Archimedean point, one from which Steele argues that Christ's humanistic and iconoclastic ways can be discerned in the likes of H. L. Mencken and from which he provocatively asserts that if the reader finds the observation surprising it is because of his or her "very unalert sense of what that Lord [Jesus] had to represent, which is to say, reveal to us". Steele's provocation is aimed not only to shock, but to convert the reader into insightfulness. Earlier in the piece Steele says:

For some people, the clown figure is conversational, the sponsor of the playground or the cocktail party: for others, he is conversional, yanking Abraham onto his camel, and turning that unlovable beast's head out into the sands. For my money, he is the second.

This imagined jester who points Abraham's camel in the direction of the desert is Steele's metaphor for what he hopes he is doing to his reader, heading him or her in a new direction where new vistas including the likening of Christ and H. L. Mencken will not seem "an odd usage" but will be the product of an increased facility to recognise and relish the attributes of provocation, and dissension.

Steele's view of the jesterly character and action of God:

Keeping in mind the Jester's functions, in particular, his capacity to dissent from widely accepted views and to provoke conversion to insightfulness, it is now necessary to return to Steele's radiant structure of thought and his understanding of God as the source of, among others, this "jesterly" raying. Remembering also Balthasar's "Everything about Jesus which appears to be his 'nature' must now be interpreted... as the action and love *of God*",⁷¹ what needs to be considered is Steele's

⁷¹ *Glorylord*, I, 671.

perception of that God whose “action and love” render Jesus able to be spoken of (in some respects) in the same line as H. L. Mencken.

Steele frequently asserts the loving foolishness of God. This includes his regarding God in the manner of the Pauline claim that “the foolishness of God is wiser than men”;⁷² and in stressing, after Auden, that God’s foolishness is in creating “a world which he continues to love, although it refuses to love him in return”.⁷³

In the theological manner of Balthasar’s:

God’s honour and sacredness radiate precisely from one who has been so dishonoured and desecrated.⁷⁴

and of Karl Barth’s:

His wisdom does not deny itself, but proclaims itself in what necessarily appears folly to the world... God does not have to dishonour Himself when He... conceals His glory. For He is truly honoured in this concealment....⁷⁵

Steele claims:

God’s radiance is in the world (as in the Johannine stress), but it is in the world as the world goes: God’s folly is to be where the fools are, his impotence is to be where goodness is annulled.⁷⁶

Paradoxically this foolishly loving God is also for Steele a jesterly God, that is to say, God is seen as extravagantly ironic. On one occasion conceding that “in the modern spirit, ironists deplore ideology and rightly so”, he says, however, that “they should at the very least ask themselves whether God cannot gladly be the God of ironists”.⁷⁷ In another context he makes the claim that “anyone who can believe... that the death of

⁷² “Circus”, 8.

⁷³ “Circus”, 8.

⁷⁴ *Glorylord*, I, 650.

⁷⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation, Part One*, ed. G. W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrance, T.& T. Clark, Edinburgh, 1956, 188.

⁷⁶ “Singing”, 17.

⁷⁷ “Hopeful”, 4.

the Son of God is part of the providence of God is well placed to shape up to lesser ironies.”⁷⁸

Steele also sees God as mocking. He claims, for example, that

there is hardly a representation of a prophetic figure in the Old or the New Testaments which is not a representation of anything from hawering to extravagant buffoonery.⁷⁹

and that this state of affairs is “a witness to the comedy, the festivity of [God’s] grace”. He further claims that God’s salvific action can be comically executed:

That exquisite fool Jonah, as cowardly and as moody as Falstaff and Hamlet put together - truculent, querulous, ludicrous - is just the one to be sent to ‘the great city of Nineveh, with its hundred and twenty thousand who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and cattle without number.’ The bewildered and dismayed man is sent to the other bewildered and dismayed men, in the name of the Lord for whom they are not pawns, not just to be born with, not to be humoured in their comicality, but the ones who cannot be spared.⁸⁰

The “fool figure” as it recurs in literature throughout the ages, Steele believes, “conveys the laughter of God about all effort to idolise ourselves”, a belief that is inextricably linked with his understanding of Christ’s participation in the jesterly character and action of God.

Steele’s view of God’s jesterly character and action shared with Christ:

Steele refers to the coming of Christ as “the ridiculous quixotry of the Incarnation”.⁸¹ Christ is “the purest fool of all: who lives and reigns, the first-born of many brothers”;⁸² he is “The one properly centred person in a world of eccentrics determined to centre things on themselves, he is, and is certified by us to be, a bloody

⁷⁸ “Stay”, MS 8.

⁷⁹ “Steerage”, 7.

⁸⁰ “Steerage”, 7.

⁸¹ “Hopeful”, 9.

⁸² “Circus”, 8.

fool...”.⁸³ And in a more meditative appraisal of the action of the Passion, Steele writes:

No wonder the costume put on him, at least twice in the passion, is that of a buffoon. He has to be treated as a pathetic fool, lest he come through intractably as a menacing fool.⁸⁴ He has to be established, the world says, as a bloody fool, or the Kingdom of God will be among us. So he is made to lose all things one ‘cannot’ do without, lest we should lose them instead: self-possession, dignity, backers, vindication, clothing, the intact person. He has to be forced into the situation of taking sides - conform, or be destroyed. He will not conform, not out of stubbornness, but because he is haunted by other dreams, and has the vocation so to be haunted: so he is destroyed. But he is the martyr for the men who kill in despair - kill him, or kill others, in actuality or in their hearts. He is the martyr for the New Jerusalem, in the midst of, and at the hands of, the Old Jerusalem. Nobody but a fool would do it.⁸⁵

Steele’s observation of the antithesis between pathetic and menacing fools endorses his understanding of the tensional nature of Christ’s role as fool. Certainly according to Paul, the Greeks saw the cross as folly and this is what Steele has in mind when he says “there seems no more apt way of speaking of his excesses than to talk of folly”; but to see Christ as a fool incorporates also seeing him in his jesterly role as a mocker of the ways of people and as a provocative force amidst staid habits of thinking and living. Just as Steele sees God as both foolishly wise and as a mocker of foolishness, so he sees Christ both as fool (in colloquial parlance with which Steele often surprises the reader, “a mug”,⁸⁶) and as someone to redress foolishness. This doubleness is a strategic component of Steele’s concept of Christ. For him, Christ is not only a fool in the sense of being “quixotic”⁸⁷, he is also “a shocking man”;⁸⁸ and “a shock to the system”;⁸⁹ “the great iconoclast”,⁹⁰ “the great perturber”,⁹¹ “the Lord of the ‘but’”;⁹²

⁸³ “Circus”, 3.

⁸⁴ C. S. Lewis would agree. In the children’s Narnia Stories, Aslan, who is quite capable of menacing the entire population of Narnia, and who is about to be slain for the redemption of Edmund, is humiliated by having his majestic mane shorn and then insulted with the White Witch’s shouting “Fool!” *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lions, 1990, pp. 138-140. q.v. C. S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, Lions, 1980, 158.

⁸⁵ “Steerage”, 14.

⁸⁶ “Love is for the imprudent, the un-knowing, the mugs”. “Liturgy for a Strange God”, Jesuit Theological College, 1972, AJAF vii, 2.

⁸⁷ “...Christ, who is himself quixotic through and through”. “Hopeful”, 9.

⁸⁸ “Steerage”, 9.

⁸⁹ “Christ was a shock to the system. And if we don’t find him a shock to the system today, it’s not him we’re talking about, it’s someone or something else.” “Choosing to Love”, Dahlgren, 1994, 2.

⁹⁰ “Steerage”, 12.

“he was trouble”, “a meddler”, “confrontative”;⁹³ “the outrager, the violater almost... he transcended the traditions upon which he depended”;⁹⁴ “he upsets our personal applectarts”;⁹⁵ and in Dostoevsky’s hands, says Steele, Christ is “so provocative... as to be a source of vexation and disconcertment to all who meet him”.⁹⁶ In *Jonathan Swift: Preacher and Jester*, Steele apologises for likening Jonathan Swift to Jesus Christ, finding it useful nevertheless to compare “a militant healer and the Swift who is constantly trying to evacuate evil by a display of his own power”.⁹⁷ It also seems appropriate, in stressing Steele’s understanding of the provocative aspect of Christ’s nature, to compare Christ with Swift whose “provocation, and delight, for his contented reader”, Steele says, “consists partly in his ability to take us with him into dank and noisome territory for the sake of the truth of the experience, while offering... guarantees that it will be possible to retreat without being ruined by that experience”.⁹⁸

In attesting to Christ’s folly:

Christ’s initial rejection of a manipulative life [the temptation to order and make “an oeuvre” of his life] is a piece of folly: the rest of the gospel account is in a sense a working out of the consequences of that folly. The life of Christ was, and is, a mug’s game.⁹⁹

and in attesting to Christ’s mockery, (for the purpose of “provocation to repentance”) of other (wilful) fools:

One of Christ’s modes of proclamation... is that of mockery, the apt rhetoric for wilful fools...¹⁰⁰

Steele follows the pattern he establishes in his study of Swift. While he sees Swift to be one kind of Jester working to remind the world of its rampant folly, he sees that Christ (notwithstanding his greater magnitude) is about the same kind of enterprise:

⁹¹ “Steerage”, 12.

⁹² “Silences”, 7.

⁹³ “Jesus: Transparencies: 3. The Closing Door”, 1993, AJAF viii, 3.

⁹⁴ “Hopeful”, 13.

⁹⁵ “Beyond Normality”, Newman, 1996, 1.

⁹⁶ “Singing”, 14.

⁹⁷ *Swift*, 44.

⁹⁸ *Swift*, 172.

⁹⁹ “Hopeful”, 12.

¹⁰⁰ “Poemind”, 8: “...but the mockery is meant to serve as provocation to repentance.”

We are saved in the death of one kind of fool for other kinds of fools: in this, and in this alone, is our hope.¹⁰¹

Steele's poem "April Fool",¹⁰² where the title is the only implied reference to Christ as fool, makes the same point, that one kind of folly is engaged in for another kind of folly. The folly of Christ, (in the title), and the foolishness of people, the "bloody fools", (named only as the last words of the poem), are interspersed with the account of the trial and torture of Christ (his folly) in the first stanza, and an account of the torture of nations (mankind's folly) in the second. With little or no explanation save the title and the last two words of the piece the poem makes the same comment as Steele makes for Swift - one kind of fool activity is going on in the face of, because of, another kind of fool activity:

Done with Herod and the glittering robe,
the zinfandel in Pilate's bowl,
the scarlet thorned together at his breast,
he went, what was left of him, after
the lashed bone and lead toggles were finished
making completely clear who
was who and what was what, out of the city,
a day's work still to do.

A retrospective piety would have him
gaze down the novel vistas
of Flodden Field, Antietam, Gallipoli,
the flaming butter of napalm, the gulf
made in the air when atoms boil, the hiss
of gas to deal with other Jews:
but he may have found it saving grace enough
not to be hating bloody fools.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ "The Bull Ring", n. d., AJAF viii, 4. q. v. "A Week in Winter: Lines for a Snowman", 14.

¹⁰² Poem 37, *The Potomac Sheaf*, 1994. [*Potomac*]

¹⁰³ This poem continues the Ignatian tradition of holy folly just as certainly as the work of the seventeenth century Breton Jesuit Père Vincent Huby, who promoted retreats and whose principal literary works "were largely concerned with providing suitable material for retreatants." (*Perfectfool*, 149). Huby in his "Retreat on the Love of God" uses "vivid images of God's 'mad love' to stir a reciprocally wild and foolish love for God in the hearts of the retreatants." (*Perfectfool*, 152.) Most importantly says Seward, Huby prays a particular litany of Christ the fool:

For Steele the matter of the death of the Purest Fool for other kinds of fools has more complexities. He is acutely aware that coming to terms with the concept of the death of the Christ for other kinds of fools seems to leave the individual in an untenable situation. He is alert, for example, to Swift's warning that the individual is foolish not to see that foolishness is rampant:

Swift finds so many, and such apparently ineradicable, instances of wicked and absurd behaviour, that the world looks to be a fool's world *au fond*. This means that a man is a fool, by the world's estimation, not to come to terms with it.¹⁰⁴

But he is also aware that such insights which lead the individual to eschew the folly of the world, place him or her in another predicament. This is the predicament that Steele finds in Auden's "The man who takes seriously the command of Christ to take up his cross and follow Him must, if he is serious, see himself as a comic figure, for he is not the Christ only an ordinary man, yet he believes that the command 'be ye perfect' is seriously addressed to himself...".¹⁰⁵ Or as Steele puts it: "we have the paradox that so exercised Pascal and Swift, the paradox of sinful man following and confessing Christ in a (necessarily) sinful way".¹⁰⁶ Christ's role as Purest Fool and as mocker of foolishness, (like God's characteristics of loving foolishly but mocking foolishness) implicate the individual in the practice of holy folly. This will be treated in the consideration of Steele's writings on the *Spiritual Exercises*.¹⁰⁷

Jesus, mocked, scoffed at and slapped on the face, have mercy on us;
Jesus, robed in a mantle of shame, and treated like a fool in the court
of Herod, have mercy on us;
Jesus, whipped, lashed to ribbons, and swimming in your own blood,
have mercy on us;
Jesus, crowned with piercing thorns, have mercy on us;
Jesus, treated like a joke king (un roi de théâtre), have mercy on us.

¹⁰⁴ Swift, 59.

¹⁰⁵ Steele cites from W. H. Auden, "Balaam and His Ass", *The Dyer's Hand*, Faber, London, 1962, 135.

¹⁰⁶ "Circus", 7.

¹⁰⁷ See below, p.68.

Steele's view of the Scriptures as reflecting the jesterly character and action of God and Christ and some consequent techniques in Steele's preaching:

While it is in a way an artificial arrangement to distinguish between, on the one hand, Steele's perception of Christ as Purest Fool (which obviously requires the substantiating evidence of the Scriptures to enable the claim to be made), and on the other, Steele's identifying jesterly qualities of the Scriptures, the distinction sought is that between Steele's exclusive comments and descriptions of Christ which come from his contemplation of the texts, and Steele's particular observation of and references to the gospels and other Scriptures as functioning in jesterly ways such as provoking, shocking and so on.

Hence Steele identifies "The shock of the gospels":¹⁰⁸ "the Gospels are fractious documents: they provoke, far more than they confirm".¹⁰⁹ The Last Supper, for example, is "that provocatively deliberate occasion".¹¹⁰ Steele finds the gospels prompting: "If you wonder why I am saying these things, it is because they are prompted by the Gospel passage we heard a few minutes ago...".¹¹¹ The "dramatic tension of the Gospels", Steele says, pertains to Christ's prompting the disciples into growth in the context of his permanent love for them:

[Christ's] determining at once never to desert those among whom he has been set, while prompting them into growth and creativity by his own bursting free of all that has so far settled into definition and self-assurance.¹¹²

This provocative nature of the Scriptures is mentioned in Steele's poem "Pentecost in Oxford" in which the persona, (more likely Steele, himself) is saying the Mass of the day. He keeps the reader informed as to where he is within the liturgy. "I lift the bread and wine" and refers to the next prayer

The words to come I know by heart,

¹⁰⁸ "Poemind", 15.

¹⁰⁹ "Steerage", 9.

¹¹⁰ "Hopeful", 12.

¹¹¹ "Praying Against the Grain", Newman, 1995, 2.

¹¹² "Singing", 14.

A prayer for the Lord to be

Our daily bread and the wine of joy:

And then he reminisces on what has gone before within the liturgy of the Word:

But minutes ago I read

The day's provoking scripture....

He then gives an account of his reaction to the Pentecost event as read within the liturgy:

A sonorous tangle

Of notions lies in the mind

And these notions include not only

A jumble of fiery tongues and speeches,

but the concept of the "stunning and goading" God behind it all:

A whirlwind deity

Stunning and goading at once the men he teaches

Words for the wind....¹¹³

In addition to Steele's general views on the gospels, his view of Paul in particular is also that he is provocative, a nuisance. It is Paul's "Spectaculum facti sumus hominibus et angelis" in Steele's "Circus Maximus" which moves him to say not only that the passage reveals Paul "trying to be accurate", but also that "to be accurate, full-blooded christianity is always a mug's game".¹¹⁴ Speaking of Paul in the context of his second letter to Timothy, Steele says:

He is the patron saint of provocation, the troubler of the trivial. ...what he really wants to do... is to see us... provoked by dreams of ample, authentic life, until it would be intolerable for us not to change. He was a damned nuisance, and eventually the authorities saw to it that he became a dead nuisance.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ "Pentecost in Oxford", *Paradise*, 30-32.

¹¹⁴ "Circus", 3. For Steele, Paul's insight propels the Christian into a fool's or clown's milieu. The "circus" is more than likely to be the event of a retreat, but the image serves just as well for Steele's concept of a lifetime: "Bring your own sawdust, do your own make-up, find your own tempo in the ring: because like it or not, you are going to be in some kind of circus. The only question is one of what you make of the *spectaculum*: neither you nor the others can change the life-game beyond a certain point."

¹¹⁵ "No Cowardly Spirit", 1995, 2.

Something of this unsettling capacity that Steele identifies in Paul is frequently found in Steele's own homiletic writing. The Jester of provocation and of new insights, as well as the Jester of self-criticism, can be seen to sponsor this passage from a homily on the subject of the "Sacred Heart":

To believe in just this Lord may be the greatest moral and spiritual challenge we have. It is natural for us to feel that the rays to whose centre we are close grow feebler at an outer extremity - that someone else, 'les autres', will ultimately be unlovable and unloved. All of us have at least unconsciously our candidates for that condition: those whose misery makes them intolerable to us who have our own miseries, or those whose arrogance affronts our own; those too much or too little like ourselves. These, surely, we feel, are very dubious cases, the abolishers or trivialisers of love - even, the defilers of the sacred. In crusading moments we repel them, and on kindlier occasions we forget them.¹¹⁶

There are four manoeuvres operating in this passage fostered by the Jester. First, the writer's incisive, lancet-like analysis of the self results in the realisation, and the confession of the realisation, that feeling close to Christ the individual unconsciously feels repelled by, or is forgetful of, the miserable, the arrogant, and those too like or too unlike the self. Just as the Shakespearean fool castigates the folly of the king, here it is as though a Jester is present, instigating and sponsoring a harsh but valid self-criticism in the homilist. This is the first manoeuvre sponsored by the Jester and it occurs "off-stage", where the homilist prepares and writes the homily.

Aware that such attitudes are possible in the individual self, the homilist moves to play Jester (and this is the second manoeuvre) to his congregation, to shock them by saying that such behaviour is detectable within the self; the Jester shocks and jolts the complacency of the church-going individual. Thirdly, the homilist provokes the congregation into seeing an old devotion, the veneration of the "Sacred Heart" in a new and challenging way. A time-honoured Catholic devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus (celebrated on a particular Feast day allocated to that devotion) which could easily stultify into personal, even sentimental, piety becomes in the hands of the homilist an occasion to call for spiritual solidarity and outreach as opposed to spiritual solitude.

Fourthly the passage raises the question of the homilist's (and the moralist's and the reformer's) perennial problem of finding the Archimedean point. The pulpit, (or these days, the simple lectern) albeit physically set aside from the congregation, is no such place to stand from which to move the world. Steele never gives himself licence to exclude himself from the criticisms or affronts issued by a homily. The only ground that he stands upon as homilist is to accuse his congregation of that which he has found in himself. The Jester becomes in this passage the sponsoring agent of provocation (into self-criticism), shock (into penitence), and at the same time provides the Archimedean point from where the homilist can begin to move his part of the world. Whether the Jester in the homilies is essentially provocative, shocking or comic, his call is constantly for self-criticism and *metanoia*.

As an impetus to self-criticism, the Jester is someone whose company Karl Rahner, in one of his addresses, would prescribe for one reason to his compatriots: "It is because we - we Germans particularly - are not self-critical that we are so intolerant, so humourless, so pig-headed and fanatical".¹¹⁷ Steele, for the opposite reason, would say: "the beautiful Australian geniality and concessiveness can play into the hands of our own laziness".¹¹⁸ As Steele aphoristically says elsewhere: "We cannot take ourselves as seriously as God takes us, but perhaps we can learn from the gospels to mock ourselves with love",¹¹⁹ and this mocking is Jester's business.

In an early homily from the seventies, Steele cajoles his congregation with some provocative play. He accuses his congregation (and himself) of a particular type of foolishness: "We... have a remarkable capacity for taming and charming life into submission, and then attributing the control to God". "It is fatally easy for us", he says, "to domesticate what should shock us". Having set up the complacent

¹¹⁶ "At the Heart of Life", 1987, AJAF iv, 2.

¹¹⁷ Karl Rahner, *Opportunities for Faith: Elements of a Modern Spirituality*, trans. Edward Quinn, London, SPCK, 1974, 202. [*Opportunities*]

¹¹⁸ "Where Am I Going and Why?", Newman, 1995, 1.

¹¹⁹ "The Ironic Heart", 12.

cleverness that he wishes to castigate: “Almost everybody is likely to be too clever for his own good”, Steele provokes his hearers with a Yiddish proverb:

[it] goes, ‘you can’t fool me, I’m too stupid.’

And advises:

And there is a kind of ‘stupidity’, a kind of slow simplicity in watching, listening, mulling things over, which can alone stop us from being fooled and from fooling ourselves. It is when we are, for once, not too competent at however good a game - the game of economics, the game of social acceptability, the game of virtue, the game, even of the Mass - it is when we are not too competent, that God, in all his clumsy outspokenness, may be able to be heard.¹²⁰

Whether Steele’s homiletic Jester shocks, criticises, provokes, amuses or combines all of these activities, Steele is never far from reminding congregations, however paradoxically, of human foolishness: “And yet he [Karl Barth] was right to pray, each day, ‘Help me, God: I am a fool’. He was a fool; we are all fools”.¹²¹ He is always mindful of the imperfection of the world: “This ramshackle travelling circus of a show, as gaudy as it is flimsy, the lions badly caged, the clowns bunglers when they are not obscene, the high-wires without safety nets and with apprentices inching out onto them...”.¹²² He brings to mind the prophetic function of “unofficial” prophets [alias Jesters]: “the opening of our eyes and the stopping of us in our tracks”; “disclosing to us avenues of insight and of choice that we had not previously known of”.¹²³ He constantly recalls the need for self-scrutiny: “from time to time a good unflinching look at ourselves may be more useful than any amount of scrutiny of others”.¹²⁴ He speaks of the nature of Christ as Purest Fool: “he was dressed, twice, as a joker, on the assumption that he was a faker...”; “the Lord... who says he is unkillable... in his concern to give and give and give - like a clown, in fact, there with open hands whatever may happen to the Big Top: like a clown with open hands however bitter the cross may be to which he is pinned”;¹²⁵ and he stresses the idiocy of the crucifixion: “[‘the authorities’] thought that it was madness: and there is no reason

¹²⁰ “Too Stupid to be Fooled”, circa 1970, 1.

¹²¹ “Asking for Wisdom”, Newman, 1993, 2.

¹²² “27th Sunday through the year (18th after Pentecost)”, 1971, 1.

¹²³ “Red Lights, Green Lights, prophets, and Universities”, Dahlgren, 1994, 1. [“Red Lights”]

¹²⁴ “Window and Mirror”, Newman, 1994, 2.

to think that they were any dumber than we are”.¹²⁶ Finally Steele recommends that people be “troubled into creativity”,¹²⁷ that, eschewing “Glib ‘Christian’ talk” and behaviour and they go instead “the difficult and abrasive way of finding what... it is that the Lord blesses and endorses”, and that in doing this they take care not to “deny or reject” anyone. This is so, since according to Steele:

Turning the face of indifference upon the hysteric, the drunk, the social predator or the liar, is to turn upon our truest selves the parodic face of a fool.¹²⁸

Steele’s treatment of God’s and Christ’s jesterly attribute as imparted to Edmund Campion, Jesuit saint and martyr:

In his writings on the Elizabethan Jesuit, Edmund Campion, Steele does not go so far as to describe Campion as a fool for Christ, yet Campion nevertheless is a candidate for such a title in the sense that all martyrs including Christ himself are fools in the eyes of the world. As John Saward says, “a religion centred on a sacrificial death is consummate folly”.¹²⁹ Campion’s folly took the form, in particular, of the lunacy (in the eyes of the world) of his refusal to take the oath, his flight to and from Catholic activity in Ireland, his reversion to Catholicism, and his subsequent entry into the Society of Jesus. Campion’s holy folly and his folly in the eyes of the world climax in his final imprisonment and martyrdom. The accusation of folly, even holy folly, is very clear in the account of his otherwise most understating biographer, Richard Simpson. This is his treatment of Campion’s and his associates’ last ride to London to the tower:

they were tied and mounted to look like fools. Earlier they were treated like gentlemen.... .the way now was to render them ridiculous; they were to have their elbows tied behind them, their hands in front and their legs under their horses’ bellies. Campion, who had to ride first in this mock triumph, was to be further decorated in the way that perjurers were marked in those days, with a paper stuck into his hat with his title written, *Campion the seditious Jesuit...* all London

¹²⁵ “Eve Trinity”, 4.

¹²⁶ “Red Lights”, 2.

¹²⁷ “Pentecost: A Farewell to Babel”, AJAF vi, 2.

¹²⁸ “Eve Trinity”, 3.

¹²⁹ *Perfectfool*, 188.

beheld the spectacle, the mob gazing with delight. ...when the cavalcade reached the cross in Cheapside, Campion made a low reverence to the cross....¹³⁰

One of Steele's various addresses, written to celebrate Campion Day, proceeds via a pretence to eschew praising the "beautiful shapeliness" of Campion's life and mind. To be so tempted, Steele argues, would amount to Campion's becoming too dangerous an exemplar:

There he would be, ...the Jesuit armoured in his own excellence, the priest distilled into a private sacrifice, the martyr exquisitely fitted for drama.¹³¹

Instead Steele argues that "Campion is both engaging and provoking" and that "any apt celebration of Campion should include an element of being troubled, of being provoked":

when one celebrates St Edmund Campion, one celebrates as it were his lasting nuisance value. A martyr is a witness... he can be a witness to the life of Christ only if he is not bland, not too readily tameable, not someone to domesticate: he challenges and ruffles people because, in his life, the wind of the Spirit is moving as it likes. And I think that Campion is a witness for us, still a martyr for us, inasmuch as he continues to challenge and ruffle us too. That is not something incidental to his being as a man of God ... it is at the heart of what we are celebrating.¹³²

In taking for granted the traditionally heralded elements of Campion's life and death and in celebrating instead Campion's continuing nuisance value, Steele is playing the Jester himself. His listeners know the traditionally venerated aspects of Campion's life and Steele is going against that grain by provocatively claiming "that any apt celebration of Campion should include an element of being troubled, of being provoked".¹³³ More than playing the provocative Jester, Steele is setting up the figure as the antithetical arm of a dialectic between tradition and the questioning of that tradition.

¹³⁰ Richard Simpson, *Edmund Campion: A Biography*, Williams and Norgate, London, 1867, 228. Steele is familiar with Simpsons' biography - see "Edmund Campion", Campion College, circa 1970, AJAF viii, 1.

¹³¹ "Edmund Campion", Campion College, circa 1970, 1.

¹³² "Edmund Campion", 3.

¹³³ "Edmund Campion", 1.

In his “The Novel as Celebration” Steele cites Kolakowski, an “unorthodox thinker”, on the need for the philosopher to be jesterly, “the joker in the pack”:

The jester is he who, although an habitu  of good society, does not belong to it and makes it the object of his inquisitive impertinence; he who questions what appears to be self-evident.... At the same time, he must frequent good society so as to know what it deems holy, and to be able to indulge in his impertinence.¹³⁴

And following Kolakowski’s hybrid pattern Steele claims:

I think that the priest too should have a streak of jester in him, but that is another story. My real point here is that the novelist as celebrant has to share in the qualities of both priest and jester. ...the priest and jester... have to be joined in a kind of dialectic in the novelist if the novel is to be the abounding thing we look for it to be. There is room for an immense amount of comfortable affirmation, of solid, steady accommodation to the traditional spiritual and social forms: and as much room - in the same novels, almost in the same gesture - for subversion, for ironic displacement and re-arrangement, for mockery and quizzicality.¹³⁵

This is not only a theory of the novel; it is Steele’s approach to all that can be said of human activity. In fact to return to Steele on Campion, and to name Steele jesterly in his celebration of Campion is to find Steele standing provocatively in a dialectical antithesis to his own traditional perceptions. He says of Campion:

His very blessings, his most characteristic gifts, may distract us from what matters centrally about him. Brilliant, lively, generous hearted, at once disciplined and supple, able to bless in season and to taunt in season, he is almost the benign PR man’s stereotype of the Jesuit.

Here Steele is not only listing and valuing Campion’s traditionally feted gifts, and simultaneously warning against their distracting tendencies, he is additionally playing a slight, jesterly game in accrediting to Campion a dialectical balance in himself. Campion is able to bless in season and to taunt in season. This same game is reiterated and extended in another address on the subject of Campion where Steele plays on the binary nature of those praying through the saints:

¹³⁴ “The Novel as Celebration”, 174. Steele cites from “The Priest and the Jester”, *The Radical Imagination*, ed. Irving Howe, 90-111.

¹³⁵ “The Novel as Celebration”, 174.

the prayers to the saints, or through the saints, in the liturgy seem to hover rather capily between penitence and cheerfulness. We keep asking to be sustained through the prayers of people whose stature we haven't matched, and don't look like matching; and we keep asking with some confidence. I think that it's particularly appropriate for us to act in this way.... Because our friends... usually show us that double face of encouragement and reproach.¹³⁶

Here Steele is playing between people as penitent and as cheerful-confident; between the saints' achieved stature and people's failure to achieve such stature; between encouragement and reproach. These pairings, noted in his consideration of *Campion*, assume significance in all Steele's writings particularly when he is struck by the individual's predicament in plying between the example of Christ's perfection and humanity's sinfulness; between, that is, the imitation of the perfect folly of Christ and participation in what Steele aphoristically calls "The Gibbonian version of history" - "little more than the register of the crimes, follies, and misfortunes of mankind".¹³⁷

Steele's treatment of God's and Christ's jesterly attribute as it informs the *Spiritual Exercises*:

Because Steele understands the ruffling and provocative fool figure to be not only the foe of what he sees in the individual as "complacency and sterility"¹³⁸ but also the stimulus to personal (or indeed institutional¹³⁹) self-analysis and introspective criticism, the Jester for him, is more ubiquitous within the process of the *Spiritual Exercises* than the appearance he makes in Ignatius' requirement of the Second Week. Ignatius specifies that the exercitant is to

¹³⁶ "Campion", *Campion College*, AJAF vii, 1

¹³⁷ "Ironic", 6.

¹³⁸ "[Christ's] blessing can seem to be our curse, his fidelity our indictment: the "daily beauty" in his life makes ours ugly, and makes it ugly in its complacency and sterility." "Singing", 14.

¹³⁹ "...collective self-scrutiny is necessary if any community or any society is to cease to be a herd." "Eagle", 8.

want and choose poverty with Christ poor rather than riches, opprobrium with Christ replete with it rather than honours; and to desire to be rated as worthless and a fool for Christ, Who first was held as such, rather than wise or prudent in this world.¹⁴⁰

The Jester's provocative and critical talents are what Steele values as particularly appropriate for the exercitant's successful execution of the First Week. This week, as David Fleming S.J. describes it, is "set in the context of God's love and its rejection by each of us through sin";¹⁴¹ it calls for a "Particular and Daily Examen"; and a "General Examen of Conscience";¹⁴² a "General Confession"; and concludes with the possibility of performing a penance with an end in mind, such as the desire "to have interior contrition for sins, or to weep much over them...".¹⁴³ The Week is primarily concerned with the exercitant's deepening awareness that he or she responds to God's gestures of immense love with sin, and that despite this, the love from the Divinity is still forthcoming.

The Jester in particular fosters the activity of the *Fundamentum*¹⁴⁴ of the First Week in that, Steele says, "to be gripped by a God splendid in his living is to be *provoked*";¹⁴⁵ its effect is "partly one of unsettling".¹⁴⁶ The Jester also fosters the dichotomous situation of the *Fundamentum*, "in which man is offered to himself as both the one weighed and the one weighing";¹⁴⁷ - where he (or she) chooses to be indifferent to health or sickness, riches or wealth, honour or dishonour, a long or a short life or as Steele playfully renders it:

the kind of responsibility taken in a familiar formulation about 'for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death'.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁰ *FlemingSpEx*, 100.

¹⁴¹ *FlemingSpEx*, 7.

¹⁴² *FlemingSpEx*, 24-26.

¹⁴³ *FlemingSpEx*, 58.

¹⁴⁴ The decision to found one's life upon the idea of service to God. In a translation of Ignatius' words: "Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul". *FlemingSpEx*, 22.

¹⁴⁵ "Steerage", 3-4.

¹⁴⁶ "Poemind", 4.

¹⁴⁷ "Three Christian Comedies: *The Divine Comedy*, the *Spiritual Exercises*, and the *Mass*", University of Alberta, Edmonton, 1983, AJAF iv, 12. ["Christian Comedies"]

¹⁴⁸ "Poemind", 8.

With Ignatius' invitation to the retreatant, in the Second Week, to extend the service of God into the practice of holy folly for Christ's sake, there arises for Steele the very predicament of the retreatant caught between wanting to desire to embrace holy folly and wishing to retain his non-folly. Steele discussed this problem of the call to holy folly at the University of Alberta 1983:

The reasonable person balks here, every time, affronted by that "a fool for Christ": our residuum of reasonableness, of non-folly, has been hard enough won and is a precarious enough possession, God knows, without our playing fast and loose with it.¹⁴⁹

To which thesis Steele provided his own antithetical retort that:

And yet just this is the *pons asinorum* of the lover: that the loved one should be able to call him out and across into wild ways, to all the craziness of commitment. The blotched and beaten Christ with the crown of thorns for his cap and bells and the reed for sceptre has, historically, had a lordship in love scarcely matched by any of his other figures.¹⁵⁰

The retreatant or person at prayer is in a tensional situation. His or her choice, in Steele's view, is between the prudent tendency to want to retain "non-folly" on the one hand, and the loving willingness to practice holy folly on the other. It is a dialectical situation and in Steele's hands paradoxically so. This is due to the fact that the *Exercises'* general recommendation of a daily *Examen*, itself a jesterly provocation to introspection and self-criticism, realigns the dialectic between holy folly and non-folly as a dialectic between holy folly, on one hand, and self-proclaimed foolishness on the other.

Reflecting (in a set of Retreat Notes) about what he refers to as the "great blaze of the Divine" which Paul experienced, Steele arrives at the following insight:

that personal power which held Paul and the others in his sway can still take hold of us at any moment, a power not to make-and-break, but to elicit from us a longing and a willing so remarkable as to deserve the name of a new birth.

Once even a glimpse of this has come home to a man, there is no going back on it. Of course, and lamentably, he may be faithless to it in many particular ways as we all are: and

¹⁴⁹ "Christian Comedies", 16.

¹⁵⁰ "Christian Comedies", 16.

the more vividly this shaft of light has come into his heart, the more conscious he will be of his derelictions.¹⁵¹

The more the individual is aware of the presence of the glory of God the more he or she will be aware of personal failings and neglects. Or as Steele puts it elsewhere: “The provocation to this, [destroying of personal illusions about the self] in Ignatius’ view, is the known character and action of Christ”.¹⁵² This preoccupation with the capacity of the individual to assess culpability is evident in all Steele’s writings on Ignatius’ *Spiritual Exercises*, (“not as a little text read but as a delicately expansive set of directives followed”.¹⁵³) His view is that the *Exercises* as a whole are “inherently provocative and disconcerting”, and that “they can serve the truth only by being so”.¹⁵⁴ He regards a retreat as “getting into trouble”;¹⁵⁵ and he believes that “To pray is to consent to the troubling of the roots”.¹⁵⁶

Throughout Steele’s work, the function of the Jester is (as Steele frequently says it is Swift’s purpose), to say, “It is not as you think - look!”¹⁵⁷ The figure, therefore, becomes integral to the process of the *Exercises* as the instrument operative within the *Examen*, to prompt self examination; to achieve for the self the effect Steele (in the context of writing on the *Exercises*) recalls Auden claiming for poetry: “that insofar as poetry has an end beyond itself it is to dis-enchant, dis-intoxicate”.¹⁵⁸ To achieve, that is, what Steele calls a state of “Knowing... yourself without illusion, and yet not being the captive of dismay...”.¹⁵⁹ The result may be something like the me Steele’s persona finds in his poem “Season in Retreat”. This is the first part of the section entitled “Inside”:

Dante was wrong. You don’t go touring Hell.

¹⁵¹ “Shaft”, 5.

¹⁵² “Poemind”, 8

¹⁵³ “Christian Comedies”, 12.

¹⁵⁴ “Poemind”, 1.

¹⁵⁵ “Steerage”, 2.

¹⁵⁶ “Steerage”, 1.

¹⁵⁷ “It is not as you think - look!” is what Steele notes Ricardo Quintana saying is Swift’s activity. See above p.37.

¹⁵⁸ “Poemind”, 8. In another context “A Dialogue with the Fathers: Jarrell’s Mutations”, *Meanjin*, 41, 3 (1982), 418, Steele refers to this dictum of Auden’s and finds Jarrell sharing in it with the result that his poetry is seen as “provocative”.

¹⁵⁹ “Poemind”, 8.

It comes upon you when you look inside
At the cant of lust, the marble gaze of pride,
The torch of anger turning world to shell.

Envy is there, the quicksand of the heart,
While gluttony and avarice will rake
Into one stinking pit what's left to take
When sloth, the dullest curse, has done its part.¹⁶⁰

At base, in Swift's and Steele's terms, the result of introspective scrutiny is to know that one is a fool. Within his writings on the *Exercises* Steele speaks of "people to whom deception comes naturally" and likens their condition to "what Swift in a famous passage calls 'the sublime and refined point of felicity, called, *the possession of being well deceived*; the serene peaceful state of being a fool among knaves...".¹⁶¹ He also says: "All apostles are bad apostles: if they don't know that they are, they are worse than ever";¹⁶² "academics, religious, teachers, many Jews, artists - intellectuals haver [sic] between pretending that they are unique in their purposes and problems, and pretending that they are just the same as everyone else. But either claim is folly";¹⁶³ "We try to take the sting out of things by saying that the world is not worthy of us.... We have to be indulged in our folly."¹⁶⁴

Steele does not leave unresolved this tendency of the Jester to sponsor both the practice of holy folly and the awareness of personal foolishness. He is, after all, well aware that the *Exercises* themselves proceed according to dichotomous methods. As he says of writers, in a parody of those undertaking the *Exercises*:

They are haunted by divers spirits, good and bad. They are presented with elections, crucial and marginal. They are faced daily with the options between standards.... Their transactions are never out of the world, but nor are they exclusively with the world.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶⁰ "A Season in Retreat: Inside", *Paradise*, 35.

¹⁶¹ "Hopeful", 10.

¹⁶² "Steerage", 7.

¹⁶³ "Hopeful", 6.

¹⁶⁴ "Reveries and Colloquies", 4.

¹⁶⁵ "Singing", 2.

And he is aware of the many other sets of dualities operative within the *Exercises*: that they ask the individual to choose between God and the world; request him or her to consider the “Two Standards” offered, on the one hand, by Christ, and on the other, by Satan; proffer guidance as to the “Discernment of Good and of Evil Spirits”; invite grief and anguish with Christ crucified, on the one hand, and celebration with Christ risen on the other; they commence with a consideration of what God gives and conclude with a decision to respond to that gift with a gift of the self. For Steele these dualities are matched by the additional ironic duality that the *Exercises* are designed for people whose situation is itself always of a double nature. He says:

These meditations are concerned with the divided heart. So, obviously, is most of christian revelation. Were the heart altogether alien from God, no word from him could impinge upon it: were it altogether loyal, none would be necessary. As it is, we find ourselves hovering *between*: between God and Mammon, between providence and fate, between allegiance and disaffection, between love and hatred.¹⁶⁶

This passion of the Jester for the dialectical balance between things, for an interplay of opposites, for double-sidedness, for contrary opinions, alternative possibilities, conflicting perspectives, renders him sponsor to the style of the *Exercises* in all their binary elements. Not the least of these is what Steele calls their “dialectic and dialogic” nature. They are about the individual talking to God and about God talking to the individual, what Steele finds Pousset calling “a dialectic of being between two who are in no sense equally matched, God and man, but whose matching... is precisely that of love”.¹⁶⁷ Elsewhere Steele describes the dialectic in these terms:

The wellspring of all Jesuit spirituality, the Spiritual Exercises... is a matter of saying. Responsive saying, to God.... The contemplative in action is... the one finding words for himself vis-a-vis God, and for God vis-a-vis himself... [And in the next paragraph.] We speak because we have something to say, but also, even more primally, because we believe ourselves to be addressed, and thereupon seek the adequate words for response.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁶ “Poemind”, 7-8.

¹⁶⁷ “Christian Comedies”, 15. Steele cites from Edouard Pousset, *Life in Faith and Freedom*, trans. and ed. Eugene L. Donahue, S.J., Gujarat Sahitya Prakash, Anand-India, 1980.

¹⁶⁸ “Singing”, 1.

How Steele resolves the paradoxical antithesis between the retreatant's desire to practise holy folly and the retreatant's general foolishness is suggested by his solutions to other dialectical situations which he considers in his writing on the *Exercises*. Speaking of Christ's "great variety of enterprises and emphases" in Matthew's gospel, Steele is aware of the contrasts in Christ's life: "Compassion and indictment, extreme solitude and choking publicity, confirmation in the tiny gifts which are all that is possible and spectacularly apocalyptic visions of what is to come: it is his necessary and necessarily arresting 'response' to the daily necessity of getting the world right."¹⁶⁹

Similarly writing about relationships with God in an age in which "the absurdity and the absurdities of life as experienced have been brought to uniquely articulate expression", Steele again sees the resolution between the desire to relate to God (thesis), and the need to endure the world's absurdities (antithesis) as a synthetic resolution. He asserts that:

It remains for us not to segregate these apprehensions [of absurdities] from our apprehensions of God, nor to allow ourselves the luxury of irresponsible distaste, but to learn anew how God's grace can encompass the worst we can imagine and the worst we can do. So long as we have not done this, we certainly have divided imaginations, and we may well be aggravating the already chronic division of our hearts. It is not as if the contrary move would be anything new in the Judaeo-Christian tradition: the bible alone, to say nothing of many other records and representations, is habitually bent upon showing how God is not incapacitated by any compound of wickedness and folly. The people won to fidelity to him are indeed those who come to see the absurdity of their situation, and who pray to be delivered from it.¹⁷⁰

Hence for Steele the synthetic resolution to the dialectic of fools on the one side and their desire to practice holy folly on the other is that the foolish individual (everyone) may strive to practice holy folly. Citing Montaigne's "I wot not how, we are double in ourselves", and claiming that "no developed personal psychology can long do without some metaphor or other of the divided self", Steele speaks to God of

¹⁶⁹ "Poemind", 11.

¹⁷⁰ "Poemind", 8.

a regular, in fact almost an uninterrupted prayer that we make to you, 'I believe, help my unbelief.' We might as well say, 'I hope, help my hopelessness', 'I love, help my hatred', 'I rejoice in freedom, help my passion for slavery.'¹⁷¹

Given that Steele follows these remarks by reminding God of "that ironic absurdity of which you are said, after all, to be Lord", it is possible to claim that another of Steele's prayer formulations that people uninterruptedly make could as well be 'I strive to practise holy folly, help my foolishness'.

John Saward, commenting on Ignatius' abandonment of the externals of holy folly, notes the direction that Ignatian folly was henceforth to take:

Ignatius learnt the wisdom of *caritas discreta*, of a love generous and foolish and yet disciplined for the service of God and his Church. Ignatian folly, like that of St Bernard, is a "sober game", a directed spiritual extremism: like everything else in the Christian life, it has as its aim the greater glory of God and the salvation of souls. This is the supreme contribution of Ignatius and his sons to the folly tradition: the reconciliation of enthusiasm and discipline; the ordering of folly for Christ's sake towards an active apostolate.¹⁷²

Writing about the *Exercises* and thinking about the perturbing, provocative and embattled Christ in "his confrontation with 'the power of darkness'", Steele's enthusiasm is evident. He says:

The Ignatian wild talk about a thirst for being poor and insulted with Christ poor and insulted at no point exceeds what the Gospel commends: it is a modest, and even rather prosaic, version of what the Gospels offer to detonate, and what Paul and John in particular are constantly harping upon - wild fidelity to a wild Spirit.¹⁷³

In the same passage insisting on Christ's continuing rebuttal to all that tries to countervail against the vitality of the gospels, Steele illustrates his belief that this enthusiasm is to be practically oriented:

Once again one has to insist that all this is not a subterranean or an aetherial set of events or of postures. It has to do with food, sweat, laughter, money, political manoeuvre....¹⁷⁴

¹⁷¹ "Silences", 8.

¹⁷² *Perfectfool*, 106.

¹⁷³ "Steerage", 12.

¹⁷⁴ "Steerage", 12.

In Steele's case the apostolate consists of students, scholars, subscribers to *The Age*, the reading public at home and abroad. His enthusiasm is to expose the work of the ironic and provocative God as He can be found to exist in the literature of the world at large.

Steele's treatment of God's and Christ's jesterly attribute as it informs Steele's critical and interpretative writing:

Ignatius' letter of March 13, 1555, informs Father Robert Clayssone that his prior letter lacks "a becoming modesty in the ornament used and in the show of learning". Assuring his priest of his "affection" for him, Ignatius comments that:

This, beloved brother, is our censure, and from it you will see that it is not only the Sorbonne that is allowed to exercise such a privilege.¹⁷⁵

And he requests of the addressee:

your prayers and your admonition in turn, should occasion require it.

Steele has good precedent for his own critical activities in Ignatius' critique of Father Clayssone's allegedly flamboyant letter. More importantly, however, Steele believes not only that "Christ was and is the living embodiment of critique, judging the living and the dead",¹⁷⁶ but also that "The acidity which hangs around the humorist, and makes the rest of us uneasy, comes from his being secretly in league with the Lord of Critique."¹⁷⁷ Realising the value of literary criticism for writers as well as readers, Steele often laments the lack of what he calls "intelligent and taxing critique"¹⁷⁸ and at one point complains that poetry in Australia is not regarded with any amount of seriousness at all. He says:

Aspiring to act as representative, as celebrant of a community from which he must to some extent be separated, [the Australian poet] finds that the community will not think of his

¹⁷⁵ *Letters of St. Ignatius of Loyola*, Selected and translated William J. Young, Loyola University Press, Chicago, 1959. (VIII, 539-40, Letter 5251), 376. [*Letters*]

¹⁷⁶ "Hopeful", 18.

¹⁷⁷ "Humour", 125.

¹⁷⁸ "The contours of exile", *Eureka Street*, 3, 3 (April, 1993), 36.

enterprise in those terms at all. If it awards him a role, it is likely to be that of something between a juggler and a makeup man.¹⁷⁹

All of Steele's books of criticism and interpretation and most of his articles on literature and literary matters provide insights into the ways he scrutinises literature to discover writers attempting to articulate mystery,¹⁸⁰ to name the nature of and the truth about the complexity of the world, the others, the self, and sometimes the Deity. And since the Jester is frequently about the same kind of quizzical mission, however complex a thing reality is found to be, Steele's apprehension of the puzzling and questioning manoeuvres of the poet, and the critical writing that ensues, are often themselves performed in the jesterly vein.

The Jester in Steele's critical and interpretative books, *Expatriates: Reflections on Modern Poetry*, *The Autobiographical Passion: Studies in the Self On Show* and *Peter Porter*:

Expatriates: Reflections on Modern Poetry as its title proclaims is a book of reflections on twelve modern poems mainly from the United States but with some inclusions from Europe and South America.¹⁸¹ Steele meditates upon the poetry selected for comment in an effort to isolate and identify, first, how poetry proceeds, how it discovers things, and only then does he begin to suggest *what* poetry discovers. The twelve chapters or reflections find Steele particularly attuned to the jesterly qualities of the poems and the associations they bring to mind. He speaks (for example, in the first seventeen pages) of their "stirrings, perturbings";¹⁸² of "goodness...done against some (however fine) a grain";¹⁸³ of "the flaccidity of spirit

¹⁷⁹ "Contemporary Australian Poetry", *Spirit: A Magazine of Poetry*, Australian Issue, Winter, 1970, 45.

¹⁸⁰ See *Expatriates*, 27 for Steele's use of "their several articulations of the mystery", and "to articulate mystery".

¹⁸¹ One poem for critical interpretation is by Michael Kent, Steele's erstwhile pseudonym.

¹⁸² *Expatriates*, 3.

¹⁸³ *Expatriates*, 3.

which can fall upon the unprovoked man”;¹⁸⁴ of the poems “compensating or countervailing [movements]”;¹⁸⁵ of evidence of “the shifting about of the reflecting and arguing mind, ...wrestle”;¹⁸⁶ of “dialectical...procedures;”¹⁸⁷ “binary opposition;”¹⁸⁸ “doubleness of allegiance;”¹⁸⁹ “rhythm [that] connives with the other oppositions;”¹⁹⁰ and of “intellectual bafflement, the point at which the mind itself begins to tilt.”¹⁹¹

In considering the poetry he allows the validity of any associated thought that the poetry conjures up for him. The associated thought is sometimes only distantly related to the subject or theme of the poem under discussion; but it is frequently directly related to the jesterly nature of the poem’s inquiry or technique. A discussion of Jorge Luis Borges’ “Matthew XXV: 30”, for example, reveals Steele discussing the notion of a “serene romantic” and likening the contradictory concept to the “cosmic extravagances” of God including the idea of Christ as holy fool: “It is Christ’s being a wild man, *homo sylvestris* instead of *homo urbanus*, that gets him noticed, gets him killed”;¹⁹² a treatment of Elizabeth’s Bishop’s “The Prodigal” finds Steele discussing a parable’s facility to include “a bringing to the surface of preoccupations, defences against those preoccupations, and the need to set these two elements in the personality in confrontation with each other”;¹⁹³ and a chapter on Anthony Hecht’s “Black Boy in the Dark” allows Steele to digress into a consideration of the catalyst in the conception of art: “The most aleatory of art needs some intent prompting in order to come into existence, needs something to play against or about, some real or imagined laws and legislature, if it is to endure; the least mimetic-seeming of drama finds itself apeing the natural human hunger for arbitrariness, and is regimented into the cap and bells of the court jester...”¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁴ *Expatriates*, 3.

¹⁸⁵ *Expatriates*, 6.

¹⁸⁶ *Expatriates*, 7.

¹⁸⁷ *Expatriates*, 8.

¹⁸⁸ *Expatriates*, 11.

¹⁸⁹ *Expatriates*, 12.

¹⁹⁰ *Expatriates*, 13.

¹⁹¹ *Expatriates*, 17.

¹⁹² *Expatriates*, 22.

¹⁹³ *Expatriates*, 41.

¹⁹⁴ *Expatriates*, 88.

Expatriates does not explicitly say that the radiating glory of God imparts the ironic, quizzical, contrasting and dialectical techniques to the poet who then uses them to expound the mystery of the cosmos, (although there are some prominent images of radiance in the work which will be discussed in Chapter Five). What it does is to subtly suggest and without recourse to cliché, that the poet is inspired, or as Steele says “haunted”. He says: “Poetry is a language of those who are serrated through in body and spirit”;¹⁹⁵ “Kafka - [is] another of the haunted men”;¹⁹⁶ “in poetry and prose [Merwin] is a haunted man”;¹⁹⁷ and he refers to “the country of the arts, which inspirits and shadows us...”.¹⁹⁸ Steele also implies that by proceeding in these jesterly ways the inspirited poet and the poetry dispel shadow, shed some light, and sometimes illuminate the readers’ understanding of the mystery of reality. “The whole poetic pursuit”, Steele says apropos Borges’ poem, “is through and through a venture into these darkly phosphorescent waters;”¹⁹⁹ of Marianne Moore Steele says: “This is a poet who moves like a shadow, but a shadow thrown with the cleanness of outline proper to high noon;”²⁰⁰ apropos Richard Wilbur’s “A Voice from Under the Table”, Steele says, “Some things [in Wilbur’s poem] are not resolved... because they cannot be - But others can be, if not resolved, at least so disposed that illumination takes place;”²⁰¹ and again in the discussion of Wilbur, he claims, “There are what might almost be called stark and bright lucidities, like those of Piranese on the one hand or a Kafka on the other. And there are the other lucidities... the ecstatic clarities of a Vaughan or a Blake”.²⁰²

The Autobiographical Passion: Studies in the Self On Show is a series of lectures on a wide range of autobiographical works selected from the literature of Europe and America. It also relies heavily for its argument on the perception of the jesterly skills

¹⁹⁵ *Expatriates*, 2.

¹⁹⁶ *Expatriates*, 3.

¹⁹⁷ *Expatriates*, 11.

¹⁹⁸ *Expatriates*, 118.

¹⁹⁹ *Expatriates*, 29.

²⁰⁰ *Expatriates*, 60.

²⁰¹ *Expatriates*, 112.

²⁰² *Expatriates*, 104.

of the writers. Introducing the book Steele draws the reader's attention to "a certain play between attention to the various writers' fascination with the grit and rondure of experience, and attention to rendering and interpretation".²⁰³ Additionally, he claims that the individual writers selected for discussion display for him some "riddle, quizzicality, and quirk" in the accounts of their lives.²⁰⁴

Conversely for Steele the lack of such jesterly qualities in autobiography reveals writing that does not interest him. Un-ironic and narcissistic studies of the self bore him because they fail to attempt to contend with the multiplicity of the world and the metamorphic nature of the self: "Boring autobiographies are... the words of Narcissus untouched by mercury".²⁰⁵ And autobiographies devoted to a factual narration of events are no better. He says:

Tabulation of event, even psychic event, while indispensable for scientific purposes, is at best a limbering up when the displaying of the human is in prospect; and on the other hand, an exhibition of the various postures of Narcissus will not get me to pay the entrance money. What grips me about the autobiographical art... is the twin wield of self upon world and world upon self.²⁰⁶

Aware that "Autobiography is a teasing, a provoking, a playing art" Steele delights in identifying in James Boswell's *Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson, LL.D.* not only the writer's capacity to change his roles: "Boswell flickers about the figures encountered in the expedition, sometimes Sancho to Johnson's Quixote, sometimes Watson to Johnson's Holmes, but always the entrepreneur of Johnson's Garrick", but also his doubleness: "Each of [Boswell's roles] is full of self-congratulation, a state which they are adept at combining with authentic humility".²⁰⁷ In his chapter on Andrei Sinyavsky's *A Voice from the Chorus*, Steele leaves a discussion of Sinyavsky's "antiphonal" writing to digress into the nature of religion: "a little reflection", Steele claims, "should suggest that many religions have been intensely ironic in pervasive spirit, so much so that the main moral challenge before

²⁰³ *Autopassion*, 1.

²⁰⁴ *Autopassion*, 2.

²⁰⁵ *Autopassion*, 26.

²⁰⁶ *Autopassion*, 1.

²⁰⁷ *Autopassion*, 61.

their articulators has often been to know how to be as double-minded as they knew they must be without being double-hearted, which they knew they must not be". And to take a third example of Steele's relish of the jesterly in autobiography, this is his bilateral view of the autobiographical instinct:

But what is the autobiographical passion: is it another to be added to the already existing tally offered by this philosopher or that? Well, perhaps it is: perhaps, along with anger and fear and desire and the rest of them, there is a quasi-instinctive drive in us, helping to constitute our nature and sometimes greatly fostered by nurture, to map our own ways, personal and corporate, to revive in retrospective tale the lives we had supposed done away with by time, and to give such verdicts on those lives as self-interested judges can manage. Perhaps. Alternatively, it makes sense to me at least to think of autobiographies as being fuelled by an ensemble of passions, including the passion to know...²⁰⁸

Despite his decided preference for individuals' ironic accounts of their lives, Steele proffers in *The Autobiographical Passion* his thoughts on two pieces of autobiographical writing where the jesterly arts are not practised. The pledge of Swift's Gulliver (in the last chapter of the fourth book of *Gulliver's Travels*), which is one of the two, includes the following:

I imposed on myself... that I would *strictly adhere to Truth*; neither indeed can I be ever under the least temptation to vary from it, while I retain in my Mind the lectures and Examples of my noble master, and the other illustrious *Houyhnhnms*...²⁰⁹

And the other, from the last chapter of Benito Mussolini's *My Autobiography*, includes this section:

I am strict with my most faithful followers. I always intervene where excesses and intemperances are revealed. I am near to the heart of the masses and listen to its beats, I read its aspiration and interests. I know the virtue of the race. I probe at its purity and soundness. I will fight vice and degeneration and will put them down....

I am forty-five and I feel the vigour of my work and my thought. I have annihilated in myself every egotism...²¹⁰

²⁰⁸ *Autopassion*, 133.

²⁰⁹ *Autopassion*, 21-22.

²¹⁰ *Autopassion*, 22.

Clearly there are no jesterly insights or revelations of self-knowledge evident in these passages. Where the Jester is conspicuously absent in the texts however, Steele employs him to analyse their deficiencies and more besides. Not only does he find the juxtaposition of the pieces comic, he finds them, because of their capacity for self-commendation, provoking and persuading the reader to believe that he or she is superior to such foolishness. Then, Steele says, the pieces vex the reader for the reason that he or she is aware of feeling superior. This is Steele's treatment of the passages (which he cites at greater length):

Both declare that the speakers want nothing for themselves but the satisfaction of serving what lies beyond them - in Gulliver's case, the unalloyed truth, and in Mussolini's, the glory of the Italian people. Both essay selflessness, and both recriminate those who want anything less. And both are grossly incongruous with that aim. One looks with amazed delight at Gulliver's claim that he can never 'be... under the least Temptation' to vary from the truth, as at Mussolini's "I have annihilated in myself every egotism", looks at a *monstrum* in all its panoply. They are, in a highly satisfactory sense, provocations to our comprehension. Minds so self-commending induce a self-commending of a different sort in us as we watch them in action: we do well, we think, to see precisely what they do so ill. And so, by an instinct of which Swift is the great anatomist, we take upon ourselves some tincture of the two speakers' self-congratulation.

When this is noticed, we may say that the passages are provoking in another sense: they vex us. That too, as it happens, was one of Swift's aims.... It was not one of Mussolini's aims, except in that he wished others to feel humbled at the figure he cut. But vexed we surely are, or at least perturbed. Subliminally, if not more consciously, we sense that we have after all been drawn into a conspiracy with the speakers even when we identify a superiority over them.²¹¹

This is Steele at his jesterly best. Needless to say the chapter (or lecture, as it was) is titled "The Provocations of Autobiography".

As with *Expatriates*, Steele no more claims that the radiance or glory of God imparts the ironic, quizzical, contrasting and dialectical techniques to the autobiographer than he asks if the autobiographer is *croyant* or not. *The Autobiographical Passion*, like

²¹¹ *Autopassion*, 23.

Expatriates, does, however, place particular importance on a series of radiant images to establish what Steele sees as the the connection between the writer and the imparted glory of God. How Steele organises these images will not be examined until Chapter Five when all the four “rayings” imparting the glory of God to the world will have been discussed. At this point let it suffice to say that what Steele does in *The Autobiographical Passion* is to reveal the various writers’ capacities to engage with, as he describes it, “our own lodgings in life and life’s lodging in us”. Clearly the capacities to do this are as varied as the writers themselves; nevertheless they include, in the case of Sinyavsky, for example, the capacity to “have felt himself in collaboration with air, cockroach, cat, smoke...”; or in the case of Lauren Eisely, to be a “great gazer and contemplative”; or in the case of Herbert to “have a spiritual life” rather than “a spiritual death” and to trace “his pursuit of the one in flight from the other”.²¹²

Steele’s book, *Peter Porter*, also has a strong jesterly vein. It pertains, in brief, to Steele’s claim that Porter’s inspiration derives from music and that music has four roles, the first of which is that of “disturber”. Music, Steele says, “rebukes us for what we are not”. And attributing an almost divine status to music he continues:

It is coherent, while we are so only intermittently: it modulates, whereas we seem often to mutate: it concludes, where we halt. Subject to its visitations, we are rarely entirely given to it: and whether we partly ignore it or turn it to our purposes, we are often diminished by our response to its grandeur.²¹³

Steele’s view that music is a disturber is tantamount to saying that music has jesterly functions. In fact Steele’s delineation of the four roles of music align themselves, respectively with those of the Jester, the Pilgrim, the Celebrant and the Word. This however will also be discussed in Chapter Five where all of Steele’s figures will be seen acting in concert.

²¹² *Autopassion*, 90.

By way of concluding the examination of the Jester there follows below a summary of some of the jesterly activities which Steele discerns at work in the texts of various writers. They are poetry's or literature's functions, but simultaneously they are the Jester's. Some of them resemble the talents Steele identifies in "the humorist". For their identification in poetry and literature at large, however, and for his utilisation of them in his criticism, Steele (who incidentally calls himself "an ironic realist"²¹⁴) has had to be in some kind of collusion with the Jester.

The qualities are:

probing, prompting, shocking:

I think that poetry is the drastic art, whose insignia lie sometimes in metaphor... but whose métier is the unappeasable. Considerable poetry both signals and precipitates considerable psychic shifts, and any Plato who desires an unperturbed commonwealth would be wise to preclude it. This is the order of attention which Heaney, like Hecht, brings to bear upon it: this is the 'shock of the new' which they look for in poetry of distinction ...²¹⁵.

provoking, perturbing:

Montaigne's, Rousseau's and Adams's moves are then, in their various ways, provocations of the reader.²¹⁶

introspecting, self-scrutinizing:

Porter's poems often carry the same insignia of self-interrogation, a poetical equivalent of the Wittgensteinian 'is this the way to put it? Is this what I want to say?'²¹⁷

questioning, in the sense of quizzing, dislodging, causing upheaval:

Belitt's "Xerox" has several formal questions embedded in it, but the whole thing in fact works as dislodgement, upheaval, the buckling of emphases into interrogations. This is frequent in poetry which strikes us as memorable.²¹⁸

questioning, in the sense of mocking, subverting: Richard Wilbur's speaker in "A Voice from under the Table" is

below the salt, the underdog, the giver of a new sense to the old saying that wine is a mocker. He has something in common with every irreverent, subversive presence which

²¹³ *Oxford Australian Writers: Peter Porter*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 1992, 5. [Porter]

²¹⁴ *Expatriates*, xiii.

²¹⁵ "Leaning towards the lyrical", *Eureka Street*, 6, 2, 42. ["Lyrical"]

²¹⁶ *Autopassion*, 25.

²¹⁷ *Porter*, 36.

²¹⁸ "Walcott", 62

asks questions and makes comments before it is invited to do so. He is that self-directing genie in every bottle, carafe and *fiasco*. Sorting himself out by speaking himself out, he sorts out those who, half-unwillingly, listen.²¹⁹

opposing, contrasting, contravening, revising:

The poet Juan Ramon Jimenez scribbled in a notebook, 'If they give you lined paper, write the other way', and Jarrell [in his four line poem "A War"] is writing the other way.²²⁰

or

Being one's own shadow, dark to one's own brightness; being one's own mirror-image, that perpetual inversion; being one's own revisionist, and revision; such things engage Walcott.²²¹

criticising:

Very few autobiographies proceed as his work [*Gulliver's Travels*] did, in an age before anaesthesia, to put the analytic knife into one set of vitals with such penetration...²²²

doubling:

Both ... [Hopkins and Walcott] ... have the double-mindedness, the linguistic ruefulness, which we never have to look far to find in Donne or Herbert. Hopkins might have said that if the Logos is fleshed, pretty soon there will be a crucifixion: and the Walcott who writes, ... "I crucified my coat on one wire / hanger, undressed for bathing, / then saw that other, full-length, alarmed in the glass coffin / of the bath-room door" might agree with him.²²³

or

Students of human nature have long observed that we are double to our various experiences - are passionate and passional. I take it that, however prior experiences have impinged upon writers of autobiography, they instance this double condition in the writing. Indeed, I am no doubt drawn especially to those writings in which I see the pulsations between subjection and initiative.²²⁴

holding in tension, balancing:

Porter's business is with setting and upsetting, both; he is donor and revisor, a renderer and a remediator. Neurotics do not have second thoughts: they have the same thought again and again, unstoppably. Porter has second thoughts in order to purify, modify, and sometimes to

²¹⁹ *Expatriates*, 110.

²²⁰ "Passages of arms", *Eureka Street*, 3, 9 (November, 1993), 30-31.

²²¹ "Walcott", 56.

²²² *Autopassion*, 24.

²²³ "Walcott", 63.

²²⁴ *Autopassion*, 2.

intensify the first thoughts. ...we are dealing with a prevailing and countervailing intelligence, a resource for dissonance and a resource for consonance.²²⁵

And since the dialectic throws up the opposite and contrary possibility, a further jesterly action is that of balancing dialectically²²⁶ - as in Steele's observations of Walcott's line "Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?" where all of thesis, antithesis and synthesis hold true:

the assumption is that the blood of the slaver and the blood of the slave both dishonour him, but he also assumes that he must write 'in the vein' of one fated to be such, there being no primordial, preservile, state available to him.²²⁷

Or as Steele explains apropos Peter Porter:

I come now to my third point about the 'thickening' of the poetry - what I call its 'synthesising vigour'. Poems, like novels, essays, short stories, plays, are 'thickened' by the wedding and diverging powers within them. Porter's poetry does this with uncommon, and sometimes unremitting, force. All of us are the product of meiotic and mitotic powers, biologically speaking; things diverge and converge, whence our being, and whence, later, our style. In medieval western philosophy, it was said that estimation takes place *componendo et dividendo*, which has sometimes been taken to mean 'by the conflating of this element with that', but has also been understood as meaning, 'by saying yes or no'. Both stresses are appropriate when we are trying to understand Porter's poetry.²²⁸

And further, since irony which requires using words to imply the opposite meaning, and since satire consists in contrasting what is existing with what is ideal, both irony and satire, in juxtaposing opposites, (although in differing ways) are both jesterly tools. Hence Steele's observation:

²²⁵ Porter, 33.

²²⁶ Steele sees George Herbert's "Affliction" as an account of Herbert as celebrant "acceding to the 'daily beauty' in the midst of the daily dying". (This will eventually be a matter for discussion in Chapter Three). Here however it should be noted that the synthesis of Herbert's dialectical state of affairs, accepting both the beauty and the dying, is for Steele a new thesis in the continuing dialectical state of affairs: "God has to entice to himself the heart of the man whose disappointments and disenchantments have become the staple of the conversation between these two strange friends".

²²⁷ "Walcott", 56.

²²⁸ Porter, 28.

The perspicacity of Christian divines, like the personal insight of any individual, tells us almost nothing about life. Any theology which does not recognise the fact that it is constitutively ironic is worth much less than the paper it is written on.²²⁹

And his satiric comment, along the lines of his own description of such comment:-
“any clown [can] drop both smile and tears and offer the bared teeth at a moment of his choice”:²³⁰

Anti-humanism has become such a cultural axiom that to protest against it is taken for prating. ‘In the kingdom of the blind, the one eyed-man will have his eye wrenched out’: Kafka did not say that, but then Kafka did not live in 1993. In his time you had to invent and sustain your own despair: it was neither institutionalised, nor subsidised by the public.²³¹

Or his account of how satire works:

In earlier times, a device much in use against cavalry was the caltrop - an iron ball with four protruding spikes so arranged that when the ball is on the ground one of them always points upwards. Verse like Jarrell’s is a kind of intellectual caltrop: it brings the rushing or hustling mind to a halt. This is one of the typical uses of satirical writing.²³²

Even drama or more precisely the duologue, in that it proffers two conflicting positions, can belong to the genre of jesterly manoeuvres, or conversely, Steele can resort to drama and duologue to show tensional elements at work in poetry and its criticism:

Much good criticism of poetry consists in the critic’s saying, more decorously, what one voice says to another in *The Goon Show* - “Shut up, Eccles!”, when Eccles is too much the ragged idiot even for the others to bear. And much good poetry proceeds, fortunately, as if the poet were, as Eccles does, joining in that chorus, were [sic] chiding and containing his own peculiarities and false moves.²³³

Additionally, one version of a poem may “have it out” with another in translation:

It is a salutary experience for the reader... to look at parallel texts [of Jorge Luis Borges’ “Matthew XXV: 30”] in the original and in one of Reid’s renderings. There, as in a diptych, the versions of the poem face each other, and in some sense have it out - have out, that is,

²²⁹ *Expatriates*, 23.

²³⁰ *Expatriates*, 173.

²³¹ “The contours of exile”, 37.

²³² “Passages”, 30.

²³³ *Expatriates*, 25.

not only the adequacy with which the English is legal tender for the Spanish, but have out their several articulations of the mystery which prompted the writing of the poem in the first place.²³⁴

Or one version of a parable (such as that of the Prodigal Son) may be held in a double and contradictory relationship with another:

The poem, [Elizabeth Bishop's "The Prodigal"] ... both depends upon and deviates from the parable which was its provocation.²³⁵

But ultimately it is within the reader that the well known tale (such as a parable) finds fertile ground for its conflicting interpretations:

Of course the parable 'wants' [the reader] to go its way, but its way is not confined to its moral. Its way includes a stirring of his consciousness as surely as it includes coming to a conclusion. It includes a bringing to the surface of preoccupations, defences against those preoccupations, and the need to set these two elements in the personality in confrontation with each other. The simply welcomed, simply affirmed parable is the unheard parable, the failed parable.²³⁶

And so ultimately the reader is the beneficiary of doubleness, of tensional and conflicting impulses within the writing.

Through [the reader] or more precisely in him, there takes place the convergence of disparate and, it may be, warring promptings. Could he not be solicited by more than one impulse, he would probably have been no good recipient of the made work of art in the first place, since in my view no work of art could exist which was not itself a tensional entity. But once he is there, and once it is there, he holds the ring, incites the antagonists, binds up their mutually inflicted wounds, reads scores, foreshadows further encounters, reflects... says little, apprehends much. The joker in the pack, the man on the line, the decorously wild man, the sheltered vagabond, turns out, when there are, as there always are, dealings between one work and other works at stake, to be the reader.²³⁷

This *is ultimately* the case except that for Steele, "jesting and not jesting" (as he says elsewhere of Peter De Vries²³⁸) the defence of the reader as recipient of contrasting

²³⁴ *Expatriates*, 26-27.

²³⁵ *Expatriates*, 39.

²³⁶ *Expatriates*, 41.

²³⁷ *Expatriates*, 47.

²³⁸ *Autopassion*, 6.

impressions and conflicting interpretations can be countered, still again, by a further argument, a final and teasing “And on the other hand” argument for the virtue of the “simply welcomed, simply affirmed parable” which he says is at least a “response”.²³⁹

This jesterly attribute of the glory of God and of Christ which is imparted to the people of the world and which provokes a response from its readers is best summed up in a passage from Steele’s *Retreat Notes*, “The Hopeful Exile: A retreat for an intellectual”. He writes:

just as, in the first chapter of *Genesis*, God is shown as being captivated by his work, and as bursting out from one degree of creativity to another and yet another, so in Christ’s life the dominant spirit is one of systematic excess. The many parables to do with boundless giving, the injunctions about boundless forgiving - these are simply pieces of oblique autobiography. The various acclamations which come to him - from the angels in the infancy account, from gratified crowds, from individual apostles, from the soldier who speaks the epitaph - can be seen as testimonies to his lavishness in promise and performance. “We saw his glory” is one way of putting this; and one remembers that (as Arendt points out), “glory” is something dependent both on a personal attribute and on public recognition. The “glory of the Lord” lies partly in the provocative presence, and partly in what is elicited by that presence. There is, therefore, an intimate link between the magnanimity of the Lord and the magnanimity of spirit which it fosters, and by which it is saluted.

Steele does not let the matter rest at that. The jester must respond to statement with retort. He continues:

At the same time, it has to be remembered that there is nothing smooth or automatic about the human response. When Hobbes spoke of laughter as “sudden glory” he meant something less generous than what I am talking about: but there is, as it were, a “suddenness: about the glory of God, something as explosive and mounting about his creativity. When the fathers of the church spoke of the resurrection as the “laughter of God”, they might also have pointed out that this first gesture of the new creation answered to something essential in all prior creation as well. And Christ’s living and dying was carried out in a spirit of quixotic fidelity to the evidences of a prior generosity in giving on his father’s part.²⁴⁰

Steele’s modern use of the Jester taps into a deep tradition of spiritual thought and sensibility. The laughter of the Jester is a kind of counterpoint to the unifying vision

²³⁹ *Expatriates*, 41.

of Steele's interests, yet one that ultimately confirms the presence of the Shekinah in a unique way.

²⁴⁰ "Hopeful", 9-10.

CHAPTER THREE: THE PILGRIM / EXPATRIATE

how bitter the bread of exile is.¹

As every Eucharist offers us viaticum, food for the journey, so the readings of every Eucharist offer us the tale of our travel, the story which may reverberate within us as we make our way.²

‘If I can’t have a change, at least I’ll have a poem: and *that* will be the change’.³

The conversion prompted by the Jester who turns Abraham’s camel into the direction of the desert is for Steele only the first of what will become for the individual engaged in prayer or meditation a succession of personal changes. Having undergone an initial *metanoia*, the individual - indeed all individuals of what Steele calls “the human, or nomadic, race”⁴ - may, according to him (and according to the format of the Second Week of the *Exercises*), find themselves in the way of a “Pilgrim” travelling from the point of a primary or initial conversion through many changes to a desired destination. In making this journey the individual undergoes a process of continuous conversion. He or she may also be aware of an expatriation from a former milieu on the one hand, or from heaven, on the other.

Just as Steele believes that the “personal power which held Paul... in his sway can still take hold of any of us at any moment”,⁵ he also asserts that the individual avoids frivolity in going about God’s affairs if his or her exertions are made “with a deep, constantly converted, passion for the Luminous Presence”.⁶ A second attribute of this Luminous Presence, and the one which correlates to the constantly travelling and constantly converted Pilgrim is the peregrinatory action and character of God. God

¹ “Love/death”, 62. (MS 16.)

² “Between the Lake and the El: Two Ways of Keeping Faith”, Loyola University, Chicago, 1988, AJAF vi, 1. [“Lake/El”]

³ “Poetry and the Hunger for Change”, Lyceum Club, Melbourne, 1995, AJAF viii, 11. [“Hunger”]

⁴ *Expatriates*, 2.

⁵ “Shaft”, 5.

for Steele is a an expatriate and a traveller, “a nomad whose home is the earth”,⁷ a concept which is best explained by Steele’s reference to Nicholas Lash’s comments following upon Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. Steele says:

Nicholas Lash, drawing on some insights of Karl Barth in *Church Dogmatics*, pointed out that of Christ’s life, as of any man’s, one can tell two stories. One is the story of ‘The Way of the Son of God into the Far Country’, the country of alienation, contradiction, and death. The other is the story of the ‘Homecoming of the Son of Man’, the journey out of ignominy into the light of God’s presence. Like Barth, Lash stresses that there is only one life for these two stories, and that they are not two stages which between them describe a sequence of events, but two (true) versions of the same occurrence. The challenge to one’s faith is not so much to acknowledge that this may have been so for Christ, but to apprehend that it is so for oneself.⁸

Since for Steele (albeit after Lash, after Barth) God and Christ are so expatriated and so given to making the pilgrimage Home from exile, it is not surprising to find Steele examining incidents and accounts of exile, expatriation, pilgrimage and the process of constant conversion attendant upon them, as possible instances of the presence of the glory of God in the world. Hence Steele can claim:

We were empowered, in prospect, before we were born, to be drawn beyond the condition into which we would come on being born....⁹

Or that:

Ignatius’ presupposition is that a true response to the presence of God will be authenticated in some significant alteration in one’s practices....¹⁰

And he can assert that:

A Dante grows more fertile in invention, and more nearly blind with dazzlement, as he gazes towards that light [John’s “inaccessible light”]; yet his imagined pilgrimage gives us no more than the trajectory of that passage of Godhead into our own being which is already accomplished, and that passage of us towards his own being which is currently being achieved.¹¹

⁶ “Eagle”, 8.

⁷ “A Week in Winter: Lines for a Snowman”, 1974, AJAF vii, 11. [“Snowman”]

⁸ “Singing”, 24. The Jester who will be found often accompanying the Pilgrim on the journey not only sponsors the dialectic between these versions of the Incarnation but issues the challenge to accept the synthesis between them.

⁹ “Eagle”, 23.

¹⁰ “Christian Comedies”, 14.

This chapter is concerned with Steele's perception of the peregrinatory beam emanating from God into the world and imparting to all people the capacity to experience existence as a form of expatriation, and to regard the life process as a journey home. More particularly it treats what Steele sees as a divinely organised state of discontent within the Pilgrim / Expatriate who, as a result of such "divined discontent"¹², will have inexplicable yearnings and longings, and "a deep, constantly converted, passion for the Luminous Presence".¹³ The chapter will briefly consider how that capacity is imparted to Christ, to the Scriptures, to Ignatius' writing the *Exercises*, to Campion and to writers, especially poets. More importantly, it will examine the homilies and the criticism to show the consistency of Steele's thinking on the Pilgrim or Expatriate, as he makes his way through the different genres.

The Pilgrim / Expatriate in Steele's experience:

Steele has an acute sense of place, of distance, (an awareness of "Urania"¹⁴) deriving from his early imaginative perception of what it was to live in the isolation of Perth, Western Australia. In a 1990 review of Australian books entitled "The Geography of the Heart", Steele recalls that experience:

When I was a boy in Perth, some of us took the study of geography seriously. The reason is obvious. Perth is about as remote from anywhere else metropolitan as, say, Lhasa; and we Australian Tibetans used to figure reality to ourselves lest the whole thing fall apart.¹⁵

Despite these recollections, however, Steele's experienced observation over the decades forces him in the same 1990 review of books to concede that

This is not a peculiarity of Perth-ites, but is the proper style of all who are forced to find themselves participant in the bodiliness of the country [Australia] and the globe.

And having said so much, he proceeds to review a parcel of Australian autobiographical books seven of whose titles, he says, "betoken something territorial,

¹¹ "Christian Comedies", 4.

¹² "Radiations", 66.

¹³ "Eagle", 8.

¹⁴ Steele, aware of Joseph Brodsky's experiences of exile and emigration, speaks of the significance of Brodsky's title "*To Urania*", she being the Muse of space or of geography...". "Joseph Brodsky: 1940-1996", *Quadrant*, 40, 3 (March, 1996), 17. ["Brodsky"]

and in fact all are informed decisively by a preoccupation with ‘placement’”.¹⁶ This commencement to a review of books is in its way a brief summary of Steele’s use of the Pilgrim and the Expatriate. It looks back over the decades to Steele’s juvenile sense of place and distance, and it looks back over the years to *Expatriates: Reflections on Modern Poetry*, Steele’s theory of “the poetry of expatriation” and his pronouncements as to where poets are lodged. It also reveals Steele in the process of applying the pre-occupations of *Expatriates* to the genre of *The Autobiographical Passion* - autobiography aware of milieu. It is as if the review steadily draws upon and builds on recollections of juvenile impressions, a theory of poetry derived from a sense of place (*Expatriates*) and a study of autobiography as dependent upon place and relationship to land.

Almost twenty years prior to this review of books, Steele’s boyish impressions of place and distance provided one of the subjects for the poems of his first collection of poetry. *Word from Lilliput* includes the poem “Campus” which is written as if from the ambience of the gardens of the University of West Australia. Steele’s persona observes the architectural and horticultural environment of the campus, but thinks of the desert of the hinterland and writes of “A trepidation” that

veins

The heart that dwells too long on Eden soil,
Knowing the old and airless death that reigns
Inland an hour’s flight away,

¹⁷
....

In another poem from the same collection, “For Paul at Twenty-One”, Steele, (a student in Melbourne) speaks as across a vast physical distance to his elder brother, (studying medicine at the University of Western Australia):

Mounts Bay or Studley Park, the same blunt toys
Go racketting to universities;
Blinking before the sunswilled campuses
And past the dusty-gutted miles that smother

¹⁵ “The Geography of the Heart”, *Overland*, 118, (Autumn, 1990), 50-54.

¹⁶ “The Geography of the Heart”, 51.

¹⁷ “Campus”, *Lilliput*, 11.

Terra Australis, will we pause, assess
Our lives' blurred maps, consulting one the other:
The big, exactly-fingering man whose guess
Goes nearer heart's-root than the charts his brother

Plots on an envelope, or glosses to
Aquinas' Summa and the verse of Hope;
....

In his thirties, after living in Melbourne for fourteen years, the mindset of the West Australian thinking about what lies beyond the desert to the East is still with him. In the poem "Orientals" Steele realises that:

For half my life this place was part of The East,
generic and fabled, as if Prester John's
country or Cathay lay beyond the desert.
To a boy of eight it seemed important
that stick-men dotted on wavering maps of Australia
should be facing east, alert for Magi,
eyes on the rising sun. Year by year
most of the continent grew mythopoeic,
its persons figures, its places all horizon;
Nice and La Paz were cities, Melbourne
location on a planet. And even now,
with fourteen years in the orient
behind me or within me, it's not easy
to put my own feet on my own earth
and know I'm El Dorado.¹⁸

When in 1993 Steele writes his mini-autobiography he not only recalls, as we have seen, that that first journey from Perth to the novitiate in Melbourne "took two days and three nights by train" but attributes to this event a significance accessible only to mature retrospection:

the distance is symbolic: to go was leaving not only family and friends, but my known world. The exodus was itself a rite of passage....¹⁹

¹⁸ "Orientals", *Lilliput*, 42.

¹⁹ "Stay", MS 4.

Realisations such as this are prevalent in the mature writing where Steele makes use of his early pre-occupations with isolation and distance and applies them to serve his critical ends. In all his mature writings Steele identifies as a universal condition, a dissatisfaction with where one is, geographically, intellectually, spiritually, socially, emotionally and so on, and an attendant yearning for something, someplace, someone. This deep-set dissatisfaction and yearning Steele associates with the lot of the individual who, feeling not-at-home wherever “home” may be, moves through the stages of life as a pilgrim might move from town to town constantly yearning for the desired destination.

This perception takes many forms in Steele’s works. It might for example, be a recommendation to the “criticised writer” of the value of moving on: “Like Odysseus... he will find himself snaking clear of storm, fury, disheartenment and blandishment, and will be right to do so. If we keep our wits about us as we move, that is partly because our moving gives us whatever wits we have”.²⁰ Or it might take the form of an endorsement of a similar point in C. P. Cavafy’s “Ithaca” about which Steele says, “having enjoined on the traveller to Ithaca that he ‘pray that the road is long’, Cavafy ends”:

Ithaca has given you a beautiful voyage.

Without her you would never have taken the road.

But she has nothing to give you.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca has not defrauded you.

With the great wisdom you have gained, with so much experience,

You must surely have understood by then what Ithacas mean.²¹

Or yet again, it might take the form of public address informed by scholarly observation. Speaking on “Prejudice and Antisemitism”, for example, Steele refers to Lionel Trilling’s work as “re-endorsing the Romantic project as one of articulated yearning, of reaching beyond the current horizon” and finds that an emblem of this yearning is the figure of the “Wandering Jew”. Of this figure Steele says:

²⁰ *Autopassion*, 95.

The burden he carries is not, as some versions of his myth would suggest, that of guilt, but rather the human onus to deny that any place or condition can be an adequate locale for settlement, an appropriate milieu for comprehensive life. What he carries in his heart is not the memory of some ancient dereliction, but the prospect of our common agenda: essentially, he is not a fugitive but a pilgrim.²²

Expatriates: Reflections on Modern Poetry criticises and interprets a range of modern poetry in terms of a quality which Steele describes in a subsequent paper as “the sentiment of incomplete lodgement in any particular psychic zone”. Poetry eligible to be considered under this rubric Steele dubs “the poetry of expatriation, of deflection from an enduring *patria*”.²³ At its most sophisticated level, Steele’s approach to the poetry investigates questions as to how, for example, a translation of a poem relates to its original form: the “Spanish translation [of “Jorge Luis Borges’ “Matthew XXV: 30”] leaves home. The poem leaves it Eden, seeking new fortunes and new hopes. It is bereft of its hispanic endowments, seeks new welcome among foreigners.”²⁴ At its simplest Steele’s discussion of the poetry of expatriation investigates language of poetic nostalgia and longing. Edwin Muir’s “One Foot in Eden” he says “is the language of the expatriate, sick for home...”; “It is the language of those with one foot in Eden, and they lie if they say they have neither foot there or that they have both”.²⁵ However Steele interprets and applies the concept of poetry revealing some kind of “deflection from the *patria*”, the metaphor is constant. The poetry, the poet, the subject of the poem, the language of the poem are expatriated. They are like Marianne Moore of whom Steele says: “she is not, any more than we are, quite where she would like to be...”²⁶ and they reveal a longing to come home.

In 1984 on one of his extended absences from home Steele spent some months in Chicago writing the Martin D’Arcy Memorial Lectures²⁷, an extensive study of the

²¹ *Autopassion*, 95.

²² “Prejudice and Antisemitism in English Literature”, *Gesher*, 1, 2 (June, 1992), 36-40.

²³ “Radiations”, 66.

²⁴ *Expatriates*, 27.

²⁵ *Expatriates*, 2.

²⁶ *Expatriates*, 57.

²⁷ See above p.16.

genre of autobiography, to be delivered at Campion Hall, Oxford, later that year. In addition to devoting a lecture to “Boswell at Journals” (wherein Boswell’s accounts of his travels with Dr Johnson are mentioned) another lecture, “Pilgrims, Rovers and Strolling Players” is specifically devoted to the autobiographical accounts of travellers or as Steele styles it “the literature of the self in peregrination”. Here although Steele discusses the literal travels of the writers (Ignatius Loyola and Laurence Sterne) and in Ignatius’ case digresses to discuss the medieval tradition of pilgrimage, Steele is less interested in the specific travels than the pilgrimage of the inner man. Steele refers to it (in Ignatius’ case) as “the internalizing of the external journey”.²⁸

In the same lecture Steele not only says that Ignatius’ literal pilgrimage strongly influenced the Founder’s writings but suggests that Ignatius himself regarded and recorded in his writings his life’s enterprise in terms of the literal pilgrimage that instigated and confirmed it. The *Autobiography* (which Ignatius dictated to de Cámara), Steele says, reveals Ignatius as a man who “moved around a great deal...which he found both formative and normative for his spiritual being”. The *Constitutions*, Steele says, are “a stylized reading on Ignatius’s part of the cardinal experiences of his life” and he goes so far as to suggest that “It may even be that one of the governing impulses behind the distinctive Jesuit ethos of high mobility in quest of the divine service... is Ignatius’s recognition of how central a part the peregrine condition had played in his own fashioning.”²⁹ It is not surprising that when Ignatius’ precedents for living are culled from Steele’s writings they comprise an itinerary not for the medieval pilgrimage detailed in “Pilgrim Rovers and Strolling Players”, but for a hypothetical journey, from exile to yearning to personal change to hope. Steele writes with Ignatius in mind that “[God]... likes [his friends] to be, like Ignatius, and like Christ, joyful pilgrims”.³⁰ That life is an exile: “Now a world so constituted [as

²⁸ *Autopassion*, 99.

²⁹ *Autopassion*, 99. Steele acknowledges John O’Malley, “To Travel to Any Part of the World: Jerónimo Nadal and the Jesuit Vocation”, *Studies in the Spirituality of Jesuits*, XVI, 2, 1984.

³⁰ “Vows”, AJAF ii, 1. Steele regards Ignatius’ life as an ongoing pilgrimage. This is apparent if his metaphoric concept of pilgrimage as a life-long venture is placed beside more pragmatic views on Ignatius and pilgrimage. John Olin, (“The Idea of Pilgrimage in the Experience of Ignatius Loyola”, *Church History*, 48 (1979), 387-397) categorises three types of pilgrimage - physical to a sacred shrine, allegorical seeing life as a journey, and metaphorical seeking inner transformations - and examines Ignatius’ particular journeys in all three modes. Ignatius experienced at Pamplona a transformation or conversion, made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and planned another and final journey to the Holy Land, which being aborted, led to more personal changes, education, inner growth and ultimately the plan to go to Rome. Olin stresses that it was the failure of Ignatius’

that in Zbigniew Herbert's "Elegy of Fortinbras"] is, in minor ways for all, and in major ways for some, the 'exile' which Ignatius calls it. One can fail to be at odds with it only by being calloused against it".³¹ He says personal changes are anticipated: "Unfortunately, as also happened to Ignatius, the wind has changed, and the Spirit has got into my craw. The thing that keeps the world un-converted, un-transfigured, is not resistance to this or that specific change, but fear and revulsion at change itself";³² and that hope is called for: "This is what Ignatius, also, was up to. It was not the sullen cowl of distaste for the world, but the lucky caul of hope for it, that made him so eager that things not be allowed to stay as they stood".³³

The homily that Steele gave when he was in Oxford to deliver the Martin D'Arcy "autobiographical" lectures is entitled "28th October 1984 for the 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time" and was preached at the Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy, St. Aldate's. Appropriately, given the peregrinatory theme of some of the lectures, and ironically, given Steele's status (as he says) of "transient, ...sojourner" in Oxford, the homily takes as its Hebrew text, the first sentence from *Exodus*, "You shall not molest or oppress an alien, for you were once aliens yourselves in the land of Egypt". Steele comments that the alien ("of another nationality or ...an Israelite from another locale") "lacked secure lodgement where he was; he could not guarantee that the milieu would be on his side, and he had nothing to fall back upon".³⁴ From the New Testament the homily treats the parable of the Good Samaritan and the "centrality of

first plan to remain in Jerusalem, that led to his years of study in Alcala and in Paris and eventually to the establishment of the religious order. It was the abandonment of Ignatius' second intended voyage to Jerusalem with his confreres that led to their decision to stay in Rome and which was the cause of Ignatius' delay in saying his first mass which he had hoped to say in Bethlehem. As Olin cites Ignatius' biographer, James Brodrick: "It marked in a sense... the renunciation of a long-cherished dream and the recognition that the *amor y servicio* of God our Lord required him to make Rome his Jerusalem". (Olin cites from James Brodrick, *Saint Ignatius Loyola, the Pilgrim Years, 1491-1538*, New York, 1956, 357). Olin is content to see the choice for Rome as the end of the quest for an apostolate: "Ignatius", he writes, "remained in the city for the rest of his days; his travels, his search, his pilgrimage in a sense had ended". (395). Steele, however, understands Ignatius' pilgrimage differently, as one continually relevant for the entirety of Ignatius' life: "James Brodrick", he says, "called the earlier years of Ignatius' life 'the pilgrim years', but that is what all the years were, even the stabilized years in Rome. He was a God-haunted and a God-hunter all his life". ("Thursday September 6th 1984: Community Chapel, Loyola, Chicago", AJAF vii, 1.) As Steele says elsewhere, "Ignatius... knew very well that the pilgrimage of the sacred is one which goes on right through the last, dark portal". ("God's A.L.P.H.A.B.E.T.", *Madonna*, January-February, 1993, 6.)

³¹ See also "Exiles from the proper paradise who are acting in good faith heighten the sense of exile in others". ("Singing", 6.)

³² "Shifts", 3-4.

³³ "Shifts", 4.

³⁴ "28th October", 1.

the stranger”: “If, as has been said, ‘the sinner is at the very heart of christianity’, it is the sinner in his estrangement, his foreignness, his alienation”.³⁵ Steele derives from the texts finely tuned and thematically coherent theological assertions such as

[God] is the horizon of all our journeyings, the climax of our yearnings, the one who is where we are beginning to be.

The most momentous claim of the whole of the New Testament is that where man was foreign to God, and because he was foreign to God, God took him to his heart in Jesus Christ.

Yet for all this there is evident in the homily a *crie de coeur* from the expatriated homilist nearing the end of a taxing year in foreign parts. In the following year *Expatriates* was published, and although it was completed prior to the commencement of the Chicago-Oxford sabbatical and therefore draws on a previous overseas experience, in the chapter on Elizabeth Bishop’s “The Prodigal” one finds the same cry.

When I first read it [Bishop’s “The Prodigal”], I had never been outside of Australia, and not been conscious at first hand of the sense of exile, of expatriation, which is a *sine qua non* for an adequate grasp of the poem. Of course I knew about it conceptually, and of course it would be, and was, a helpful metaphor for the other exiles we all know - exile from infancy, exile from wisdom, and so forth. But in a variety of countries I tasted, briefly but painfully, the food of foreignness, where one is both stranger and estranged.³⁶

From the time of this first experience of foreignness Steele’s literal travels increased to the point where during his time as Provincial, he estimates that like his predecessor, he must have “travelled half a million air-miles in his six years’ stint... within Australia and beyond it.”³⁷ During the time he held this office he once told his fraternity that he saw himself as a “moving crossroads of the province”.³⁸ This excessive itinerancy, a literal conforming with the Society’s so called unofficial “fourth vow” of mobility, provides for Steele a ready trope, not only for the alienation he sees experienced by twentieth century humanity, but also for his constant conviction that men and women

³⁵ “28th October”, 6.

³⁶ *Expatriates*, 49.

³⁷ “Stay”, MS 15.

³⁸ “Parish and Possibilities: Sheepish Thoughts of a Provincial”, 1993, AJAF viii, 1.

are expatriated - exiled from Eden, precluded from heaven, and never, in any sense, where they might wish themselves to be.

The use of travel as a trope to document alienation, expatriation and eventually to chart spiritual advancement becomes prevalent in Steele's second and subsequent collections of poetry. "A Season in Retreat" includes a section entitled "Bowral" which uses jet travel and the subsequent passing of "jet lag" to contrast alienation experienced abroad with a similar feeling at home. The section begins:

Some weeks ago I shuffled into airports,
My world that web of booking-clerks and touts
Who pass you into other realms. And now,
The jet-lag gone in Bowral, other-worldly,
I wonder about home. They said, the few
Who knew, that I could count on two things here:
Being where Bradman was, and being cold.
For the second, yes: but then that's nothing new:
I know the Arctic as I know my eyes.

³⁹
....

Some of the more recent poetry written at Georgetown University also deals with the ramifications of jet travel, the consequent jet lag, and the inversion of seasons only too familiar to the Australian flying north. In "Jetlag" for example, the poet, newly arrived in Washington DC complains of his less than serene state as he retraces the route over which he has just flown:

Pour moi, I'm disarrayed. A body - mine?
Or me? -- is trailing off in Pacific skies,
Swan-imprinted, Yarra-coursing, singed
By the sun you'd think we'd borrowed from the Dreamtime.⁴⁰

Other recent poetry uses the travel trope to create multiple levels of meaning, the poem being all of traveller's diary, social satire, and spiritual journal. This is "Airport" which is addressed to God and which, while being close to the persona's stream of consciousness, operates on all of these levels:

³⁹ *Paradise*, 38.

That you have your ways, and that we no more grasp them
than a note could reason Mozart out –
of this I'm as sure as of any thing. That said,
when it comes to the hoped-for rendezvous,
(which I imagine will lack such accoutrements
as flamboyant bush or singular wind),
the tinkering mind gets out beyond its brief
and wonders how on earth you do it.

Coming to meet me looks like getting into
one of the least-domestic airports:
whether you move from its levelled surrounds or toboggan
airily down to taxiing point,
how do you find the real person? A yeast
of claimants heaves from car-park to tarmac,
hauling everything short of yurts, explaining
that flying's the only way to fly,

frisking anyone still indebted to
the Iron Age, peddling insurance,
serving nature's abhorrence of vacua through
chili-burgers and Bud on draught,
pattering information of sorts about what
will go or come or can't be said,
putting trash in its place, or staring with
Olympian eyes from the glazed tower.

Personally, I wouldn't go there unless
I had to, but there's no accounting
for tastes, least of all yours. Johnson
declined to bandy words with his sovereign,
and Job's gambit was mainly a botch, but if
getting me isolated for
some life-or-death attention is at issue,
trying love has been known to work.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Poem 1, *Potomac*

Coming to the unlovely airport, a simile for coming to meet the speaker of the poem, God is figured as coming to a chaotic, preoccupied, hyperactive, over-committed, and unattractive organism, which the speaker ironically says he would avoid if he could: “I wouldn’t go there unless / I had to...”. Despite his aversion to himself the speaker recommends that God tries loving him into giving Him his attention. A poem ostensibly devoted in the main to describing an airport turns out to be a prayer to obtain divine love from a frenetically busy and preoccupied and distracted individual. The poem in fact parallels an insight that in *The Autobiographical Passion* (“Pilgrims Rovers and Strolling Players”) Steele has concerning Ignatius’ interpretation of his literal travels. Steele says of Ignatius:

To call the literal travels [Ignatius’ journeys “to and from Jerusalem, Rome to and from Spain, Paris, Venice, and Rome”] ‘pilgrimage’ was, in his case as in all others, a piece of interpretation; to call the internal *passus* of good cheer or bad, obscurity or lucidity, subjection or initiative in the face of authority, ‘pilgrimage’, was also interpretation. Ignatius supposed that both interpretations were warranted not only by human custom but by divine preference - that the reading of life which the God whom he followed was giving was the reading of pilgrimage, and that this legitimated Ignatius’s own un-ironic sense of direction in life. V.S. Pritchett, in *A Cab at the Door*, says, “To love, travel is almost the complete alternative; it is lonely, it is exhausting, but one has lived completely by one’s eyes and ears and is immolated in the world one is discovering”.⁴² For Ignatius, the ‘travel’ was not love’s alternative, but love’s mode.

In his poem “Praying” Steele again uses jet travel to speak about spiritual states of affairs. Alternative images of jet travel, the tedium of it, and the power of it, trope respectively the persona’s seemingly futile efforts to pray, and the efficacious prayer he observes prayed by veteran contemplatives:

Sometimes it feels like Jimmy Durante calling
goodnight to Mrs. Calabash, whoever
she was or whether. Sometimes it’s the tenth
hour in the trans-Pacific plane,
all glamour gone and connections still to make.

....

⁴¹ Poem 69, *Potomac*.

But whistling in the dark, as the poet said,
is good practice for whistling, so
one goes on doing it and cognate things,
knowing a little and holding out
for a touch of what shows in the eyes of the old
hands at the business, their voices surrendered,
a better than Boeing winging their hopes, the laden
flesh beginning to take fire.⁴³

The Pilgrim and the nature of the journey:

Steele is aware that life imaged as a journey is “The most ancient and most durable metaphor for life itself”⁴⁴ and that the image is so frequently used that it is scarcely perceived as a metaphor at all: “amongst metaphors for life itself, that of a journey is surely the most widespread - so much so that we barely recognise that it *is* a metaphor...”.⁴⁵ Nevertheless Steele insists on the validity of the image: “If there is some trope more primal or more comprehensive than ‘travel’ as a way of bringing life into focus, it escapes me”.⁴⁶ Consulting Roget to find “an *aide-memoire* of how our species has apprehended itself through its long haul”, Steele lists the human individual as “‘tourist, excursionist, adventurer, peregrinator, bird of passage, tramp, palmer, peripatetic, somnambulist, emigrant, fugitive’, and so on and on”.⁴⁷ One should, with Steele’s writing in mind, add to this “expatriate”, “exile”, “alien” and “refugee”: “The pilgrim could be regarded in many lights by those who had dealings with him. They could see him... as an alien in one’s territory, if one were a civil authority...”;⁴⁸ “It would be possible, and I think instructive, to attempt a profile of European

⁴² *Autopassion*, 99. Steele cites from V.S. Pritchett, *A Cab at the Door*, Harmondsworth, Penquin, 1979 [1968], 175.

⁴³ Poem 58, *Potomac*.

⁴⁴ “A Slightly Crooked Line”, *Quadrant*, 39, 11 (November, 1995), 26. Gerald O’Collins (*The Second Journey*, New York, Paulist Press, 1987, 4) says “to describe human life as a journey and religious life as a pilgrimage” is “commonplace”.

⁴⁵ “Love/death”, 55. (MS 8.)

⁴⁶ *Autopassion*, 94.

⁴⁷ *Autopassion*, 94.

⁴⁸ *Autopassion*, 98.

philosophy, or theology, by pursuing the fortunes of the trope of man the traveller: we might find some odd bedfellows as a result. Or again, one might play back and forth between the visual and the verbal arts, attempting to build on what has already been done in the matter of the figure of exile, or of exploration...”.⁴⁹

In fashioning his own version of the metaphor of pilgrimage Steele establishes the nature of the travelling that the Pilgrim of life must do. The journey is one from an Edenic exile or expatriation (“to be here is still to some degree to be in exile”⁵⁰) to “the Heimat, the patria”,⁵¹ Paradise, or heaven. For Steele it commences, as it did for the Dante he so admires, from a state of expatriation, passes through vistas of incessant need, hunger and yearning (including the yearning to change or be changed) into regions of daily change and constant hope for, over and above other things, the destination of Paradise. These four distinct stages through which the Pilgrim must pass: exile or expatriation, yearning, change, and hope become something of a theme in Steele’s use of the Pilgrim figure.

The first stage for Steele’s Pilgrim is expatriation or exile. The commencement point of the journey is not exilic only because it is Adamic.⁵² It is so since, having undergone a rejection of evil and sin both in self and in the world, the Pilgrim, like his or her prayer, plies “between earth and heaven”,⁵³ and belongs to neither: “The agony of both Fortinbras and Hamlet is that they can imagine a condition of coherence and entire lucidity: but it is no more given to them by Shakespeare or Herbert than it is given to us by God to live in that imagined state. Like us, they have both lived, and they will both have died, in exile”.⁵⁴

The second stage is that of yearning, longing, dissatisfaction or discontent. Finding himself/herself so in-between, (“Celestial days have domestic intent, and heaven’s

⁴⁹ *Autopassion*, 95-96.

⁵⁰ “Hopeful”, 1.

⁵¹ *Expatriates*, 4.

⁵² “the most eden-like spot in the world is always in some measure a fallen Eden.” (“The Emmaus Encounter”, 1986, *AJAF* v, 1.)

⁵³ “A Woman in the Middle: Part Two”, address to Georgetown University, 1994, *AJAF* viii, 3.

⁵⁴ “Singing”, 6. Steele is referring to Zbigniew Herbert’s “Elegy of Fortinbras”.

journey must go earth's ways";⁵⁵) the Pilgrim (who is of the stock of "revenants, and rovers, homebodies and hunters",⁵⁶) yearns for and is attracted to, he or she knows not what: "In [Marianne] Moore's case I would say that one can sense a variety of yearnings - she is not, any more than we are, quite where she would like to be...".⁵⁷ As he or she progresses, the yearning is for home and for God: "the passage of our days will always be a paschal passage, a sometimes mysterious being drawn into the field of force of the Father himself, the one who magnetizes our wits and our hearts";⁵⁸ his or her yearning, that is, is for God, if, in fact, he or she has begun to find Him: "'You would not seek me if you had not found me' ...".⁵⁹

The third stage of the Pilgrim's journey is change. For Steele conversion is a daily affair: "The trope of the pilgrimage of life coincides with the insight expressed by Kafka in the form that the day of judgement is in perpetual session; one is judged in, and by, one's daily essays";⁶⁰ "Newman pointed out that to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often".⁶¹

And the fourth stage for Steele's Pilgrim is hope. Continuing to yearn for and to seek God, undergoing daily personal change and development, the Pilgrim is then to hope: to "find hope at the heart of the exile";⁶² or at the very least he or she is to hope for hope: "If you cannot hope, at least hope to hope".⁶³ His or her hope is to be for God-given transformation: "transformation is his [God's] metier, and here we are for the transforming";⁶⁴ "(as the Reformers recalled to a forgetful church) it is the grace of God, not human wrist and muscle, which will win us to transformation".⁶⁵ The Pilgrim's hope is also a hope, to be attended: "[Muir's] is the language of the

⁵⁵ "The Passionate Man's Pilgrimage", *Madonna*, September, 1990, 10.

⁵⁶ *Expatriates*, 23.

⁵⁷ *Expatriates*, 57.

⁵⁸ "September", 2.

⁵⁹ "Poemind", 1.

⁶⁰ *Expatriates*, 23. Steele cites from Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father: Stories and Other Writings*, trans. Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins, Schocken Books, New York, 1954, 38.

⁶¹ "A Good Man with a Stone: Easter 1985", 1.

⁶² "Hopeful", 1.

⁶³ "Snowman", 4.

⁶⁴ "September", 2.

expatriate, sick for home all right, but sustained in his sickness”.⁶⁶ It is a hope to be repatriated: “...hope ...that here and hereafter one may come home”;⁶⁷ “may we go life-long as his pilgrims; and may we celebrate... at the goal of every pilgrimage”.⁶⁸ And finally, it is a hope for what, in a homily, and with Dante in mind, Steele calls “the Love which gave us our origin [and] gives us our destination”.⁶⁹

This delineation of the journey to be made by the Pilgrim is culled from Steele’s overall use of the figure throughout his oeuvre. In many instances the role of the figure is not sustained over the entire four part journey. Just as the Jester is frequently an unseen literary device at the elbow of the dialectician, interrogator, or individual wishing to gain insightful experience, Steele’s Pilgrim or itinerant figure can also operate as an unseen metaphoric force. In the passage cited below the unseen Jester is present, not only in the criticism levelled at the writer but in that writer’s response - (“the writer... shrugs his shoulders, or jostles his neighbour”) and the Pilgrim, the traveller and fugitive figure is also there, as, Odysseus-like, the writer moves away from various emotional vistas into new regions of experience. Steele writes:

World-weary proverbs abound to tell us that we are none the better for going to Rome, or out of our room, or into another heart; the golden world of lost paradises rebukes, coldly, the silver, bronze, or leaden *milieux* through which we stump in time. Had irony no other nourishment in the world, it could feed itself fat on the prospect of selves in motion. So far, so bad. But the fact remains that the very readiness to scorn man in his mobility is always itself a form of stored mobility: it is coiled, to spring or to strike. That is why, whether the criticised writer is practising some species of psychology or of history or of philosophy or theology... however he tips his hand, shrugs his shoulders, or jostles his neighbour - he is unlikely to be downcast for long in the face of however stern a rebuke. Like Odysseus, man of many turns, he will find himself snaking clear of storm, fury, disheartenment and

⁶⁵ “Poemind”, 6.

⁶⁶ *Expatriates*, 2.

⁶⁷ “Silences”, 16.

⁶⁸ “September”, 3.

⁶⁹ “Magnetism and the Lady: Feast of the Assumption, 1988”, Hawthorn, *AJAF* vi, 1. q. v. “Early Birds”, *Anglesea*, 1993, 2, where the meaning of Christianity, says Steele, “is a form of divine magnetism. It says that the cosmos is drawn by what Dante calls, in the last words of his masterpiece, ‘the Love that moves the sun and the other stars’.”

blandishment, and he will be right to do so. If we keep our wits about us as we move, that is partly because our moving gives us whatever wits we have.⁷⁰

Frequently the Pilgrim, (or when there is need for a differently accented interpretation of the journeying figure, the Expatriate or Exile) allegorises the human condition and proffers some perspective on the venture of life itself. The condition and the affairs of the Pilgrim or the Expatriate are, for Steele, by implication those of everyman, all teachers, scholars, writers and poets, all people, but the allegorical applications are varied in the metaphorical forms they take: “Some of us travel physically a lot... But all of us travel psychologically, running our imaginations over so many locations...”;⁷¹ “We are called to be ‘unappeased and peregrine’”;⁷² “I hope that we will bring to the Province’s meeting all the graciousness, wit, patience... We will all bring our wounds, God knows. Perhaps they may be our transit-passes for resurrection”;⁷³ “Autobiography is a foreign country, and its makers all expatriates”;⁷⁴ “The most momentous claim of the whole of the New Testament is that where man was foreign to God, and because he was foreign to God, God took him to his heart in Jesus Christ”.⁷⁵

The commonplace nature of life described as pilgrimage does not pre-empt Steele from further inventive figuring, and further playing on variations of the theme of life as journey, as, for example, in this montage of image upon image where “you” as the

⁷⁰ *Autopassion*, 94-95. Similarly the Jester licenses Steele’s comments, troped in terms of the Pilgrim or Expatriate, on Coleridge’s “shaping spirit of imagination”: “Much of Coleridge’s anguish, and, as he believed, almost all of his joy, came from a dialectical movement between himself and the supposedly promising territories to which he addressed himself”. (*Expatriates*, 143.) The Jester’s proclivity for double-sided insights also attends the Pilgrim in Steele’s claim that: “It is possible for us to go all-out for only one of the God-given appetites, possible to idolise transience or to idolise permanence. ...we are home-bodies, but we are also trail-blazers - after all, nobody but you has taken the path to where you are right now.” (“Roads and lodgings”, *Madonna*, July, 1994, 6.) Speaking about Christianity’s call for change and Jesus’ incitement of that change Steele is clearly describing jesterly qualities of Jesus but imaging them in terms of the traveller. More importantly every class of individual that Steele sees as incited to change is imaged in these terms: “Jesus is vexatious precisely insofar as he incites a swerving from the habitual path of official, of religious luminary, of imperial occupier -- but also of common citizen, and dedicated disciple, and the evangelists themselves”. (“SpChange”, 50.)

⁷¹ “The Emmaus Encounter”, 1.

⁷² “SpChange”, 53.

⁷³ “Another Man’s Wound”, 1988, 1.

⁷⁴ *Autopassion*, 138.

⁷⁵ “28th October”, 6.

sojourner, “the Pilgrim”, (despite the novel imaging of Melbourne’s weather as a restless child), is still the pervading metaphor:

If you happen to live in a city like Melbourne, where the weather is on the move like a hyperactive child, you have a simple reminder of provisionality, phasing and staging, one step back and two steps forward.⁷⁶

Or when Steele says of his own attempts (apropos Elizabeth Bishop’s poem “The Prodigal”) to say something of the state of “not being at a loss”, which “rather clumsy way of putting it” he says:

still says something about our typically ungainly backings and fillings as we try to find the impelling forces to take us, intact, in the right direction, rather than those forces which blow us raggedly home or entire clean wrong.⁷⁷

Or when, to take a further example, Steele refers to Randall Jarrell as “another virtuoso of the incomplete”.⁷⁸ All of these - the awareness of the provisionality of life, the need to live appropriately, and the perception of life as a work-in-process - pertain to the image of the Pilgrim on a journey, (and in fact make much more sense troped than when an attempt is made to say the same thing non figuratively.)

Steele also identifies archetypal peregrinations and exiles in literature and tropes the general human condition in terms of them. These include journeys from Odysseus’s travels to Gulliver’s,⁷⁹ to Boswell’s with Johnson,⁸⁰ to Howard Nemerov’s “The Backward Look”⁸¹ from the moon, and imposed exiles from Ovid’s to Joseph Brodsky’s. Most dominant in Steele’s considerations of the contemporary relevance of archetypal journeys and exiles is Dante’s:

Our consciousness corkscrews its way through the world - a fact which Dante himself imaged in the whole design of the *Commedia*, in which he first descends and then mounts,

⁷⁶ “A Slightly Crooked Line”, 27.

⁷⁷ *Expatriates*, 46.

⁷⁸ “Presences”, 51.

⁷⁹ *Blue and Gray*, Georgetown University’s Biweekly Newspaper, reports Steele as having said: “I plan to teach a travel writing class next semester, and “The Odyssey”, “Gulliver’s Travels” and “Moby Dick” are just a few of [sic] books we’ll study,” ... “Each deals with travel, either real or imaginary. I’m fascinated by the travel metaphor and what reading about travel can teach you about yourself.” (“A Proper Topic and Circumstance”, Kathryn Mahon, *Blue & Gray*, March 6, 1994, p.8.)

⁸⁰ q. v. “The Autobiographer as Scapegrace: Boswell at Journals”, *Autopassion*, 4-19.

⁸¹ “Presences”, 48-50.

swirl by swirl, to the vindication of his passage. Our winding ways take us into and out of ourselves by a strange instinctive competency.⁸²

Steele can also isolate a poet's particular recognition of life's coursing, such as he finds, for instance, in Bruce Dawe's

And I must have turned over, mumbling
making vague gestures out of myself
in the hope that finally the heart
would find its way home, now fast, now slow,
.....⁸³

and figure it as

a wanderer's and an exile's manoeuvre, the heart itself having that combination of the domestic and the self-propelling which we find in beasts, our alien fellows. And so the heart - the self, under some description - goes on, "travelling, despairing, singing".⁸⁴

Or he may work the trope in reverse so that purely literary matters are discussed by using the figure of the Expatriate to expound them or the reader's range of reactions to them. Writing about Ben Belitt's view of poetry and the translation of poetry, for instance, Steele comments that:

It is possible to be patriated into the place of a particular poem, and possible to feel this as repatriation: but it often involves a strong sense of dislocation, expatriation, from what had formerly seemed the matter-of-factness of seeing, even the matter-of-factness of interpretation.⁸⁵

Additionally Steele can describe in some detail or range of example all of the Traveller, the Pilgrim, the Expeditionary, the Exile and the Refugee - and this quite literally. But he does so only for the purpose of preparing the way for an intellectual and emotional statement that will follow the literal statements:

We often read with pleasure things that were written out of pain. After all, much travel is largely or entirely unwelcome. In the Middle Ages, if you were both sufficiently immoral and sufficiently repentant, you might be sent on pilgrimage for the term of your natural life.

⁸² "Presences", 51.

⁸³ Steele cites Bruce Dawe's "A Week's Grace" in "Presences", 50.

⁸⁴ q.v. "Presences," 50.

⁸⁵ *Expatriates*, 150.

Military expeditionaries might one day be immortalised for their cry of ‘The Sea! The Sea!’, but would still be deeply conscious of their mortality most of the time. And try as he might to transfigure exile in the *Commedia*, Dante was an exile still, bitten into by nostalgia. The starkest of all... is the refugee story, in which we may discern both the pangs of others and a powerful sketching of something universal. Ortega y Gasset wrote once, ‘We are locked outside ourselves,’ and so we are.⁸⁶

The result is that the final troped abstraction, (notwithstanding the fact that it is a citation), “‘We are locked outside ourselves’”, gains from all the other uses and carries a more intense meaning due to the cumulative pedagogic force of the preceding comments.

Steele’s writing taken as a whole works in much the same way in that the frequency of accounts of physical travel, literal pilgrimage, chosen or imposed exile, and expatriation, which whether they are predominantly, historical,⁸⁷ comic,⁸⁸ or tragic,⁸⁹ act as the foundation upon which Steele constructs a pervasive metaphor of the human condition as one “in process”, expatriated, and exiled. Factual situations (or in the case of poetry, the speaker’s situations) of travel are of certain importance in themselves. These are as various as: “when medieval pilgrims got home... they brought with them the... insignia of palm or cockle shell”;⁹⁰ “When I came back last night, with mind and body / At loggerheads from twenty hours in the air”;⁹¹ “This word, coming down from Sinai, and mediated through a Moses who has killed and nearly been killed in Egypt, reminds its first auditors that they have been an alien people”;⁹² “Like many people in Oxford, I am a transient, a sojourner”.⁹³ These factual situations of travel, although appearing in different works and at different times, become the foundation and the milieu for their metaphoric derivatives: “there is no

⁸⁶ Peter Steele and Damien Simonis, “ES travels”, *Eureka Street*, 3, 8 (October 1993), 4.

⁸⁷ “In *Exodus*, the fugitive, refugee people of Israel complain, most understandably, to Moses about their desperate situation”. “Foods”, Dahlgren, 1994, 1.

⁸⁸ “one motif for going on pilgrimage was to get away from the omnipresence and frequent tyranny of the parish priest...”. “Parish and Possibilities: Sheepish Thoughts of a Provincial”, 1985, *AJAF* viii, 2

⁸⁹ “[Brodsky] sentenced, in his twenties, to five years’ hard labour, in internal exile...: exiled from Russia itself in his early thirties: ...”. “Brodsky”, 16.

⁹⁰ “SpChange”, 46. See also “Palmer’s”, Newman, 1995, 1-2.

⁹¹ “Now Hiring Smiling Faces”, poem 72, *Potomac*.

⁹² “28th October”, 1.

moratorium on passover for a living community -";⁹⁴ "There is nothing of us, body or spirit, which is not always and everywhere in process";⁹⁵ "I'm inclined to agree with the view / that things are in the saddle";⁹⁶ "Expatriated, will I be forever a refugee, or will I come into a strange new fullness?";⁹⁷

The result of Steele's widespread and varied use of the motif of travel is that he is never without immediate recourse to a range of metaphors which readily represent his constant awareness of the ephemeral nature of life, the permanent human state of longing and yearning for something, the need to engage in daily conversion and the constant progression being made towards the *Patria*. Such metaphors also give him scope to document what he sees as humanity's expatriation from Eden and Heaven, humanity's permanent state of longing for God, and humanity's need to hope not only for heaven but for whatever is needed in the present stage of the journey towards it.

The Function of the Jester and the Expatriate in Steele's tribute, "Joseph Brodsky: 1940-1996"⁹⁸ (with some reference to his verse tribute "In Memoriam: Joseph Brodsky".⁹⁹)

The purpose of examining his prose tribute to Joseph Brodsky is to show Steele in the process of finding the late Russian-American poet combining his jesterly traits with his role as Expatriate.

Steele's prose tribute to Brodsky, (like his one in verse, "In Memoriam: Joseph Brodsky") serves to reveal Steele observing, however briefly, a writer who is both

⁹³ "28th October", 1.

⁹⁴ "Crossing Over", 2.

⁹⁵ "Images Fortunate and Unfortunate", *Quadrant*, 26, 10 (October, 1982), 29. ["Fortunate"]

⁹⁶ "Things", poem 33, *Potomac*.

⁹⁷ "Crossing Over", 2.

⁹⁸ *Quadrant*, 40, 3 (March, 1996), 16-17.

⁹⁹ *Eureka Street*, 6, 2 (March, 1996), 23.

provocative and expatriated (exiled, to be exact). Steele considers a section from Brodsky's poem "May 24, 1980":

What should I say about life? That it's long and abhors transparence.
Broken eggs make me grieve; the omelette, though, makes me vomit.
Yet until brown clay has been crammed down my larynx,
only gratitude will be gushing from it.

Steele notes Brodsky's questioning and answering - always an indication to Steele that the poet is writing in the jesterly vein: "What should I say about life? That it's long and abhors transparence"; and he sets about isolating what can be seen as the jesterly aspects of Brodsky's work. Steele comments on the dialogic nature of the poem: an "interplay of question and response, or retort or riposte"; he finds Brodsky's poetry to be of a "dramatic character"; and he notes Brodsky's observations in the writing of others, of elements that can also be classed as jesterly: Brodsky, for example, Steele says, writes of Mandelstam's "unpredictable turns and pitches" and was "An admirer of Kierkegaard the ironist and of Beckett the ultra-ironist". Steele also reports on Brodsky as dissenter: "He [Brodsky] wrote that 'A song is a form of linguistic disobedience, and its sound casts a doubt on a lot more than a concrete political system: it questions the entire existential order'".¹⁰⁰

There are also two instances in the prose tribute to suggest that not only is Brodsky jesterly in his own use of language but that Steele, in portraying him as such, refuses, given the subject, to behave otherwise himself. In commenting on Brodsky's veneration of language, Steele insists at the same time that "the last thing that this did was reduce him to reverential modesty".¹⁰¹ And later in the piece Steele shows that for all the attention he pays to Brodsky's language, he (Steele) also is not reduced to "reverential modesty", but quips instead that when Akhmadulina calls Brodsky "tragically fulfilled" it is a compliment that "Brodsky, who was not famous for his humility, might have accepted...".¹⁰²

¹⁰⁰ "Brodsky", 17.

¹⁰¹ "Brodsky", 16.

¹⁰² *Quadrant* does not print this statement of Steele's but it is included in the MS copy of the article, AJAF viii, 2. Professor Steele says the cut was made by *Quadrant* not by him. Conversation with P. Steele, January, 1997.

Steele's memorial poem endorses his identification of Brodsky's jesterly manoeuvres: Brodsky, Steele says, is "comedian, chider". At the same time, however, Steele's poem names the late poet as "so outre a figure", and as "exile":

Still, you are off, as the master said of another,
at the dead of winter. Its frosted cobbles
puncture darkness, the gape of its chilled yawn
declines to welcome so outre a figure -
exile, comedian, chider, estranger, maker.
You outface ice as it brims in space.

Referring to Brodsky as "exile" is, however, not merely a biographical note. Introducing his *Expatriates: Reflections on Modern Poetry* Steele claims that his selection of poems for interpretation complies with one or both of the senses of "to expatriate" - "to drive (a person) away from his native country; to banish", or "to withdraw from one's native country; to renounce one's allegiance".¹⁰³ Moving from the literal to the metaphoric plane what Steele really describes in the work is the verification of his observation that the poems

are variously at home, variously displaced, whether as to the world with which they deal and from which they diverge, or as to other writings which are, shiftingly, their milieu. Poems attest elaborately various negotiations with the world on the part of the writer, and in some sense are those negotiations.¹⁰⁴

When in "Joseph Brodsky: 1940-1996" Steele provides short biographical details of the poet's "Five years' hard labour, in internal exile, [in his twenties]" and ultimately his "exile from Russia itself in his early thirties", Steele is proffering biography but suggesting that an appropriate appraisal of Brodsky's verse is to be obtained in terms of the metaphorical basis underlying *Expatriates*. Thinking of Brodsky's facility for "depth, precision and irreversibility of speech" and the capacity of these to change "the nature of attention, not only in the poet, but in his apt readers", Steele applies the metaphorical milieu of *Expatriates* to depict Brodsky's literary technique. Brodsky "went there [where 'apt readers' are changed by his 'depth, precision...'] again and

¹⁰³ *Expatriates*, xi-xii.

¹⁰⁴ *Expatriates*, xii.

again”; Brodsky “given what that territory was like” might as well be called “tragically fulfilled”; “the zone of Brodsky’s imagination was always the one where life and death share a frontier”; “one of his books is called *To Urania*, she being the Muse of space or of geography...”. Speaking generally of poetry but with Brodsky in mind, Steele adds, “Poetry is... an art of saying not so much what we have got as where - less of naming our temporarily possessed items than of trying to net in words... where we are lodged”. As expatriate - both literal and imaginative, Brodsky, Steele says, “knew that all our lodgements are temporary”.¹⁰⁵

The piece together with the verse tribute serves, however, not only as a resume of Steele’s theory of poetry of expatriation and a technique for the critical appraisal of all appropriately yearning poetry, but to show that Steele, particularly in the light of Brodsky’s death, sees himself exiled, expatriated. Just as Steele plays the Jester in observing Brodsky’s lack of humility and his possible concurrence in Bella Akhmadulina’s label, “Tragically fulfilled”, so, while he interprets Brodsky’s poetry in terms of “where we are lodged”, Steele also lets the reader know where he is lodged, in this instant, in grief, not only for Brodsky but for Elias Canetti who, he notes, pre-deceased Brodsky by a “Little more than a year”.

From among the citations from Canetti which Steele selects to word “a kind of joint epitaph for them” is one which figures Steele’s grief by paradoxically depicting the speaker’s world not as a place of loss but as a populated and attained place, as home:

I would no longer be able to count them, all my dead ones. If I tried, I would forget half of them. There are so many, they are everywhere, my dead are scattered all over the earth. Thus the whole world is my homeland. There is hardly a country left for me to acquire, the dead have obtained them all for me already....¹⁰⁶

By way of corollary to this Steele writes in the verse tribute of Brodsky imagined in the company of Auden, Dante, Marina Tsvetaeva, and Osip Mandelstam:

If, in some fluent limestone tract contrived
for Wystan’s sake you meet at last

¹⁰⁵ *Expatriates*, 17.

¹⁰⁶ *Brodsky*, 17.

the brilliant riffraff of your dreams - Dante,
all scowl transformed to song, Marina
nosing eternity's forest like a wolf,
the other Joseph, a throttled goldfinch -
and then asks Brodsky to

Sing for the rest of us, not in a chevronned parade
of angels at canticle, but in your old
perturbed provocative fashion. 'Everything has
its limits, including sorrow', you said;
but stand up there, as once down here, to say
you give us tongues, in God's name.

While Steele persists in expecting the paradisaical Brodsky to behave like a perturbed and provocative Jester, he no longer calls him exiled or expatriated. In fact it is clear who in Steele's mind is still expatriate, still excluded from the company "up there".

Steele's view of the peregrinatory character and action of God:

As the source of the Pilgrim / Expatriate's awareness of alienation, as the source of his or her longing and yearning, of his or her potential to change on a daily basis, and of his or her hope, God is seen by Steele as the source of the peregrinatory raving. Steele claims that "God is a vagrant, 'unappeased and peregrine'".¹⁰⁷ He also speaks in general terms of God's journeying: "God is a nomad whose home is the earth";¹⁰⁸ God is "the Lord of the march";¹⁰⁹ he is "the greatest of travellers".¹¹⁰

Additionally Steele regards God as implicated in all the stages of the archetypal journey that engages the Pilgrim. After Barth, for example, he thinks of God as having alienated himself by the event of the Incarnation. Barth asserts that

¹⁰⁷ "In the Pen: 200 Hours", AJAF vii, 6. ["Pen"]

¹⁰⁸ "Snowman", 11.

¹⁰⁹ "Lake/El", 2.

¹¹⁰ "SpChange", 53.

God shows Himself to be the great and true God in the fact that... He is capable and willing and ready for this condescension, this act of extravagance, this far journey.¹¹¹

Steele not only speaks of “the steps of Christ - the steps of God become human, and walking the human ways”,¹¹² but, as we have seen, of “the story of ‘The Way of the Son into the Far Country’, the country of alienation, contradiction and death...”.¹¹³

Secondly Steele sees God as a “yearning Creator”;¹¹⁴ “he sings the world forth in all its... yearning”;¹¹⁵ “he yearns towards us... and prompts a yearning in reply”;¹¹⁶ he is “the horizon of all our journeyings, the climax of our yearnings, the one who is where we are beginning to be”.¹¹⁷ Thirdly for Steele, God sponsors change in the individual Pilgrim: He is “the God of... new starts...”;¹¹⁸ he is “illuminator and encourager”.¹¹⁹ And fourthly he is the basis of hope: “the tug of all our aspirations, the groundswell of all we can hope for, is the Holy Spirit.”¹²⁰

Additionally Steele regards God as imparting these peregrinatory qualities to Christ. Speaking about ancient Israel Steele says: “A God on the march was the God they knew, and eventually, the God they got. The Lord’s visibility in the flesh did not put a stop to this. The last injunction to the apostles is not that they hold fast, but that they move out, accompanied by the Spirit, who would truly be their motive force.”¹²¹

Steele’s view of God’s peregrinatory character and action shared with Christ:

¹¹¹ *Church Dogmatics*, IV, “The Doctrine of Reconciliation”, Part One, 159.

¹¹² “Palmer’s”, Newman, 1995. q. v. *Madonna*, March, 1996, 37-38. Steele also refers to Barth in “Singing”, 24, and also in *Expatriates*, 40.

¹¹³ “Singing”, 24.

¹¹⁴ “Early Birds”, 1993, 3.

¹¹⁵ “Stills: 5: A Song of Blessings: Matt.V:1-12”, *Madonna*, April, 1987, 6.

¹¹⁶ “Singing”, 4.

¹¹⁷ “28th October”, 5.

¹¹⁸ “Two Images of A Woman in the Middle”, Georgetown University, 1994, 2.

¹¹⁹ “Getting It Straightened Out”, Newman, 1995, 2.

¹²⁰ “Eve of Trinity”, 5.

Steele considers Christ as participating in this second raying from the glorious God. Christ, seen in this beam, is “God in the flesh walking the roads between hungry towns...”;¹²² he is “a wandering Jew, provoked by the Spirit... as his prophetic forbears had also been”;¹²³ he “was to call himself ‘the Way’, but the precondition of that was his being himself a wayfarer”;¹²⁴ “He is largely a man on the run...”;¹²⁵ his is “The pilgrim heart of Jesus”;¹²⁶ “Had [he] needed... to carry identification papers, ‘*Homo viator*’ would have appeared in them”; he is “the primal pilgrim, ...the primal quester”;¹²⁷ “the definitive pilgrim”;¹²⁸ “Jesus the pilgrim palmer”;¹²⁹ he is “a finally successful pilgrim”;¹³⁰ and Steele images him as “the everlasting Odysseus, tied to the mast of the cross, traversing life’s sea, and bent through many trials on home...”.¹³¹

In addition to these general images of Christ as wayfarer, pilgrim, traveller, Steele also delineates him according to the four stages of the Pilgrim’s journey. First Christ is seen as dispossessed and exiled. Giving the homily within a Mass said for the Aboriginal people of the Daly Mission in Australia, Steele says:

It’s a hell of a business, being pushed out of being on one’s land, or in one’s youth, or in one’s happiness, or having one’s health. But I must say to you that Jesus... had exactly those experiences.¹³²

Elsewhere Steele locates Jesus within the history of his people and says that he offers the parable of the prodigal son as “something which would resonate with the easily evoked Jewish memories of their various exiles, and... with their being to some extent

¹²¹ “Eagle”, 14.

¹²² “Easter and May, Bread and Fish”, Newman, 1992, 2

¹²³ “Lake/El”, 1.

¹²⁴ “Lake/El”, 1.

¹²⁵ “Steerage”, 12. q. v. “The Wars of Love”, Newman, 1995, 1. “Jesus is a man watching his back, a man on the run ...”.

¹²⁶ “Good Friday, 1993”, 1.

¹²⁷ “SpChange”, 48.

¹²⁸ “Palmers”, 1.

¹²⁹ “Palmers”, 2.

¹³⁰ “Ascension Day in Perth”, 1994, 1.

¹³¹ “Good Friday, 1993”, 2.

¹³² “The Mass - Precious Rite of the Christian Dreamtime”, *Annals Australia*, 50 (March, 1987), 33. AJAF iv.

exiles in their own country... under Roman occupation”¹³³ and regards him as “the man who was born and died homeless”.¹³⁴ Steele, moreover, sees it “possible to think of the whole story of Christ” as being

under this sign of home-making, exile, resentment, reconciliation, the bleeding involved in any long fidelity to the true homeplace. John’s gospel... says that Christ came to his homeplace and they wouldn’t let him in; he reads Christ’s fortunes among his people - the people of Israel or the people of earth, it comes to the same thing - as that of one whose home has suffered usurpation.¹³⁵

Apart from being seen as itinerant, exiled and dispossessed, however, Christ is also regarded as the source of resolution to these unsatisfactory conditions when they are the conditions of humankind. Steele figures Christ in terms of the second aspect (yearning) of the Pilgrim’s journey when he says Christ is “the true Everyman of our yearning world”;¹³⁶ and in terms of the third (change) and the second when he says “[Christ] offered himself as both the way to change and as the home-maker for our yearnings”;¹³⁷ and in terms of the fourth (hope) when he says that Christ is a “hoping Lord”;¹³⁸ he is “the outcome of all Adam’s wanderings”; “he smells like home”.¹³⁹

Steele’s treatment of the Scriptures as reflecting the peregrinatory character and action of God and Christ:

Whereas within Steele’s jesterly raying the gospels are seen as provocative, within this second raying they are regarded, (as the reference to Steele’s view of John’s gospel¹⁴⁰ indicates), as addressing the Pilgrim’s or the Expatriate’s state. As in the first raying, while any distinction between Steele’s understanding of Christ and his interpretation

¹³³ *Expatriates*, 36.

¹³⁴ “Poemind”, 9.

¹³⁵ “Silences”, 5.

¹³⁶ “Good Friday, 1993”, 2.

¹³⁷ “Roads and lodgings”, *Madonna*, July, 1994, 6.

¹³⁸ “Praying Against the Grain”, 2.

¹³⁹ “The Names of God: VIII. Home”, *Madonna*, September, 1987, 30.

of the gospels is an artificial one, what is of import here is that series of comments in which Steele indicates that the gospels attend to the situation of the Pilgrim / Expatriate. They are said to summon: “[The gospels] are not a form of reminiscence but a form of summons”.¹⁴¹

More particularly just as Steele sees God’s and Christ’s character and action in the peregrinatory raving delineating the four stages of the Pilgrim’s journey so he identifies those stages within the gospels. First they are said to alleviate the exiled state: “All the episodes of the risen life... are the bringing home of Christ’s determination to come home to those who live exiled, in darkness, and in the shadow of death”.¹⁴² Secondly they attest to mortal yearning: “The bible is unblushing in its testimony that the Lord draws us in our hungers”.¹⁴³ Thirdly they establish the imperative of personal change: “[the gospels] can no more be read without reference, usually tacit but powerful, to action, than can a manifesto”;¹⁴⁴ “the master and the message are both specifically about change”;¹⁴⁵ “The accounts of the behaviour of the apostles amount to a portrayal of the gradual but decisive conversion - not without agony - of unfaithful and indecisive men”.¹⁴⁶ And fourthly the gospels (and other Scriptures) are said to incite hope: “we can lose heart... to such an extent that we scale down hopes, ...expectations. ... But it seems to me that the whole brunt, the whole thrust, of both the Old and New Testaments is that we should be very slow indeed to concede the last word to bitter experiences.”¹⁴⁷

Steele’s treatment of God’s and Christ’s peregrinatory attribute as imparted to Edmund Campion, Jesuit saint and martyr:

¹⁴⁰ See above p.119.

¹⁴¹ “Poemind”, 9.

¹⁴² “Silences”, 5.

¹⁴³ “Shaft”, 7.

¹⁴⁴ “Poemind”, 9.

¹⁴⁵ “Poemind”, 7.

¹⁴⁶ “Steerage”, 11.

Steele's "The Choices of Edmund Campion",¹⁴⁸ addressed to a community of Jesuits at Campion College, Melbourne, ostensibly presents the saint's choices: a choice for intellectual life; a choice against the Church of England Established and England itself; and further choices for each of the Society of Jesus, the priesthood, the apostolate, and finally martyrdom. In speaking to each of these choices, however, Steele so arranges his imagery that Campion's series of choices becomes partially a literal description of his leaving, changing, turning and turning back and partially the adroit figuring of his particular life as a journey. It also works, without the speaker's having to say as much, as an archetypal, and therefore imitable, journey for anyone so choosing.

Regarding Campion's choice of "the mind", Steele says:

Campion went on to hone his wits, and, more importantly, to hone his mind, so as to lodge as thoroughly as he might in the Lord of all Truth... To take him for a patronal figure is to take seriously the challenge to go mindfully towards God.¹⁴⁹

Regarding Campion's choice "to leave", Steele treats this decision for a chosen expatriation from church and state as, in Campion's view, leaving the good for the better. Steele likens this choice to modern Jesuit choices to eschew possessions, the opportunity to marry and personal freedom for the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, all of which he styles as "vows of departure, [made]¹⁵⁰ in the hopes of a more significant arrival."

Apropos "choosing the Society" and later "the apostolate", Steele says that Campion's decision to join "the brethren" is comparable to moderns who join the community. The result of this communal life is change to the individual, and, in a small way, to the group:

¹⁴⁷ "The Abraham Within", Newman, 1996, 2.

¹⁴⁸ "Choices", Campion College, Melbourne, 1987, AJAF viii.

¹⁴⁹ "Choices", 1.

¹⁵⁰ This piece was written to be spoken.

When you vowed not just to follow the Lord but to follow Him in this religious family, you vowed to change.¹⁵¹

In a similar vein this choice thrusts the individual into “mutations, transformations”: “we who are Christ-concerned turn again and again to face those who are rarely consciously Christ-concerned”.¹⁵²

On “choosing priesthood”, Campion’s decision to be ordained involved him in “not, as the *Letter to the Hebrews* reminds us, a pursuit of angels, but a task of pilgrims, footsore, beset, accompanied, and magnetized”.¹⁵³

And finally on his choosing martyrdom, Steele delights in playing on the repatriating sense of “his [Campion’s] own dear country” amounting to death, but implying heaven: “when he turned towards England, like our Lord turning towards Jerusalem, he knew that he was choosing martyrdom... in turning back to his own dear country, Campion as truly as Jesus knew that he was turning back to his death”.¹⁵⁴

All of which commentary on Campion’s choices Steele has prefaced with references to heaven and his own lament that “I wish we all thought about Heaven more.” The address on Campion’s life has been no less than Steele’s account of a life, troped as a journey, troped itself as having the stages of expatriation (“Campion left doubly”), yearning (“magnetization”), change, hope and repatriation (“in the hopes of a more significant arrival”).

Steele’s treatment of God’s and Christ’s peregrinatory attribute as it informs the *Spiritual Exercises*:

¹⁵¹ “Choices”, 2.

¹⁵² “Choices”, 3.

¹⁵³ “Choices”, 3.

Just as the Jester's proclivity for introspection and self criticism was found to be in accord with Steele's views of the *Exercises* as "inherently provocative and discontenting";¹⁵⁵ of a retreat as "getting into trouble";¹⁵⁶ and of praying as a "consent to the troubling of the roots";¹⁵⁷ and just as the Jester endorses the function of the *Examen*: "Knowing... yourself without illusion, and yet not being the captive of dismay...";¹⁵⁸ and endorses the function of the *Fundamentum* in that its effect is "partly one of unsettling";¹⁵⁹ so the Pilgrim and Expatriate can be seen to feature in Steele's writings on the *Exercises* both in a particular and in a general sense.

Steele reminds his listeners in the lecture, "Three Christian Comedies: *The Divine Comedy*, the *Spiritual Exercises* and the *Mass*", that Ignatius

introduces figures which allow alienation to have full weight... The less important of these moments is the one at the beginning of the *Exercises* where, considering what most disables and abases us, Ignatius invites the exercitant to 'consider that my soul is imprisoned in this corruptible body, and my whole self in this vale of misery, as it were in exile among brute beasts...'. (First Week: The First Exercise - 'The Triple Sin').¹⁶⁰

Although in this passage Steele is drawing attention to Ignatius' directly equating life with exile, the *Exercises*' most intrinsically relevant section to the Pilgrim and the Expatriate is not this section from the First Week. It is the whole process of the Second Week which requires the exercitant to pray the more to love and follow Christ, whom Steele calls a "footslogging Christ"¹⁶¹ and whose ministry he says elsewhere "was a circling and redoubling business, physically, from township to hamlet to city to open country".¹⁶² Having examined the past and acknowledged a personal alienation from God through sin, in Week One, the exercitant, in Week Two,

¹⁵⁴ "Choices", 3.

¹⁵⁵ "Poemind", 1.

¹⁵⁶ "Steerage", 2.

¹⁵⁷ "Steerage", 1.

¹⁵⁸ "Poemind", 8.

¹⁵⁹ "Poemind", 4.

¹⁶⁰ "Christian Comedies", 16. Steele finds Ignatius' second "vital moment" (in which he allows "alienation to have full weight") is in the Second Week: the "three degrees of Humility" where the exercitant is to desire to be counted a fool for Christ and which has been discussed in Chapter 1.

¹⁶¹ "SpChange", 47.

¹⁶² "The Winding Way", 1992, 1.

is directed to follow in meditation the steps of the itinerant life of Christ from the Nativity to the Last Supper and to ask for what is needed to effect changes within.¹⁶³

In *The Autobiographical Passion* Steele explains the thinking that lay behind the emphasis on pilgrimage as it was understood by mediaeval Christians, Ignatius included. Steele writes:

At its most elevated, the pursuit of the pilgrim was an emulation, even a replication, of Christ's own movement through the world.... The long-standing Jewish pilgrim festivals of Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles had been subsumed into the Christian liturgical year, and Christ as both their beneficiary and in some sense their continuator was seen as making his passage through the world *en route* to the Father. The following of Christ, while able to take many specific forms, could naturally be stylized into earthly journeys, in the course of which, it was hoped one might approximate more closely to the condition of Christ.¹⁶⁴

Additionally Steele sees the *Exercises* as the exercitant's travelling in search of a quest: "You want to do a retreat, it seems, [he writes to an imaginary or anonymous intellectual exercitant] for reasons which have found classic expression in a number of pieces of English writing: in *Piers Ploughman*, for instance, or in *The Pilgrim's Progress*".¹⁶⁵ Steele says that the *Exercises* "are a way of our going, in our entirety, to find what will do".¹⁶⁶ He also sees them as taking the retreatant through the four stages of the Pilgrim's journey.

¹⁶³ In the Second Week there is much stress on the literal theme of travel, homelessness, fugitivity and expatriation as the first and second days are given over respectively, (and among other things) to meditations on the Nativity, where Mary is imagined "seated on an ass, and accompanied by Joseph and a maid, taking an ox, to go to Bethlehem..." and where the exercitant is "to see with the sight of the imagination the road from Nazareth to Bethlehem; considering the length and the breadth, and whether such road is level or through valleys or over hills...". [112] There is also an emphasis on "the Flight into Egypt as into exile", on which scene (as on any scene from the Gospel selected for meditation) the exercitant is to apply the five senses. [132] Additionally the emphasis on travel is apparent in Ignatius' instructions to the exercitant to consider how Christ "sends [the apostles and disciples] through all the world" [145] and later "to consider the discourse which Christ Our Lord makes to all His servants and friends whom He sends on this expedition". [146]. Ignatius' preoccupation is with the going forth of Jesus: contemplation is prescribed on "the Departure of Christ our Lord from Nazareth to the River Jordan" [158]; and on "how Christ our Lord went forth from the River Jordan to the Desert" [161]; and on the following of the others: "How St Andrew and others followed Christ our Lord" [161].

¹⁶⁴ *Autopassion*, 98.

¹⁶⁵ "Hopeful", 1.

¹⁶⁶ "Poemind", 1.

First Steele sees the *Exercises* as identifying the exercitant as existing in a state of exile: “So every retreat is a retreat for Adam: the man from the earth, the man unparadised as he severs himself from the God of bud and water”;¹⁶⁷ “Ignatius’s dream in the *Fundamentum* is as wild, and ought perhaps be as haunting, as anything in the Scriptures or after them.... Dreams are inherently nostalgic, in a strong and good sense: that is, they imply at once that we are exiled from something and the thing from which we are exiled”;¹⁶⁸ “The ‘First Principle’ may be haunted by intimations of Eden, but it is not for men living there”.¹⁶⁹ Secondly the *Exercises* for Steele are the result of yearning: “The poem of the mind in the act of finding what will suffice is a poem never to be finished in this life: were it to finish, it could finish only by lying. [And in the next paragraph.] And such is prayer, such are the *Exercises*”.¹⁷⁰ They are analogous to such “emblems, or expositions, of a truly harmonious... existence. Golden age, utopia, New Jerusalem, paradise, American Dream - on and on. They are both the fruits of yearning and further promptings of it”;¹⁷¹ “One has to go on seeking... Hungering and thirsting after justice, seeking the face of the Lord...”.¹⁷² Thirdly Steele finds that the *Exercises* demand on-going personal changes in the exercitant: “For Ignatius, the dream and the nightmare at the beginning of the *Exercises* conspire to enjoin responsibilities... a man taking seriously either Christ or his vision is stirred into change...”;¹⁷³ “Ignatius’s attempt in the *Exercises* is... to muster all a man’s capacity for both awed receptivity before the mystery of Emmanuel and gripped responsiveness *as one is changed*”;¹⁷⁴ “to have seen the truth of his [Christ’s] action, and his determination, is to be required to change”.¹⁷⁵ And fourthly, he finds the *Exercises* are to be the basis for hope: “You know that [‘to be here is to some degree to be in exile’] already, of course”, Steele tells his intellectual retreatant, “otherwise you would not be an intellectual at all: but it must get worse in order to get better. And, in turn, it cannot get better unless you find hope at the heart of the

¹⁶⁷ “Steerage”, 2.

¹⁶⁸ “Poemind”, 4.

¹⁶⁹ “Hopeful”, 4.

¹⁷⁰ “Poemind”, 1.

¹⁷¹ “Poemind”, 3.

¹⁷² “Poemind”, 4.

¹⁷³ “Poemind”, 7.

¹⁷⁴ “Steerage”, 10.

¹⁷⁵ “Poemind”, 7.

exile”.¹⁷⁶ And having assisted the exercitant to find the presence of God, the *Exercises*, Steele knows, are to send him or her confidently into new or newly confirmed directions: “If you were a sixteenth-century gentleman being taken through the final stages of the *Spiritual Exercises* by one of Ignatius Loyola’s men, you would by now be praying to have combined in the one body and the one career the burning hearts and calloused feet of the disciples coming back from Emmaus...”.¹⁷⁷

Steele’s treatment of God’s and Christ’s peregrinatory attribute as it informs his poetics and homiletics:

The Pilgrim makes his consistent way through both Steele’s poetics and homiletics. The alienation, the longing and the hungers for change experienced by the poet Steele believes are identical with those addressed by the gospels. Steele’s concept of the Pilgrim’s journey from exile through yearning and personal change into hope, which is evident in both his interpretation of poetry and his preaching of the gospel, is best introduced by a particular prayer of Steele’s.

Addressing God by way of a long literary prayer in which various poems are examined as part of the process, Steele reflects on Howard Nemerov’s “The Backward Glance” in which a spokesman for the astronauts set down on the moon looks back with yearning and affection for mother earth:

Earth mother of us, where we make our death,
Earth that the old man knocked on with his staff
Beseeching, “Leve moder, let me in,”

...grant us safe return
To where the food is, and the fertile dung,
To generation, death, decay; to war,
Gossip and beer, and bed whether warm or cold,

¹⁷⁶ “Hopeful”, 1.

....

With this poem in mind Steele says to God, among many things, that the poem speaks to him [Steele] because it is about “the business of being a resident alien”, because it “is one of the many hundreds of human essays in articulating that want [the want to be fulfilled] and in signalling its fulfilment”, and it “is a good ironic angle for looking at the earth - our mother, which might be called what yours was: our life, our sweetness, and our hope”.¹⁷⁸ Continuing to address God, Steele turns to John’s gospel which he says (as has already been mentioned) makes it “possible to think of the whole story of Christ under this sign of home-making, exile... the blooding involved in any long fidelity to the true homeplace”.¹⁷⁹ Then he draws the meditation on Nemerov’s poem to a conclusion as he says to God:

All this [Christ’s sojourn on earth] was a long time ago, they will say. And anyway Nemerov believes none of it. And anyway poetry is not about that, is not prose... One thing at a time. Yes, poetry, or this poem, is not about that, not right off; but they live together in my mind, the poem and the gospel, and that is enough for me. It says something about poem and gospel, more about my mind, and even I believe something about you.¹⁸⁰

The prayer reveals Steele’s integrating, synthetic mentality that has prompted, if not so many literary prayers, at least many prayerful meditations on numerous poems which form Steele’s retreat notes and reflections (many parts of which have been cited in this discussion). The co-habitation, in Steele’s mind, of the poem portraying astronauts longing for their earthly home and the gospel depicting Christ bent on his heavenly one and the referral of all of this to God in prayer is a microcosmic example of Steele’s whole procedure with respect to poetry. As the prayer makes it clear, this holds whether or not the studied poet is *croyant*, whether or not the poem is “about” [the subject matter of the gospels] as he says, “right off”.

¹⁷⁷ “Hopeful”, 18.

¹⁷⁸ “Silences”, 3.

¹⁷⁹ “Silences”, 5.

¹⁸⁰ “Silences”, 5.

Another instance of Steele's integrating mind occurs when he uses the over-riding issues of a poem such as Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to explain that religion in its main concerns does not differ from those of poetry. Steele says of the *Metamorphoses*:

Part of the enduring fascination of a work like Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is in its providing models of mutation in life, its portraying or instancing of the shucking off of what will not now "suffice", and its foreshadowing of what may suffice. The countless representations in words, the visual arts, and music of remembered or envisaged paradises are so many portendings on the part of exiled man of that which we need, desire, and will not be still until we have. Being the people we are, we cannot have even temporary contentment unless we figure to ourselves what we are not.¹⁸¹

These portendings of the exiled race, its relentless yearnings, the imaging of "what we are not" in life and the expression of hopes for the future, these components that Steele identifies in the *Metamorphoses* are those which he repeatedly isolates as necessary to poetry. In the same article, however, Steele turns his attention from Ovid to religion and claims that "religion carries through all its endeavours in the same circumstances and after the same fashion."¹⁸² Christianity as interpreted from John's gospel, he says, "attests a gradual expansion of human horizons and a transformation of the human world"; and "all religions", he adds, are "haunted by what one might call paradisaal preoccupations".¹⁸³ In other words, poetry and religion are preoccupied with exile, yearning, personal change and the "foreshadowing of what may suffice" which is tantamount to hope. These elements which are so crucial to Steele's poetics and indispensable to his homiletics¹⁸⁴ will be traced through both genres of Steele's work.

Steele's treatment of "expatriation" and "yearning" in poetry:

¹⁸¹ "Fortunate", 30.

¹⁸² "Fortunate", 30.

¹⁸³ "Fortunate", 31.

¹⁸⁴ Steele told the Newman students a few years ago: "Blake thought that 'To see a World in a Grain of Sand, / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower' were 'auguries of innocence'. We cannot do such things unless we have a residual innocence in us. Christian belief says that Christ's transforming grace gives us the equivalent of that: that as he grows in us, so does innocence of heart. It is not rash to hope that with that growing innocence we may be enabled to see the world less indifferently, and less opportunistically. The arts can be, life-long, our mentors in this, but there is only one who is entitled to be called 'Teacher'". ("What He Didn't See", Newman, 1992, 3.)

In the *Purgatorio*, Dante, the pilgrim, is delayed, ironically, by some diversionary poetry and song which blinds him from pursuing the ultimate goal of his pilgrimage which is God. Dante is duly chastised and told:

‘Run to the mountain, shed that slough which still
does not let God be manifest to you’.¹⁸⁵

Contrary to this diversionary poetry that waylays Dante is the work of what Steele calls “a very large range of poets ancient and modern”,¹⁸⁶ which is characterised by the various poets’ acute awareness of their exiled condition and which shows the poet or the persona in the process of yearning for more satisfying modes of being. This poetry Steele calls “the poetry of expatriation”,¹⁸⁷ where the metaphor of displacement from the native land stands for the poet’s psychological or spiritual dissatisfaction, an awareness that he or she is exiled and in process somewhere between Eden and Paradise.

Instances of such expatriated poetry collected in *Expatriates: Reflections on Modern Poetry* include Randall Jarrell’s “Jerome”, where the poet, Steele observes, is “concerned with the ways in which... one may come home to oneself... voicing... that some exile, some expatriation will be perpetual”;¹⁸⁸ Anthony Hecht’s “Black Boy in the Dark” whose central character “is expatriated from his own past, his own individual past and his own ethnic past”;¹⁸⁹ and Richard Wilbur’s “A Voice from Under the Table” whose persona for Steele is like “Archilochus” in that he is a “wandering spirit”;¹⁹⁰ and about whom Steele cites the opinion of H. D. Rankin that “‘We have no reason to believe that he ever in any sense reached home’”.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁵ *The Divine Comedy*, II *Purgatory*, trans. Musa, Canto ii, 20.

¹⁸⁶ “Radiations”, 66.

¹⁸⁷ “Radiations”, 66.

¹⁸⁸ *Expatriates*, 73.

¹⁸⁹ *Expatriates*, 87.

¹⁹⁰ *Expatriates*, 108-110.

¹⁹¹ *Expatriates*, 109. Steele cites from H. D. Rankin, *Archilochus of Paros*, Noyes Press, Park Ridge N.J., 1977, 1.

Expatriation of whatever kind, Steele knows, triggers yearning and longing. He is aware of the essentiality of yearning, that it is something as basic to the human condition as the need for oxygen.¹⁹² Canetti's aphorism sums it up best when he says "You can't keep living in a truly beautiful city: it drives out all your yearning".¹⁹³ Examining Marianne Moore's "The Hero", Steele speaks of the poet's wisdom calling it "that fugitive self which seeks the truths by which it is sought" and discerns "I would say that one can sense a variety of yearnings - she is not, any more than we are, quite where she would like to be...".¹⁹⁴ And speaking of Randall Jarrell's, "A Sick Child", (which is not treated in *Expatriates*) Steele claims that the child speaker who realises "If I can think of it, it isn't what I want" is aware of a lifelong destiny to yearn. The poignancy of the poem, Steele says, is that the child is about a minute older by the end of the poem yet he or she realises that the individual must go on being a yearner appealing to the unknown to foster these yearnings.¹⁹⁵ As the child persona of the poem puts it:

I want... I want a ship from some near star
 To land in the yard, and beings to come out
 And think to me: "So this is where you are!
 Come." Except that they won't do,
 I thought of them.... And yet somewhere there must be
 Something that's different from everything.
 All that I've never thought of - think of me!¹⁹⁶

¹⁹² Related to Steele's concept of the poetry of yearning is his understanding of the poetry which reveals the negative side of yearning, namely outcry at something. Steele's homilies treat outrage and outcry and validate them as prayer (see p.135, n.213 below) and in this vein Steele finds outrage and outcry intrinsic to much poetry. He considers, for example, George Herbert's "Affliction" - "Ah my dear God! Though I am clean forgot, / Let me not love thee, if I love thee not" and says that "What it does do is gather into outcry not only prior meditations but prior living...". ("Singing", 12.) Something of this claim rings true for much of the Irish poetry that interests Steele. This interest including seventeenth and eighteenth century forms such as are collected in Kinsella's translation of *An Duanaire, 1600-1900: Poems of the Dispossessed* (The Dolmen Press, 1981) is partially due to its eligibility for the genre of poetry of expatriation, (one inclusion of the anthology, for example, is "Exodus To Connacht", a seventeenth century poem-prayer urging spiritual courage to the refugees as they make their way in winter, west of the Shannon, 105-109); and it is also due to the fact that it evinces the negative side of yearning for something, that is outcry at something.

¹⁹³ Elias Canetti, *The Human Province*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel, Picador, 1985, 103.

¹⁹⁴ *Expatriates*, 55-57.

¹⁹⁵ Professor Steele's comments on "The Sick Child" were made at a seminar "Poetry and Prayer" at Canisius College, January-February, 1995.

¹⁹⁶ Randall Jarrell, "A Sick Child".

What Steele is describing both in *Expatriates* and in the more recent considerations of poetry is the quality he also continues to find in the work of Peter Porter and, as mentioned before, of Joseph Brodsky. Regarding Porter, Steele writes:

What I do *not* have chiefly in mind here is the fact of Porter's having long lived outside Australia.... What I do have in mind... is... the sentiment of incomplete lodgement in an particular psychic zone, and incomplete satisfaction with any formulation, however eloquent. Such is the poetry of expatriation, of deflection from an enduring *patria*. The emotions it manifests may be very various, ranging from those of Homer's expatriate Odysseus or Milton's expatriate Adam to those of a Jarrell, a Mandelstam, or a Kinsella. Perhaps, it is true that the seedbed of all poetry is a divined discontent: certainly, poetry such as Porter's constantly alludes to, and displays, the mind's and the heart's imperfect fit in any milieu in which it finds itself.¹⁹⁷

The first matter of importance here is the notion of literal and figurative exile, the second, the idea of "incomplete lodgement" and the third, the concept of "divined discontent".

While Steele minimises the importance of Porter's literal expatriation, in the case of Joseph Brodsky this is not quite the case. Brodsky's forced "internal exile" and the ultimate exile from Soviet Russia¹⁹⁸ become for Steele springboards from which to approach the figurative ramifications of Brodsky's writing from exile. This is prompted partly by Brodsky's facility for metaphor and metamorphosis (Steele refers elsewhere to Brodsky's being "at once an agent and a beneficiary of mutability in language"¹⁹⁹) which allows him to speak in literal and particular terms, which terms, however, do not for long remain either merely literal or merely specific. This is evident from these lines from Brodsky's "May 24, 1980" (the whole of which Steele cites in his paper):²⁰⁰

I have braved, for want of wild beasts, steel cages,
carved my term and nickname on bunks and rafters,
lived by the sea, flashed aces in an oasis,

¹⁹⁷ "Radiations", 66. Steele's major work on this idea is *Expatriates*; Porter, however, is not represented in this collection.

¹⁹⁸ "Brodsky", 16.

¹⁹⁹ "Joseph Brodsky: Mutability Cantos", [author's note: Poetry Conference at the University of Melbourne, 1993] MS 1993, AJAF viii, 1.

dined with the-devil-knows-whom, in tails, on truffles.
From the height of a glacier I beheld half a world, the earthly
width. Twice have drowned, thrice let knives rake my nitty-gritty.
Quit the country that bore and nursed me.
Those who forgot me would make a city.
I have waded the steppes that saw yelling Huns in saddles,
worn the clothes nowadays back in fashion in every quarter,
planted rye, tarred the roofs of pigsties and stables,
guzzled everything save dry water.
I've admitted the sentries' third eye into my wet and foul
dreams. Munched the bread of exile: it's stale and warty.

Steele has the facility to say of Brodsky: "When Brodsky was talking about Dante, he did so... because the exilic Dante stalked towards him out of the smother of time. He got Dante as Dante got Virgil -- whether he wanted him or not." This kind of declaration owes its certainty to Steele's awareness of Brodsky's own vision of literal exile as having a powerful contribution to make towards a writer's potency. Steele is aware that "Brodsky, reflecting on 'The Condition We Call Exile', said that 'Exile brings you overnight where it normally would take a lifetime to go...'" Elsewhere in the same address to emigré writers Brodsky says:

Pull down your vanity, [exile] says, you are but a grain of sand in the desert. Measure yourself not against your fellow penmen but against human infinity: it is about as bad as the inhuman one. Out of that you should speak, not out of your envy or your ambition.²⁰¹

Steele therefore nuances Brodsky's exilic mind slightly differently from Peter Porter's. Steele finds Porter's poetry revealing a "sentiment of incomplete lodgement in any particular psychic zone"; but in Brodsky's case Steele is more strident. He says definitively of him that

Brodsky who wrote in season and out of season about exile, knew that all of our lodgements are temporary, but that our very trajectories can lodge in the mind.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ "May 24, 1980", *To Urania*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York, 1992, 3. Cited by Steele in "Joseph Brodsky: Mutability Cantos", MS 10-11.

²⁰¹ "The Condition We Call Exile", *New York Review of Books* (21 January, 1988), 16. Steele cites another passage from Brodsky's article in "The contours of exile", 35.

²⁰² "Brodsky", 17.

And he confidently endorses Brodsky's own assertion (made with Mandelstam in mind) that

Art is not a better, but an alternative existence; it is not an attempt to escape reality but the opposite, an attempt to animate it. It is a spirit seeking flesh but finding words.²⁰³

However Steele classifies the awareness of dissatisfaction in the poetry of Peter Porter or of Joseph Brodsky, the latter's "spirit seeking flesh but finding words" and Steele's own adage made with Porter in mind, "the seedbed of poetry is a divined discontent", both point to the nature of poetry as being, for Steele, by no means an escape from reality, but an attempt to lay hold of it. More importantly, there is, in Brodsky's case, something more than a hint, and in Steele's, an acknowledgement, that there is a divinity perpetrating the discontent which both of them understand as exile of one kind or another. Perhaps Steele's most colloquial but succinct way of saying this is to be found in his reply to his own question: "What did [Brodsky] think that he was up to?" To which Steele quips: "he thought, rather, that something was up to itself in him". That by "the something" Steele means 'something divine' is reinforced by his similar use of the terminology in the homily preached in Oxford: "God", he says, "is not only the one who looks to us for something: he is the one who looks the something into us..."²⁰⁴

Steele's treatment of "expatriation" and "yearning" in the homilies:

Steele's homilies may be seen to take as a first premise the alienation of the human race. On one homily Steele refers his congregation to Bellow's *Dangling Man*: "remember man that thou art alien, and unto alienation thou shalt return".²⁰⁵ Elsewhere it is the "sinner", everyone, who is seen as existing "in his estrangement, his

²⁰³ "Brodsky", 17.

²⁰⁴ "28th October", 5-6.

²⁰⁵ "Saint Thomas of Two Minds", 1987, AJAF iv, 1. Conversely Steele commences his interpretation of Jorge Luis Borges' "Matthew XXV: 30" with a citation of the biblical verse and declares "There is alienation for you." *Expatriates*, 21.

foreignness, his alienation”.²⁰⁶ Frequently the homilies proffer as a response to this alienation Steele’s development of what he calls “The most-quoted words from St Augustine’s enormous literary output”,²⁰⁷ namely, a positive version of Steele’s concept of divinely organised discontent. Augustinian statements such as “we are *drawn* by that cosmic magnetism which issues from God”;²⁰⁸ or such as “He is simply keeping faith with the human being who always yearns... He is endorsing in summons what we already experience as desire”;²⁰⁹ or “the Lord magnetizes us”,²¹⁰ are occasionally given a fuller development. Steele writes:

Who is God? He is both the outreachers and the ingatherer: he is the magnet and the magnetism and the magnetized in our hearts. And when Christ, faced with the lawyer’s question, [Matthew 22:35], gave the classic answer, he was not loading upon us the most terrible and insupportable of burdens, as in moments of dismay we may suppose: he was rather inciting hopes, fuelling ambitions, which are there at least dormant in everyone who sees the light of common day. God is not only the one who looks to us for something: he is the one who looks the something into us; and we are not only the ones who ambition some goodness; we are the ones in whom that ambition is only the tip of God’s exulting in us. When, by God’s blessing, we realize these things, even if only for a little while, we keep the company of the blessed: and even if, like the disciples after the transfiguring vision, we have to face, and perhaps fail in, passionate moments, the vision was authentic, the presence is not passing, and God keeps his old ways however falteringly we may give our allegiance to them.²¹¹

This is what Steele, after W. H. Auden, terms in a homily of the same name, “The Wild Prayer of Longing”, which he regards as the periodic norm for individuals during their earthly existence: “most of us have known wild gusts of longing - desires, hopes, yearnings. Most of us have known the heart’s imperatives”.²¹² The most salient factor about these for Steele is that they are legitimate, they are prayers, they are not to be

²⁰⁶ “28th October”, 6.

²⁰⁷ “Magnetism”, 1. Steele refers to Augustine’s “You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

²⁰⁸ “Magnetism”, 1.

²⁰⁹ “Lake/El”, 2.

²¹⁰ “Magnetism”, 2.

²¹¹ “28th October”, 5-6.

²¹² “The Wild Prayer of Longing”, Newman, 1992, 2. Elsewhere Steele says: “The literature of Europe and its successors are full of outcries about “what will suffice”, cries for salvation. People on whom the Christian terminology has long staled, or whom it has never touched, still engage in what has been called ‘the wild prayer of longing’”. (“Poemind”, 1.)

smothered by “religion”, and they are all too frequently insufficiently ambitious. He laments that

Too often, these cries of the heart have been regarded as a kind of babble of some internal rabble, which should be rebuked and muted as rapidly as possible. But as I see it, most of us are tempted to be too slight and feeble in our yearnings, not too ambitious.²¹³

Elsewhere Steele comments that

One of the worst abuses of religion is to use it to kill longings: that is a real perversion. ...to use prayer, or doctrine, or social dedication, as a way of quelling the wild prayer of longing in the heart is almost equivalent to stifling the heart itself.²¹⁴

Contrary to this killing of longings, Steele explains in “The Wild Prayer of Longing”, is a contrasting process that occurs in the Mass where “hardly a minute will go by without a reference to, or a dramatizing of, the heart’s hungers”;²¹⁵ and elsewhere when he talks about “haunted women, haunted men, in whom the Holy Spirit of blessed desires keeps coming home”;²¹⁶ he again explains the source of these hungers: “the Lord of the march... is also lodged deep in our hearts.... He is simply keeping faith with the human being who always yearns, and perhaps always will. He is endorsing in summons what we already experience as desire.... Our very dreams... tell us sweetly or bitterly that we are men of passage...”.²¹⁷

Overall the concept of “divined discontent” which describes the individual’s vulnerability to divinely implanted hungers, (something like the experience of John the Baptist who “stood for the unfinished, the unsettled, the hungry”,²¹⁸) is best summed up theologically by Steele’s statement that “Christ was raised up to carry a torn and yearning world with him into the new embrace of a whole and yearning Creator”;²¹⁹

²¹³ “Longing”, 2. The homilies also treat what can be seen as a corollary to yearning for something, namely, outrage as a result of something. Steele frequently cites with approval the Audenesque “Oaths in anguish count as prayers” to endorse the validity of outrage which, together with “outcry” he says, “can become forms of outreach to the God who takes responsibility for all of our deepest needs”. Additionally, he says, (and this becomes more important as the Pilgrim journeys into hope) “God’s Holy Spirit renders prayers made in grief, fear and anger into the language of hope”. This is the homiletic counterpart to the poetry of outrage.

²¹⁴ “Singing”, 9.

²¹⁵ “Longing”, 2.

²¹⁶ “Choosing to Love”, Dahlgren, 1994, 1.

²¹⁷ “Lake/El”, 2.

²¹⁸ “Stills: 1 - The Man at the River: Matthew. 3:1-17”, *Madonna*, March, 1985, 11.

²¹⁹ “Birds”, 3.

but best summed up *tout court* by Steele's comment (with which this chapter was introduced) that

A Dante grows more fertile in invention, and more nearly blind with dazzlement, as he gazes towards that light; yet his imagined pilgrimage gives us no more than the trajectory of that passage of Godhead into our own being which is already accomplished, and that passage of us towards his own being which is currently being achieved.²²⁰

Steele's treatment of "change" in poetry (with a distinction made between "change" and "transformation"):

Poetry for Steele is a transforming power. Writing of Coleridge he says: "Figuring what lay before the mind's eye, he always aimed to transfigure it";²²¹ and of Anthony Hecht, he says, "Reading him, I am often reminded of a passage from a letter of that very different poet David Jones, who nonetheless shares with Hecht a concern for transforming vision...".²²² To instance Jones's "transforming vision" Steele cites Jones writing on "the Latin poet Fortunatus's '*Vexilla Regis*'":

His concept of the advancing *vexilla*, which provides not only a concrete poetic image but the poem's initial thrust, is even more poignant when we recall that the actual *vexilla* Fortunatus saw with his physical eyes were standards, imitative of a past imperium, but in fact now carried before petty Merovingian dynasts at fratricidal wars of loot. Such was the sordid violence from which the poet gave the Liturgy this enduring image of banners. It is the sort of thing that poets are for; to redeem is part of their job.²²³

This transformative power of poetry, a capacity to salvage, retrieve or redeem something from the past for the future is, (as Chapter Four will attempt to show), the essence of the function of "the Celebrant". While the Celebrant will be shown to be concerned with the transformation of both world and individual, declaring in fact that something or someone has been salvaged, redeemed, transformed, the Pilgrim is preoccupied more with the desire to be, and the consenting to be changed on a daily basis.

²²⁰ "Eagle", 4.

²²¹ *Expatriates*, 143.

²²² *Expatriates*, 83.

There is also in Steele's work the implication (made for example by his reminder that "Newman pointed out that to live is to change and to be perfect is to have changed often";²²⁴) that individual changes are the stepping stones to overall transformation. That conversion for Steele is a slow process is verified by his claim that "The accounts of the behaviour of the apostles amount to a portrayal of the gradual but decisive conversion - not without agony - of unfaithful and indecisive men".²²⁵ That this conversion consists of small change upon small change which process can eventually be regarded as transformation can be seen with respect to a longer passage. With W.S. Merwin's "Lemuel's Blessing" in mind, Steele has this to say:

The test of whether it was God to whom we wished to pray has always been whether or not we could envisage being radically changed by him in virtue of that prayer; whether we took un-settlement to be outrageous, too expensive, or inevitable. In "Lemuel's Blessing", the assumption is eventually, "Let fatigue, weather, habitation, the old bones, finally, / Be nothing to me, / Let all lights but yours be nothing to me." Outside that assumption, a blessing is mere dissociated lyricism, and probably whistling in the dark. Lemuel wants vindication, but he knows that it must take the form of transfiguration.

The transfiguration, at least at a modest level, begins in the prayer itself.²²⁶

There is also the additional implication that the human individual is changed ("changed from the heart",²²⁷ and eventually transformed) but that it is God who is the transforming agent. In a passage from a set of retreat notes Steele refers to "the transforming presence of Father and Spirit" and to "the jubilant transfiguring currentness of God" on the one hand; and on the other to a certain "gripped responsiveness *as one is changed*".²²⁸ The insistence, that is, is on the individual as the changed and changing one: "to have seen the truth... is to be required to change".²²⁹

²²³ *Expatriates*, 83. Steele cites from Jones's *Epoch and Artist: Selected Writings*, Faber, London, 1959), 261.

²²⁴ "A Good Man with a Stone: Easter 1985".

²²⁵ "Steerage", 11.

²²⁶ "Steerage", 15.

²²⁷ "Steerage", 13.

²²⁸ "Steerage", 10.

²²⁹ "Poemind", 7.

and on God as the transformer: “it is the grace of God, not human wrist and muscle, which will win us to transformation...”.²³⁰

Both these claims - that for Steele, God does the transforming and that transformation is a long term process - are further substantiated by Steele’s reflection on Matthew IV, 18-22 that:

We can see without difficulty that when a Levi is confronted at the tax-house, that emblem of foreign depredation, he must have a change of heart if he is to stay with, and in, the presence that has come to him. But what went for Levi would have to keep going for the later Matthew: as what went for the worldly young Francis or Ignatius would have to keep going for the later, saintly figures. We are transformed, if at all, by the company of God and of God’s servants; and as the experience of partial transformation comes home to us, we are in bad faith unless we consent to the rest of the transformation.²³¹

Having made these distinctions between *changed* individuals, and a *transforming* God; between change as the stepping stones of an individual’s growth, and transformation as the process occurring over a lifetime; and between the Pilgrim’s readiness for change, and the Celebrant’s capacity to proclaim that something, someone has been transformed; it should be conceded that there are times, such as in the passage immediately above, when Steele, as would be expected, interchanges “change” and “transformation”. Another such instance is where, referring to Jarrell’s “The Woman at the Washington Zoo”, Steele says at one point in his discussion that the woman is finding herself in “the milieu of an envisaged transformation”. Later, however, he argues that the woman is praying “that she may be changed” and finally concludes that only the God who knows “‘what I was’ ... sees ‘what I am’... can change us as we need, and deeply want, to be changed”.²³² It should be noted, however, that while God is said to be the one who does the *changing* (instead of the usual “*transforming*”) there is still the sense of *changes* amounting to a *transformation* that is as yet “envisaged”. For the purposes of this thesis the only interchangeability of *transform* and *change* (and their derivatives) will be Steele’s,

²³⁰ “Poemind”, 6.

²³¹ “Stills: 3 - Caller at the Lakeside: Matt. IV, 18-22”, *Madonna*, July, 1986, 27.

²³² “Singing”, 9.

transformation”.²³⁴ The poetry itself, Steele concludes, is “at the service of a hunger (in this case a desperate hunger) for change”.²³⁵

As a second instance of poetry’s relationship to change, Steele reflects on Howard Nemerov’s “The Makers”, which he interprets as revealing the poet’s concept of “changing” as “making” poetry. This is the second stanza of Nemerov’s poem:

They were the ones that in whatever tongue
Worded the world, that were the first to say
Star, water, stone, that said the visible
And made it bring invisibles to view
In wind and time and change and in the mind
Itself that minded the hitherto idiot world
And spoke the speechless world and sang the towers
Of the city into the astonished sky.²³⁶

Poetry, Steele claims, “changes one’s regarding of the world, and thus in effect the world itself, by making new prominences”.²³⁷ He does not specify any religious context or purpose, but allows the argument as to how poetry functions to bring about change to establish such a context for itself. He explains that

the poet’s intervention, whereby the poem comes to be, is always one which tries to change understanding and feeling by naming the disposition of one thing or one aspect as against others.²³⁸

He then refers to the last of the three stanzas of Nemerov’s:

They were the first great listeners, attuned
To interval, relationship and scale,
The first to say above, beneath, beyond,
Conjurors with love, death, sleep with bread and wine,
Who having uttered vanished from the world

²³³ “Hunger”, 4.

²³⁴ “Hunger”, 4.

²³⁵ “Hunger”, 5.

²³⁶ Cited by Steele in “Hunger”, 5.

²³⁷ “Hunger”, 7.

²³⁸ “Hunger”, 7.

Leaving no memory but the marvellous
Magical elements, the breathing shapes
And stops of breath we build our Babels of.

Steele refers to Nemerov's "above, beneath, beyond" as "relational words, pattern-makers, meaning-solicitors"; acknowledges the capacity of every original metaphor to "make strange" to "defamiliarize";²³⁹ and by way of summing up says that Nemerov's poem is "a humane way of talking about talking". Steele explains this by saying that:

it both salutes the high competencies of language, but also acknowledges the frailty of the beings who deploy it: Babels are all inadequate, and ending the whole poem with the vernacular 'of' is a nod to the amateurism of being which is with us lifelong.²⁴⁰

Steele's third point about poetry and change hinges on the claim that poetry can also be about the desired impossibility. Steele refers to Maxine Kumin's "Seeing the Bones" which concludes:

Working backward I reconstruct
you. Send me your baby teeth, some new
nail pairings and a hank of hair
and let me do the rest. I'll
set the pot to boil.²⁴¹

This proposed reconstruction of the speaker's distant daughter, Steele knows, "is literally impossible". Yet he adds "a great deal of poetry is not about what is possible but about what is desirable - hence its preoccupation with Edens, golden countries, timeless circumstances, the staples of dreams". Where there is "brute wishing that things could be otherwise", Steele says the poet is saying "If I can't have a change, at least I'll have a poem: and *that* will be the change".²⁴²

Poetry in other words has a particular function for the individual who writes it: "We write poems not only to say, but to be: and we want to write them better because we

²³⁹ For which Steele acknowledges Victor Shklovsky.

²⁴⁰ "Hunger", 8.

²⁴¹ "Seeing the Bones", Ellmann, Richard, and O'Clair, Robert, *Modern Poems*, 2nd ed., Norton, New York, 1989.

²⁴² "Hunger", 11.

want to ‘be’ better, a bettering whose nature is disclosed only by the poem that comes to be”.²⁴³ Whether this “bettering” function of writing poetry is to be regarded as pertaining to short term *change* in the individual, or continuous changes and therefore *transformation*, is not something that can be ascertained from Steele’s wording of it in this context. What is at issue is that for Steele poetry has a role to play in bettering the individual (long or short term); and this is what the Pilgrim is about, spiritual advancement by means of moving through changing circumstances. That Steele has something of the Pilgrim in mind as he concludes his argument on this point is evident from his saying that

I doubt whether we have it in us to understand life in any thorough-going way, but any poem in the Western tradition at least is likely to ambition having ‘something understood’, even if the understanding is attended by new vistas of the unexplored.²⁴⁴

Steele’s fourth observation of poetry and its ‘hunger for change’ is made in the context of a single paragraph devoted to Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Archaic Torso of Apollo”, in which Steele recalls the poet saying: “‘there is no place that does not see you. You must change your life’”.²⁴⁵ Here, in understatement, and by recourse to art, (not morality or religion), Steele delivers his major point and the culmination of argument about poetry and change. Mentioning the divinity only in the context of a parting jest, Steele says simply:

I do not fully understand this [Rilke’s injunction]: but one thing that it does say to me is that the hunger to be profoundly at one with great beauty entails a readiness to be remade. I do not think that it is too much to claim that something of that kind is held up to us, as promise or warning, by poems of some stature. I wish that I did not, at this point, remember the Spanish proverb, “‘Take what you want’, said God: ‘take it, and pay for it.’”²⁴⁶

The entire argument is that poetry sponsors change. It is at the service of the “hunger for change”; it changes one’s view of the world and therefore the world itself; it concerns itself with desired impossibilities and makes something understood (even as it opens up new areas that are as yet not understood). All this argument depends for

²⁴³ “Hunger”, 12.

²⁴⁴ “Hunger”, 13.

²⁴⁵ “Hunger”, 13.

²⁴⁶ “Hunger”, 13.

its force on the last point of the discussion - the reader's preparedness to change. This last, as Steele says, is promise or warning, one assumes, according to whether it is fulfilled or not. The effect of the cumulative argument (which was initially begun by Steele's referring to "transformation" as a traditional object of religion) is that it delivers to the auditors an aesthetic, rather than a moral imperative to change, a message inseparable from that of the gospels preached in the homilies but ever so more palatable to a non-religious group.

Steele's treatment of "change" in the homilies:

As we have seen, Steele frequently cites Jarrell's "The Woman at the Washington Zoo" and Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo" to illustrate his insistence that poetry sponsors change in its readers. Although the poems differ as to who is making the plea, and to whom, and on behalf of whom, they both take as their principal thematic concerns the need for human change that Steele finds poetry at large so capable of addressing.

Appealing in a homily for people to make changes to themselves Steele resorts to the "Archaic Torso of Apollo". Here is another instance of Steele resorting to the aesthetic rather than the moral imperative. "You must change your life", he says is a "relisher's"²⁴⁷ (not a preacher's) imperative. We have seen Rilke's imperative treated in a talk to a women's club; this is the homiletic treatment of the same lines from Rilke:

I have quoted before, and it will bear quoting again, the conclusion of Rilke's "Archaic Torso of Apollo". In this poem, the poet, gazing at the brilliant beauty of the statue, says finally, 'for here there is no place / that does not see you. You must change your life.' It is an astonishing conclusion. '*You must change your life*' is enjoined not by some moralizing intransigent, but by a relisher addressing the relishable...²⁴⁸ .

²⁴⁷ "Shifts", 4.

²⁴⁸ "Shifts", 4.

Needless to say the homilies advocate, (for many and varied reasons), the appropriateness of a readiness to be changed. To a congregation in Hawthorn, Steele says, “We do not have to stay as we are”;²⁴⁹ to the Jesuits at Campion College, “Outreach and infolding, are our summons.... This always entails mutations, transformations...”;²⁵⁰ to students and faculty in the Dalgren Chapel, “To be a christian is to be in process of re-conversion to the christian story...”;²⁵¹ and “A prophet who does not insist that you be changed is a prophet who has said nothing at all”.²⁵² As for individuals, so for communities: Steele says of Jesuits who are not changed in coming to terms with the community: “if we are not changed, we should certainly get out”;²⁵³ of universities, “any university worth the name will throw up before its members challenges to change”;²⁵⁴ and of the church, “being sinful as well as saintly, [it] has often been chilled to see what embroilments, and exertions, and transformations, were asked of it, if it was to go in Christ’s style in Christ’s world”.²⁵⁵

But the question arises from what and into what are the hearers of the homilies being personally asked to change? Steele is not always forthcoming about specific change:

there is something which each of us should be changing this week, and possibly today. I have some ideas as to what that thing is in my case, but it is none of my business what it is in your case. But it is *your* business, and you probably know what it is, and it is not I but the Lord of time, the Lord of weekdays, who asks you to try to face it.²⁵⁶

Occasionally, however, he makes suggestions as to what might need to change:

Some things in us will not and cannot be changed: but some things, be they only small ones, can be. Perhaps there are dishonesties, or callousings of the heart towards individuals, or greeds and selfishnesses which we have come to take for granted and even as our right, but

²⁴⁹ “Just Like the Resurrection”, St. Joseph’s, Hawthorne, 1989, AJAF viii, 2. *Madonna*, April, 1992, 4-5.

²⁵⁰ “Choices”, 3.

²⁵¹ “Foods”, Dalgren, 1994, 2.

²⁵² “Red Lights”, 2.

²⁵³ “Choices”, 2.

²⁵⁴ “Red Lights”, 2.

²⁵⁵ “28th October”, 7.

²⁵⁶ “Good Timing”, Dalgren, 1994, 2.

which really belong in the grave and not on the shining earth. On this night [Holy Saturday] one may say, the Lord recriminates nobody, but gives heart to all. We do not have to stay as we are.²⁵⁷

Steele is clearer and firmer, however, about the consequences of effecting or not effecting these personal changes: “You can’t love without changing”; “to exercise any considerable talent to the full, we have to change”;²⁵⁸ “living and promising things which do not change *die*: and the nobler and more gifted their lives, [the disciples’], the more they have to change”.²⁵⁹

Steele’s clearest and most pressing account of the result of changing is to be found in the talk, “Two Images of a Woman in the Middle”²⁶⁰ which, although its subject is not poetry but painting,²⁶¹ and although its genre is not a homily but a trilogy of address, comprising a two part talk given together with a homily, proffers in terms of what it has to say about intellectual life a parallel for both poetic and personal processes of changing. Having spoken about van Eyck’s “Annunciation” and claimed that since this moment of Incarnation “nothing will ever be the same again”, Steele continues the revolutionary theme finding that with the arrival of John the Baptist and Jesus “things are not to go on as they have been doing”, and applies it to the present:

This point about the ongoing revolution, the individual heart and the communal heart being summoned to life-long change, has its relevance wherever there is any person or group of persons. Today’s feast... is significant... as a reminder of [Mary’s] agenda - that she should be readied for stunning change upon stunning change in her life.²⁶²

To apply this to the milieu of a university, Steele cites Alfred North Whitehead:

Traditional ideas are never static. They are either fading into meaningless formulae, or are gaining power by the new lights thrown by a more delicate apprehension. They are

²⁵⁷ “Just Like the Resurrection”, 2.

²⁵⁸ “Koalas”, 1993, 1-2.

²⁵⁹ “Red Lights”, 2.

²⁶⁰ The two-part talk “Two Images of a Woman in the Middle” and “A Woman in the Middle: Part Two” were given in conjunction with the homily, “Feast of the Immaculate Conception”, Georgetown University, 1994.

²⁶¹ Jan van Eyck’s “The Annunciation”, know as “The Washington Annunciation”.

²⁶² “Two Images of a Woman in the Middle”, 3.

transformed by the urge of critical reason, by the vivid evidence of emotional experience, and by the cold certainties of scientific perception... One fact is certain, you cannot keep them still.²⁶³

The transformative possibilities of the mind, Steele asserts, are those “without [which] there would be no such thing as any intellectual discipline”. He further claims that “when those powers are given full play, those who exercise them are themselves significantly transformed”. Then he reverts to the subject of the van Eyck

In a secular sense, the real is a nunciatory angel, promising and summoning: and profound intellectual consent to the promise and summons always carries in its train an agreement to be remade.²⁶⁴

Moving from the life of the mind back to the painting which inspires the talk, Steele notes that it has recently been cleaned and restored such that “the yield of the painting is all the greater for its being re-newed and re-presented to eyes made newly hungry and thirsty by the excellence of the performance”. Noting also the “imperial” nature of Mary’s gown and observing that “van Eyck’s instinct is sound when he lays things on with a lavish hand”, Steele sees this laying on with lavish hand as “the very definition of God’s transforming gift, which initiates as one day it will culminate the christian and human comedy.”²⁶⁵

While such a comment tends to take us out of the realm of the Pilgrim’s plodding and daily “consent to be re-made” and into the Celebrant’s role of proclaiming that transformation will be the culminating gift to humanity, it should be said that to talk about “as one day it will culminate” is to talk about hope - once more a matter for the Pilgrim. Steele’s soteriological, eschatological and Dantesque conclusion to the talk on the Washington Annunciation makes it clear what that hope is for:

Stringency and trenchancy are not the last word in the salvific agenda, though they are indispensable to it. The last word is a blaze of beauty, love and joy.²⁶⁶

²⁶³ “Two Images of a Woman in the Middle”, 3. Steele cites from A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*.

²⁶⁴ “Two Images of a Woman in the Middle”, 4.

²⁶⁵ “Two Images of a Woman in the Middle”, 6.

Steele's treatment of "hope" in the poetry and the homilies:

Returning, (as Steele often does), to the "Archaic Torso of Apollo", it is possible to see how he uses the apprehension (or the poet's apprehension) of the work of art to mediate between the keeping of tradition and the fostering of change, and ultimately to endorse movement from past traditions to future hopes. Steele writes:

When Jesuits and others, invoking the Ignatian tradition, have been content to stand pat with the status quo, they have in fact been like the many who have wanted the Archaic Torso to be buried, rather than reared, in a museum. But a museum is not a mausoleum. It is a place where the Muses muse, a hive for honeycomb. The keepers of tradition should be not the gaolers but the stagers of the Spirit, the fosterers of all that makes for hope.²⁶⁷

Hope is the final stage of the Pilgrim's journey that has passed through from exile into yearning and into the continuing process of change. Speaking in a homily of Augustine, who "had given himself to the Word with high expectations, high hopes", Steele urges: "When we take in the Word of God thoughtfully and 'heartfully', we are taking in the ripeness of the past as well as promptings for the future. It will change us...".²⁶⁸ Hope as mentioned in the homilies can be for any number of things: understanding; rain; sensitivity; "to love... to be loved"²⁶⁹; faith; spiritual and intellectual transformation within universities; hope itself.²⁷⁰ It may not be something altogether painless: people involved in a eucharist "are echoing the cry of a needy world, and the cry of a pierced but hoping Lord".²⁷¹ Hoping, after all, was a problematic affair for the disciples: "They were not only having problems with their fishing: they were having problems with their hoping...";²⁷² it is confusing: "if we are

²⁶⁶ "Two Images of a Woman in the Middle", 6.

²⁶⁷ "Shifts", 4.

²⁶⁸ "Adventures in the Good Word", Newman, 1993, 2.

²⁶⁹ "A Mess in Bethany", Newman, 1996, 3.

²⁷⁰ "But the gift of hope, like the gift of faith or of charity is just what it says - a gift. One must wish, in prayer, to have it." ("Poemind", 14.)

²⁷¹ "Praying Against the Grain", 2.

²⁷² "Easter and May, Bread and Fish", Newman, 1992, 3.

baffled as to... what changes to hope for...”;²⁷³ and a responsibility: “to be haunted by hope is no less a responsibility [than to be free from illusion]”.²⁷⁴

For Steele, however, the hope that sustains all human endeavor is the hope for heaven. He frequently insists that the Christian must love the world so extensively before he or she dare love the idea of leaving it - something he touches upon when citing William Empson’s ““The feeling that life is essentially inadequate to the human spirit, and yet that a good life must avoid saying so...””;²⁷⁵ or when asserting “We are creatures whose very discontents forbid them to be malcontents”.²⁷⁶ Nevertheless he frequently complains, as in the homily “The Expectation of Heaven”,²⁷⁷ that people do not generally talk enough about heaven. This complaint is in contrast to Steele’s poem “Marching on Paradise” where John Newman is said to have “talked of heaven as if he knew it”:

No wonder
the Newman who talked of heaven as if he knew it
would stand for hours in the zoos of Europe, eye to eye
with the beasts of an earth we think of as ours. Much later,
glowing, they said, as though the shrivelling body were fired
by things unseen but potent, he would walk
erect in his memories.²⁷⁸

Elsewhere (as we have seen with respect to the Campion homilies) Steele says:

I wish that the stunning, saving, presence of God in a milieu beyond this our passing one
were put before us often, instead of being alluded to at best lamely and tentatively....²⁷⁹

And from time to time Steele attests to a “high and hopeful view of things”;²⁸⁰ a belief in Dante’s ““single volume bound by Love, / of which the universe is the scattered

²⁷³ “The Confused and the Evil”, Newman, 1995, 2.

²⁷⁴ “Natural Flights”, *Madonna*, June, 1992, 8.

²⁷⁵ *Expatriates*, 92. Steele cites from William Empson’s *Some Versions of Pastoral*, London, Chatto and Windus, 1935, 114-115.

²⁷⁶ “Silences”, 4.

²⁷⁷ 1995.

²⁷⁸ “Marching on Paradise”, *Paradise*, 12-14.

²⁷⁹ “Choices”, 1.

²⁸⁰ “Birds”, 2.

leaves”²⁸¹; and an understanding that “the cosmos is drawn by what Dante calls, in the last words of his masterpiece, ‘the Love that moves the sun and the other stars’”²⁸².

Addressing God on the subject of Anthony Hecht’s poem “Gladness of the Best” (a tribute to George Herbert), Steele prays about the hope for “homecoming”. He says:

Hecht seems always to have liked the elaborate stanzaic form, but it’s particularly appropriate here since Herbert... liked it too. For both of them, ‘That dense, embroidered art’ gathers the opulence of the world out of anarchy into harmony. Once again it takes time, manoeuvre, a certain passionate patience. And it takes the kind of hope at whose cultivation you are expert. The metamorphosis of this poem [“Gladness of the Best”] - scene painting to book to word to song to harmonics to Law and Prophet to preaching, singing servant of the word - lie under the direction of hope, the hope that there will be more than Ovidian variations and transmogrifications to experience, that eloquence will not in the end be inane, that here and hereafter one may come home.²⁸³

Steele’s hope “that eloquence will not...be inane [and] that here and hereafter one may come home” must be tempered, at least with respect to the “here” if not “the hereafter”, by Steele’s own admission that there is no ultimate satisfaction, no complete “coming home”, no peace, for either poets or their readers. Steele endorses Wallace Stevens’ “The poem of the mind in the act of finding what will suffice is a poem never to be finished in this life...”,²⁸⁴ and artists he says, “inscribe themselves in our personal being, in which, this side of the grave, there is no peace to be had”.²⁸⁵ Just as a retreat will not “mute” but “will divinize” one’s discontents, so “vowels” and “consonants”, Steele insists, “can never provide the definitive satisfactions they imply”.²⁸⁶ “I think”, he says, “that poetry is the drastic art... whose metiér is the unappeasable”.²⁸⁷

²⁸¹ *Expatriates*, 189.

²⁸² “Birds”, 2.

²⁸³ “Silences”, 16.

²⁸⁴ “Poemind”, 1.

²⁸⁵ “Lyrical”, 42.

²⁸⁶ “Singing”, 4.

²⁸⁷ “Lyrical”, 42.

Speaking of Nemerov's "The Backward Look" Steele sums up this situation:

We want our poems, as we want our paintings or our music, to have a planetary otherness, and we also want them to be like lips to our own voices. We will not be satisfied until we have both things, entirely: which means we will not be satisfied. It is the curious business of the poet to heighten both the satisfaction we do have and the dissatisfaction which we also have - to keep alive in his poem, as it were, both the earthling and the astronaut which each of us is...²⁸⁸

In identifying these twin longings and in declaring that the end of poetry is the heightening of both satisfactions and dissatisfactions Steele is not sentencing the Pilgrim to a futile circular course; rather he is confirming that the Pilgrim who has journeyed into hope is in the continuing process of travelling from one vantage point to another along the route of his journey. In so finding, Steele continues to write in the antithetical terms, the jesterly terms, that have long been his habit whenever he has put his mind both to the question of human existence and to the question of poetry. The Jester, it seems, has run on ahead in this investigation of the Pilgrim / Expatriate and has assisted in finding the double-sided nature of the Pilgrim's earthly destination. Poetry satisfies but provokes even more dissatisfaction.

The condition of those addressed by the homilies is equally binary. Steele, (who declares himself confirmed by writers from Augustine to Chesterton in his "sense of native dissatisfactions, fugitive contentments"²⁸⁹) can pray (within a homily "Where Am I Going and Why?") with a congregation "that we may grow beyond our present dissatisfactions, and our present satisfactions".²⁹⁰ In principal he believes that "To be a thinker is to be a dissatisfied thinker, just as (and perhaps just because) to be a man is to be a dissatisfied man";²⁹¹ that "we are called to love the human condition" and yet "we are called to be 'unappeased and peregrine'";²⁹² and that "Aliens we are, so much so that nostalgia may grow from a vague wistfulness to the most deliberate of our

²⁸⁸ "Presences", 49-50.

²⁸⁹ "Silences", 3.

²⁹⁰ "Where Am I Going and Why?", Newman, 1995, 2.

²⁹¹ *Expatriates*, 9. See also Steele, *Porter*, 98: "Wallace Stevens [said] that 'Poetry is an effort of a dissatisfied man to find satisfaction through words, occasionally of the dissatisfied thinker to find satisfaction through his emotions'". Steele cites from *Modern Poets on Modern Poetry*, ed. James Scully, Collins Fontana, London, 1966, 155.

²⁹² "SpChange", 53.

passions; at the same time, and sometimes by the same motion, we are most whole when we hunger to strike roots here”.²⁹³ These antitheses apply, moreover, since for Steele Christ is “the only human being to have loved this life... perfectly” and at the same time “the only one to have been able to be unconditionally committed to a Life not describable in the terms of this world”.²⁹⁴ The Holy Spirit, moreover, is the one to “chasten, and challenge”, the one who “is sinuous in life’s shifts, and who harbours us home”, and the one to whom “we attribute a good tranquility, and a divine discontent”.²⁹⁵

The Spirit for Steele “is peacemaker” and one sense of this is found “when he makes peace among the partisan dispositions of the mind”, so that in poetry “A grace of utterance, a grace of apprehension, is in effect a sacramental of the radical gracing of the personality which may at once assuage and inspire our longings”.²⁹⁶ Hence a well placed writer, Steele believes, might “consent to find and be shown the truth: might become, with a strange mingling of passion and peace, intent only on the world informed by the living God: might treasure his art more stubbornly and gently than ever before, yet know himself summoned constantly through it and beyond it...”.²⁹⁷ Such summoning, for Steele, however, is not peaceful as he stresses in a parodic warning: “Art, poetry, are systematically dissatisfying: they come to bring not peace but a sword”.²⁹⁸

Steele’s insistence on this ensuing discontent when it is brought about by art is a quarrel he has with Seamus Heaney, for whom art brings peace. When it is a discontent brought about by life, it is a quarrel he has, like every other individual, within himself. Heaney, Steele says, “is fond of quoting Yeats’s saying, ‘The end of

²⁹³ “Silences”, 4.

²⁹⁴ “SpChange”, 53.

²⁹⁵ “SpChange”, 53

²⁹⁶ “Singing”, 24.

²⁹⁷ “Poemind”, 1.

²⁹⁸ “Poemind”, 1.

art is peace””.²⁹⁹ Steele’s quarrel with this is that “poetry is systematically dissatisfying, has salt or alcohol in it, and leaves us both pleased and athirst when a poem is concluded”.³⁰⁰ However optimistically a poem may conclude, Steele argues, its end is further discontent; and with all of Homer, Milton, Jarrell, Mandelstam, Kinsella and Peter Porter in mind he claims, as we have seen, that “Perhaps it is true that the seedbed of all poetry is a divined discontent”.³⁰¹ All of which he explained on ABC Radio in the following terms:

I sometimes think that the rather edgy spirit of many writers and artists comes from just that [“element of dissatisfaction”]. You are urged to put something with as much clarity, depth and beauty as you can, urged to get the world right; and when you get there, new depths open, a clarity and beauty for which you can’t imagine words begins to shine, and every success prompts you as if it were a failure.³⁰²

In the homilies Steele’s “good tranquility” opposed to a “divine discontent”,³⁰³ becomes a theme explicable by recourse to Rahner’s “the doctrine of divine unrest in the Church, known as the Holy Spirit”;³⁰⁴ or if one regards Steele’s homiletic parallel between heaven and eucharist, “the Lord who reigns in glory will offer himself to us in our less-than-glorious condition at the moment of Communion”,³⁰⁵ it is a theme explicable by recourse to Arthur Michael Ramsey’s “There is no despair, for glory is a present possession: there is no contentment, for a far greater glory is the final goal”.³⁰⁶ As Steele, also thinking in terms of the “glory of God” says: “The Holy Spirit is the firebrand of expanding possibilities, the beacon of hope”,³⁰⁷ and as he prays: “I’ll need, now and then, you to make moves of the spirit through me of which Ammons’ in this

²⁹⁹ Steele, *Porter*, 79. Steele notes that “The saying is quoted by Yeats from Coventry Patmore, and is cited by Heaney in, among other places, *Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978*, Faber, London, 1980, 7, and ‘The Harvest Bow’, in Heaney, *Field Work*, Faber, London, 1979, 58.”

³⁰⁰ *Porter*, 79.

³⁰¹ “Radiations”, 66. q. v. “the latent Jewish ‘divine discontent’” in Sebastian Moore, *No Exit*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London, 1968, 14.

³⁰² “Creativity Under Handicap”, n. d. *AJAF* vii, 5.

³⁰³ “It is to the Spirit that we attribute a good tranquillity, and a divine discontent.” (“SpChange”, 53.)

³⁰⁴ *Opportunities*, 42.

³⁰⁵ “The Expectation of Heaven”, 3.

³⁰⁶ *Glorygod*, 54.

³⁰⁷ “Ways of Living: Trinity Sunday, 1994”, Newman, 3.

poem ["The Arc Inside Out"] might be one symbolic integer: moves to catch me in any or all of my devising, and draw me, as in tropism, towards the sun".³⁰⁸

³⁰⁸ "Silences", 14.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE CELEBRANT

burst open from within like wheat.¹

The Eucharist is something in which we allow God to specify among us what the relationship between hope and despair is.... Joining in the “celebration” of the Eucharist is a very dangerous thing to do, if ever it dawns upon us what it is all about... and at what cost to Christ, it is possible for experienced adults to celebrate the presence of the Lord.²

Steele’s Pilgrim - yearning and hoping for heaven - yearns and hopes in the meantime to become a Celebrant. Steele says that

what we long for includes... a longing for adequacy to all we find good. We want to be celebrants, even in the midst of the underminings of celebration.³

In an Easter Vigil homily Steele speaks of Christ as

the One who beams into our short-sighted vision, the Image of God...- he does so as the One for whom life and death have become intolerably dark, so dark in fact that he had to die. But he is also the One whom we name in this ritual as the Light-bringer, the bearer of bread and wine and good heart, out of the darkness. He emerges from death’s tomb... to claim that even death works, after all.⁴

The attribute of God (and of Christ) delineated in this passage is the capacity to celebrate, to claim or proclaim, that what is dark or dead can be transformed or retrieved into something that is bright and alive. Christ’s death and resurrection (the respective concerns for the Third and Fourth Weeks of the *Exercises*)⁵ are for Steele the supreme manifestation of this transforming attribute of God. This quality of God and of Christ is also manifest in the death and resurrection of all people, in the annual passage of Winter into Spring, in the transmutation of depression into joy, in the human capacity to transmute personal suffering into positive action. It is evident in the literary transformation achieved by poets who retrieve persons, memories, ideas or

¹ “Steerage”, 15.

² “Steerage”, 14.

³ “Singing”, 15.

⁴ “She’ll Be Right”, Newman College, 1996, AJAF viii, 2.

⁵ See below p.184ff.

even other poems from oblivion and whose job, Steele notes David Jones asserting, is “to redeem”.⁶ As Steele says of poets and saints:

The last place to look for if you are after a testament of unruffled tranquility is the utterances of a saint. And the second-last is the utterances of a poet. Poets complain about everything under the sun.... But the distinctive thing about their enterprise is that a kind of praise and celebration stems from the midst of the discontents which they offer so intransigently.⁷

This chapter is concerned with Steele’s perception of the celebratory beam, so called because “to celebrate” has the meaning not only of “to solemnise” as in a ritual, but also of “to proclaim” in this case that something has been transformed from the negative to the positive. This celebratory beam emanates from God to all people infusing them with the capacity to claim a transformation from deathly to lively attitudes of mind and ultimately from death to resurrected life.⁸ Steele perceives this celebratory beam emanating from God to Christ, to the evangelists, to Ignatius, and to Campion and to writers especially poets. He sees it spanning a jesterly antithesis between death and life,⁹ transforming the Pilgrim on his or her journey of continuous change, imparting to him or her the capacity to proclaim that people and things can be retrieved from disaster and dismay, in other words imparting to them the capacity to become Celebrants.

Whereas the Jester at work in the text is often an imaginary metaphorical figure, and the Pilgrim frequently an allegorical one, the Celebrant is to be found in living people, especially priests and poets. Just as the function of the figure of the Jester is to analyse, to provoke, and to bring about the primary conversion of the individual; and that of the Expatriate or Pilgrim to yearn, to change, (so that there occurs a daily conversion), and to hope; the function of the Celebrant is threefold. First he or she is to celebrate: to claim and proclaim, to affirm, to profess. Secondly, what he or she

⁶ *Expatriates*, 83. See above p.137.

⁷ “Poems and Prayers”, 1.

⁸ In “Resurrection” Steele is dealing with two kinds of transformation, the Easter one he celebrates in the ritual of the Mass, the personal one he recommends to his congregation as available to them as resulting from making personal changes.

⁹ cf. “dark and bright lozenges play against one another...”. (“Humour”, 119.)

proclaims is that something has, or will, come through, that something is, or will be, retrieved, salvaged, redeemed, remembered, recollected,¹⁰ blessed, that, in other words something, someone, has been or will be, transformed. And thirdly the figure's response to this "coming through" causes him or her to thank, applaud, prize, prompt life, and praise because of it. This third aspect of the Celebrant's function is really matter for "the Word" or "the Witness" even though it is impossible to totally segregate celebration from giving thanks and praise.¹¹

Karl Rahner regards the celebrating of feasts as speaking "with praise and gratitude of what... rules and operates in man's existence...buried in the always ambiguous routine of ordinary life...".¹² With Paul as his precedent Steele goes beyond Rahner's "ambiguous routine" and finds that all three aspects of the Celebrant's functions apply equally in the midst of chaos and disorder or in the raptures of joy and bliss. Celebration, for Steele, is required particularly in the teeth of trouble. He speaks of St Paul's letter to the Christians in Rome as being

frank about the fact that taking heart and fostering creativity have often to be done against the grain of experience.¹³

And he identifies this capacity to celebrate in the midst of dismay, disaster, even death, in poetry such as Joseph Brodsky's "May 24, 1980", which Steele sees as "scan[ning] the vehement ups and downs of experience" and which proves the inseparability of the poet's celebration of these "ups and downs" from his expression of gratitude:

What should I say about life? That it's long and abhors transparence.
Broken eggs make me grieve; the omelette, though, makes me vomit.
Yet until brown clay has been crammed down my larynx,
only gratitude will be gushing from it.¹⁴

¹⁰ Steele, writing "Buckley's Anamnesis", [*Scripta*, 2, 2 & 3 (Spring, 1983),134,] says he borrows the word "anamnesis" from David Jones to describe Buckley's *Cutting Green Hay* and adds that although the OED gives "the recalling of things past; recollection, reminiscence" as its meaning, he chooses to also imply Jones's sense which "re-situates it at Luke XXII:19" and which has for Steele connotations of Eucharistic remembrance: "connotations of enactment and imaginatively powerful celebration".

¹¹ See Chapter Five.

¹² *Opportunities*, 171.

Because he holds this view of celebration, Steele is able - in the context of a reflection which considers not only Christ's death but also the seeming absence of God ("God's own proneness for exodus") and the concept of the twentieth century as "the age of Auschwitz" - to write confidently and with optimism. He says:

every word and deed of Jesus which has been preserved... has been scooped up from the detritus of time because it seems to offer a transparency to meaning, blessedness, and, ultimately, supreme personality. Beyond apophatic theology, silenced mystics, the fumbling gestures of love, there stands the luminous, vivifying sweetness of God. Behind the labour, the armoury and the thunder of the hive, there brims the honeycomb.

The conditions of Christian hope have always had to do with transparency, luminosity, something shining through.¹⁵

Steele's "luminous, vivifying sweetness of God" and his reference to "transparency, something shining through" imply the *ó*, the glory of God present at the crucifixion, present despite the apparent absence of God, Auschwitz, modern warfare, Hiroshima and other twentieth century atrocities which exercise Steele's denunciatory imagination.¹⁶ Steele expresses the corollary to this state of affairs in his verse:

I even know that joy
has more of gravity than of gaiety.¹⁷

The Celebrant in (Ignatian) priests, poets and autobiographers:

Certainly, for Steele, the Celebrant is a ministerial priest. In his poem "Pentecost in Oxford" he writes:

And here, alone at the altar,
Professing celebration of the world's increase,

¹³ "Dinny Homily", 1993, 2.

¹⁴ "Brotsky", 16.

¹⁵ "Jesus: Transparencies: 1. One in the light of another", 1993, AJAF viii, 2.

¹⁶ See below p.197 for Steele's poetry of denunciation.

For all the shifts and savagery of weather,

I lift the bread and wine.¹⁸

It should be said, however, that Steele sometimes merges his perception of the priestly role of celebration with the poet's capacity to celebrate, particularly when, in the case of Donne or Swift or Sterne or Herbert, he is dealing with writers who were priests. Steele sees, for example, the life of George Herbert as one in which "the major resolution and self-commitment would have to be to acceding to [sic] the 'daily beauty' in the midst of daily dying", and he describes Herbert as "the man in whom priest and poet were daily called to new life (which is to say for Herbert as *celebrant*)..."¹⁹.

Priested or unpriested the general capacity of poets to do the work of solemnised celebration is never far from Steele's mind. Writing of the Celebrant's capacity to apprehend the positive, the beauty and the living, even and especially in the face of the negative, the horrific and the dying, as sometimes being a retrospective capacity, Steele refers to the Last Supper as being "remembered and re-celebrated" both for what it instigated and for what people were able to make of its meaning. Having done this he likens the early christians' process of gathering the incidents of the event "into some ceremony of celebration" to the task of the tragic poet. He says:

the most radical challenge to certain historians of the human experience - including, for instance, the tragic poets - is to discern how madness, death, and wickedness can be incorporated into an environment of blessing - how they can be addressed by an absolving memory.²⁰

Talk of an "absolving memory", nevertheless, is priestly talk and clearly Steele's thinking on the celebratory role of writers is influenced by his experience from within the ministerial priesthood. He says as much himself:

¹⁷ "Montaigne", *Paradise*, 19.

¹⁸ "Pentecost in Oxford", *Paradise*, 30.

¹⁹ "Singing", 12.

²⁰ "Singing", 20

priestliness has a stake in singing the praises of creation and the Creator, a stake in lamenting what has become of us in the past and in the present, and a stake in helping to precipitate transformation.²¹

While Steele claims that this view is not peculiar to the Ignatian spiritual tradition (since it is at the heart of the gospel) he does not mean that it is not also Ignatian. Certainly other views of his pertaining to blessing and praising seem particularly to derive from Ignatius. He believes, for example, that he who is priested and is charged to extend God's blessing to others has great need of an awareness of being himself blessed: "A man who proffers the blessings of God, in ritual, in word, on appeal, on impulse, may need more than most the awareness that just those blessings are being offered to him".²² This is recognizably a practicing of one aspect of the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*²³ from within his speciality of vocation, as is his autobiographical "I sensed that one's personal condition, and the condition of the world at large, called, finally, for celebration: and I thought, as I still do, that that was what priests were for".²⁴ There is yet another way in which Steele's concept of the celebratory aspect of the ministerial priesthood derives from the Ignatian tradition and since what Steele means by priestly celebration is complex, it will need some introduction.

In Steele's homiletic address to young Jesuits, "Priesthood as Prophecy", priestly celebration is treated as being twofold: priests, whatever their "frailties" and "follies" are to proclaim (to proclaim being one sense of *to celebrate*) the gospel and to celebrate (in the sense of *to solemnise*) the Mass. Elsewhere Steele calls the Mass "that ritual action in which we celebrate the present efficacy of Christ's sacrifice made once and for all in the past, but here current in its effect, and displayed as current - that action [which] shares in the essential features of Christ's transforming life".²⁵ Keeping this in mind let us now return to what Steele said to the congregation of young Jesuit priests:

²¹ "Stay", MS 5.

²² "Silences", 1.

²³ See above, p.26, n.31.

²⁴ "Stay", MS 4.

²⁵ "The Moment of the Mass", circa 1970, AJAF ii, 4.

priesthood too celebrates the divine lodgement in the jerry-built human shack. We believe that when we pick up the less-than-perfect translation of the Word of God, the true God will still speak... to us and our people.... And we believe that when we pick up the slightly stale wafer and the slightly too-sweet wine, these will still in God's providence become the nourishment and the festival of the ages, the bread and the banquet. These things we believe; these things we proclaim....²⁶

The complexity of Steele's concept of celebration is hinted at in the earlier reference to the Mass as celebrating "the present efficacy of Christ's sacrifice made once and for all in the past, but here current in its effect, and displayed as current - that action [which] shares in the essential features of Christ's transforming life".²⁷ "Transforming" and "sacrifice" are the concepts that, in Steele's writing, compound the meaning of celebration. They will be treated in turn.

One sense in which Christ's death and resurrection are seen by Steele as "transforming" is to be found in a homily where he reassures the congregation that

Every Mass you have ever been to acts out the claim that, yes, this man of flesh and blood was deserted...; framed and disgraced...; and was then tortured to death... Every Mass though... makes the claim that there was a new beginning after the end, a lucidity brought to be out of the blood... And when we come to Mass... we do so not only to lift our hearts a little by the re-presentation of the Lord's being raised from death, but also to dramatize our own belief that he is with us in whatever messes, major or minor, may be our own.²⁸

When Steele speaks, however, of the Mass as an "action [that] shares in the essential features of Christ's transforming life", it is to stress another aspect of the effect of the death and resurrection of Christ, namely, that the Mass as a representation of that life (and death and resurrection) calls for a transformation also in the lives of those present. And this is where the second concept, that of "sacrifice" becomes valid for

²⁶ "Priesthood as Prophecy", 1988, AJAF vi.

²⁷ "The Moment of the Mass", 4.

²⁸ "Bethany", 3.

Steele for whom “Most celebrations involve some kind of sacrifice...”²⁹ and for whom “A Eucharist which did not look to transformation both in the personal lives of its participants and in the condition of the world at large would be a contradiction in terms”.³⁰

The ramification of this double action of the Mass as understood by Steele is that in celebrating a Eucharist a priest is both officiating at an action whereby a disastrous event is proclaimed to have come through, to have been transformed into a joyful event and whereby, additionally, the individual is implicated in a process of personal transformation: “So when I ply my priesthood at Mass... I am always conscious that things are going to have to change, whether in myself or in the others”.³¹ In other words the priestly Celebrant of the Mass incorporates, in Steele’s view, both the function of the Celebrant, who proclaims that something has come through and who re-enacts that drama, and the function of the Pilgrim, one of whose tasks along the way is to engage in a daily change within himself or herself so that the lengthy process of personal transformation, sponsored by the Celebrant, may occur. In fact it could even be said that the Celebrant’s function as so described also incorporates the Jester’s duty to look within, to scrutinise interiorly, since Steele’s “I am always conscious that things are going to have to change” cannot exist in a vacuum and is prompted by the realisation, (which he describes elsewhere) that

Every celebration of the Eucharist is partly a celebration of Christ’s accusing retort upon what we take for granted as inevitable, right, true. It would be inappropriate to begin the Mass in any other way than with a confession of our sinfulness, for then we would be failing to consent to the indicting, and the revolutionary, character of his life, death and resurrection.³²

Only after identifying the complexity of Steele’s view, albeit an orthodox one, on celebration pertaining to the Mass, is it now possible to return to the question of

²⁹ “Stay”, MS 5.

³⁰ “Stay”, MS 5.

³¹ “Stay”, MS 5.

Ignatian influences on his thinking in this matter. When Steele, writing in “Why Stay?” about his priesthood and celebration, refers to “sacrifice” and “transformation”, he says explicitly that it is in these areas that his practice is Ignatian in influence. If celebration involves “some kind of sacrifice”, he says, then “the Ignatian stress on the need for the self to be transformed made good sense in that context”.³³ Illustrating his remarks on his awareness “that things are going to have to change”,³⁴ he invokes the authority of another of his frequent references to Rilke’s ““You must change your life””, and stresses: “Happily the Ignatian preoccupation with daily change is of a piece with that”.³⁵

While Steele’s priestly experience confirms him in these views, his books of criticism and interpretation indicate that for him poets of various or of no beliefs, and autobiographers as well, can also engage successfully in celebratory endeavours. *Expatriates* finds poet after poet involved in the process of penetrating some form of darkness or dismay, retrieving or redeeming it, transforming it, and healing it. Writing on Anthony Hecht’s poem “Black Boy in the Dark”, for example, Steele recalls David Jones’s comments on “*Vexilla Regis*” and his dictum that “poets are... to redeem”. Steele hesitates to apply the concept to Hecht fearing that

Hecht might well jibe at that ‘redeem’. Taking it to be too closely associated for comfort with a specifically theological reading of his own practice as poet.³⁶

Steele nevertheless persists in naming Hecht’s poetic practice as “redeeming”. He continues:

But Jones’s insight into the transformative possibilities of poetry is surely one of Hecht’s axioms. The Donne who speaks of the “what torne ship soever I embarke”,³⁷ the Jonson of “my mountain belly, and my rocky face”³⁸ - these reach as Hecht reaches into the battered particulars of the day and divine in them those excellences which glorify the mind that glorifies them. Hecht has made it his business to seek in his day what they sought in theirs -

³² “Poemind”, 5.

³³ “Stay”, MS 5.

³⁴ “Stay”, MS 5.

³⁵ “Stay”, MS 5.

³⁶ *Expatriates*, 83.

³⁷ *Expatriates*, 83. Steele cites from John Donne, “A Hymn to Christ, at the Author’s last going into Germany”, *Divine Poems*, ed. Helen Gardner, 2nd ed., Clarendon Press, 1978, 48-49.

a discovery of more than either detritus or paradigm in history, a naming of items that go beyond the incidental, an expressing of forms which are more than formalities.

Steele speaks of Hecht's "making forays into the heartland of dismay or disaffection"; and of his being "bent on bringing to utterance the terms of joy. ...sometimes with elation at recovery or relief..."; and of the fact that "sometimes the happiness sought and found is registered as a simple given, as authoritative as the grief it has conquered...". Citing Hecht's

Pebble and weed and leaf
Distinct, refreshed, and cleanly self-defined,
Rapt in a trance of stillness, in a brief
Mood of serenity, as if designed
To be here now, and manifest
The deep, unvexed composure of the blessed.³⁹

Steele says:

These too are the engagements, the attachments of celebration...⁴⁰

Expatriates also insists upon the poet's capacity to retrieve: "Jarrell is fascinated by ...retrievals";⁴¹ and to heal. Steele says:

the poet who will not seek the self he knows himself to be and knows himself not to have, is liable to an arthritis of the spirit, and it shows. The one who is prepared to engage in those moves, in the selving and unselving that fascinated Hopkins, finds that there are links and leagues between Mercury and Aesculapius - and that shows. The going forth itself induces a healing though it be a going, as it usually is, and was for Donne, *per fretum febris*.

The Autobiographical Passion, too, reveals Steele insisting upon the celebratory quality of the genre. This is so for poetic accounts of the self such as the autobiographical poetry of Herbert, Donne and Vaughan where Steele discovers

³⁸ Steele cites from Ben Jonson, "My Picture Left in Scotland", *Ben Jonson: Poems*, ed. Ian Donaldson, Oxford University Press, London, 1975, 145.

³⁹ Steele, *Expatriates*, 85, cites from Hecht's "The Lull", *Millions of Strange Shadows*, Atheneum, New York, 1977, 39-40.

⁴⁰ *Expatriates*, 85.

⁴¹ *Expatriates*, 77

the power of minds rising or being raised from the pit of impotency; ...their trenchancy, ...their exigency. ...their claim to be carried into lucidity out of all that wars on behalf of darkness.⁴²

And it is so also for prosed autobiographical accounts such as Sinyavsky's from a Soviet prison camp in which writing Steele finds evidence of the prisoner's maxim that "Art is created in order to overcome death, but in a state of intense expectation of it..."⁴³. Steele cites variously from *A Voice from the Chorus* but this section from Sinyavsky's remarks on Swift and Defoe will serve as an example of the passages selected:

Defoe rescued Gulliver from the dismaying uncertainties of freedom and put him on a desert island. ... Defoe forced man to revert to form by drastically restricting him, by making it impossible for him to jump out of himself or escape from the need of living 'like everyone else.' He banished him to his own society....

To think thus of himself is open to anyone marooned on a desert island of work, family, hunger, sickness or wealth - in short, to anyone having no choice but to seek refuge in a saving self-centeredness, in the instinct of self-preservation which forces us to go on struggling to raise ourselves up within the confines of a prison cell or of the entire universe, as the case may be.⁴⁴

With this and other passages from *A Voice from the Chorus* in mind Steele notes the variously celebratory manoeuvres of the writer. He says: "A man may behave autobiographically from any posture in which he finds himself, but for Sinyavsky to have done so from a prison camp is eloquent well beyond its occasion";⁴⁵ "['some writers' and Sinyavsky, by implication] prefer that their readers perceive the very frequent choppiness and rockiness of thought, as of the things with which thought deals";⁴⁶ that "Sinyavsky is implicitly acknowledging a writerly passion, a passion that the casting up of personal accounts be vindicated by the coming out of a harmonious

⁴² *Autopassion*, 83.

⁴³ *Autopassion*, 118. Steele cites from Sinyavsky's *A Voice from the Chorus*, pseud. Abram Tertz, trans. Kyril Fitzlyon and Max Hayward, New York, Bantam, 1978, 35.

⁴⁴ *Autopassion*, 117. Steele cites from *A Voice from the Chorus*, 23.

⁴⁵ *Autopassion*, 111.

⁴⁶ *Autopassion*, 119

account”;⁴⁷ and that “Everywhere in *A Voice from the Chorus* one is aware of what we rightly call a play of mind, and also aware of that play as being itself a celebration of the word”.⁴⁸

Such broadly based views of celebration evident in Steele’s studies of autobiography and poetry and which are in agreement with his concept of the process of retrieval within the Mass evince a mature development of his embryonic expressions of an integrated perspective. Writing about celebration in the Sixties, this is what Steele had to say:

celebration can take many forms, but cannot be reduced to any single one of them. It is a policy and an impulse; it is a way of commanding the human situation and a way of expanding it; it is a reasonable activity which is also a mode of feeling; it may be domestic or international; it is bodily and spiritual; it savours of the divine by the way it savours of the human. It comprises, for instance, military parades, circuses, presentations of degrees, wakes, weddings, the Last Post, *Hamlet*, the Mona Lisa, Bach chorales, and the Mass - of which it is said, most fittingly, that we celebrate it.⁴⁹

The function of the Celebrant (and the Jester and the Pilgrim / Expatriate) in Steele’s article “Heaney’s Tenderness and Hope”⁵⁰ with some reference to “Taking the Strain: The Prose of Seamus Heaney”⁵¹:

In “Heaney’s Tenderness and Hope” written for *The Age* on the occasion of Heaney’s winning the Nobel Prize for Literature, Steele is at pains to cover sufficient ground as to who Heaney is, where he comes from, where he now lives, what his teaching posts are, and what in the main, he has written, to satisfy the questions a general reader might expect any feature writer to address. At the same time however, Steele is

⁴⁷ *Autopassion*, 121.

⁴⁸ *Autopassion*, 122.

⁴⁹ “The Novel as Celebration”, 172.

⁵⁰ “Heaney’s Tenderness and Hope”, *Age*, 21 October, 1995, Saturday Extra, 7. [“Tenderness”] In MS the article is entitled “Heaney Displayed”.

⁵¹ “Taking the Strain: The Prose of Seamus Heaney”, *Quadrant*, 37, 11 (November, 1993), 58-67. [“Strain”]

equally concerned to translate all these factual details into a sketch of Heaney as a Celebrant, as one who, in Steele's words, "works on the assumption that wherever you turn your eye or ear, significance will rise to meet you".⁵² As will be seen, this is in itself a form of transmutation of factual biographical details into meaningfulness and significance, in itself a celebration of Heaney's life-long achievement. These last, however, are not the most significant aspects of the article which has much besides to reveal about Steele's concept of celebration.

Steele begins "Heaney's Tenderness and Hope" by noting that Heaney is currently translating *Beowulf* and offers the reader a sample of Heaney's published verse on the burial at sea of Scyld the Dane:

they shouldered him out to the sea's flood
 ...Far-fetched treasures
were piled upon him, and precious gear.
 ...No man can tell,
no wise man in the hall or weathered veteran
knows for certain who salvaged that boat.⁵³

Steele's selection of this translating activity of Heaney's to introduce the poet and his enterprise serves well to establish the Laureate as one whose poetic process is one of retrieving and salvaging. This is hinted at, to begin with, indirectly and by implication: translating itself is an event of "eloquent transformation"; *Beowulf* is appropriate to Heaney's imaginative energies because its theme is "the salvaging of treasures"; if the "long-dead author" of *Beowulf* were known, Heaney would invoke him. In all of these there is a suggestion of translation from one mode to another: Old English to modern; treasure (including the poem itself) retrieved from its former lodgement in the past and made available to the present; a dead author called upon by a living. Steele's preparatory work is complete, the stage is set for Heaney to enter.

⁵² "Tenderness", 7.

⁵³ Steele cites from Heaney's *The Haw Lantern*, London, Faber and Faber, 1987.

Steele gives the reader ample information - details of Heaney's age, appearance, temperament, but immediately harnesses and manoeuvres these to his own end: to establish the jesterly, antithetical nature of the poet and his situation. And again this, as will be seen, is not done for its own sake. Heaney is "boyish and grave"; he writes poetry and prose; there is "gravity" and "vivacity" in his work; "most of what he has written has been done under the challenge of some such riddling claim" [as Nemerov's "life is hopeless and beautiful".] Such setting up of antitheses in Steele's writing usually prefaces a development of some importance and in his writing on Heaney there is no exception. What is to come, however, is delayed until further evidence of Heaney's antithetical milieu is concretely established.

Referring to Heaney's writing "under the challenge of some such riddling claim" [as Nemerov's], Steele retorts:

And why not, if two parallel columns, like these run through your experience?
From which point Steele introduces, "On the left", and "On the right", the contents of the two columns of Heaney's experience: "coming from a condemned minority, and bearing a name which can get you bias or even death", and yet "admiring both the intimates of one's own circle and gifted ones from remote times and places"; "growing up in an Ireland whose emotional complexities are starkly at odds with its serene physical milieu", and yet "having a cherishing, almost erotic, sense of the land itself"; "knowing what it is for an intensely tribalized society to be riven with resentments", and [perhaps in contrast to parochial linguistic preferences and resentments] "finding that the English language is as much life-form as instrument"; and finally "being subject... to mortality's daily mockery of 'life's own self-delight'", and simultaneously "finding that there is nothing, good or ill, that cannot be mused upon".

The use Steele makes of this "medley", "at once exotic and familiar", (and this is the development for which all the antithetical evidence has been accumulated) is to establish Heaney as cognisant with both polarities of his own Irishness, his own biographical existence, but as at the same time capable of, and in fact in the process

of, “spanning the distance between such poles”. Turning from Heaney’s life to his poem, “A Call”, which “traces the simplicities of a visit to an unnamed acquaintance who is weeding in the garden”, Steele cites:

And found myself then thinking: if it were nowadays,
This is how Death would summon Everyman.

Next thing he spoke and I nearly said I loved him.

Steele finds that just as Heaney personally spans disparate poles, it is also the case that “between two poles of attention, [the traditional sonnet form and the outburst of the last line] the poem’s force arcs”. So much for Steele’s setting up (within the limits of a newspaper article) the polarities of Heaney’s biography and one of his poetic techniques.

Why these jesterly polarities are significant, however, is that there can be no sense of transmutation, of moving from one milieu to another, unless there is established exactly what Steele calls Heaney’s “two parallel columns”. Later in the article Steele gives an instance of Heaney’s talent for this kind of translation in both prose and poetry. But for the moment it is helpful to turn to the second of Steele’s articles, his account of Heaney’s prose.

“Taking the Strain: The Prose of Seamus Heaney” reveals Steele, again with an eye for the Jester, citing Heaney’s “I want to profess the surprise of poetry as well as its reliability...”⁵⁴ and additionally with an eye for the Pilgrim’s hungers claiming “Heaney’s sense of poetry is that it is among other things a way of answering to the heart’s hungers”.⁵⁵ Having so observed matters Steele isolates Heaney’s phrase, “taking the strain”, as an appropriate description of Heaney’s own critical method, which observation becomes crucial in understanding Steele’s concept of Heaney as a celebratory writer. Steele cites Heaney wanting poetry to be “something sweetening

⁵⁴ Steele, (“Strain”), cites from Heaney’s “The Redress of Poetry: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 24th October 1989”, Clarendon Press, 1990, 18-19.

⁵⁵ “Strain”, 62.

and at the same time something unexpected, something that has come through constraint into felicity...”⁵⁶ and finds that

‘Something that has come through constraint into felicity’ is the paradigm which governs Heaney’s approach to the poetry of others, as no doubt his own endeavours as a poet.⁵⁷

By noting this requirement of Heaney’s, Steele is naming him as Celebrant. This is endorsed by two further sets of Steele’s observations. First he says that “There is more than one connotation to Heaney’s word, *profess*”. And that “Another thing Heaney is eager to profess is the way in which the past can re-present itself to the responsive observer”, that (and this is the second matter) “[Heaney] has a passion not only for retrieval but for re-animation - the sort of thing to be found in poets like David Jones...”⁵⁸ (whom, as we have seen, Steele cites in *Expatriates* as referring to “the sort of thing that poets are for; to redeem is part of their job”.⁵⁹) Here, in other words, is Steele delineating Heaney as one who sees himself professing, among other things that retrieval is poetry’s business. Towards the end of “Taking the Strain”, Steele cites Heaney saying of Mandelstam that “He is a burning reminder of the way in which... the words truth and justice may be salvaged from the catastrophe of history...”.⁶⁰

In his acceptance speech in Stockholm, Heaney at first plays devil’s advocate to such a statement. He sorrowfully concedes that, given the violence of our times, including and especially that of the Holocaust, “we are rightly suspicious of that which gives too much consolation in these circumstances” and that “the inclination is not only not to credit human nature with much constructive potential but not to credit anything too positive in the work of art”. Having said so much however, he proceeds to document a shift of major significance that he says occurred “a few years ago” in his own sensibility and practice as a poet. And for the purpose of stressing Steele’s understanding of celebration as a whole, Heaney’s account of this shift is stated:

⁵⁶ Steele cites from Randy Brandes, “Seamus Heaney: An Interview”, *Salmagundi* 80, Fall 1988, 17.

⁵⁷ “Strain”, 62.

⁵⁸ “Strain”, 63.

⁵⁹ *Expatriates*, 83.

⁶⁰ “Strain”, 65.

for years I was bowed to the desk like some monk bowed over his prie-dieu, some dutiful contemplative pivoting his understanding in an attempt to bear his portion of the weight of the world, knowing himself incapable of heroic virtue or redemptive effect, but constrained by his obedience to his rule to repeat the effort and the posture. Blowing up sparks for a meagre heat. Forgetting faith, straining towards good works. Attending insufficiently to the diamond absolutes, among which must be counted the sufficiency of that which is absolutely imagined. Then finally and happily, and not in obedience to the dolorous circumstances of my native place but in despite of them, I straightened up. I began a few years ago to try to make space in my reckoning and imagining for the marvellous as well as for the murderous.

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In his lecture “Measures and Pleasures: Ancient Hopes, Modern Poems”⁶² Steele argues that “Anyone who has read the speech of Seamus Heaney at the most recent awarding of the Nobel Prize for Literature will be aware that, at that singular event, Heaney was reiterating a conviction... [that] supposes that a poet’s hungers are properly for life in the round - the body turning, caught now by this beam, shadowed now by that vacancy, but always hungry for a coherence which this or that influence can at best portend”.⁶³ And in “Taking the Strain”, by recourse to a different metaphor, he moves over similar territory:

The transformational energies displayed and perpetuated in all poetry of distinction cannot be accounted for on any reductive account. And what the bulk of Heaney’s critical writing amounts to is a continued attempt to name how particular poetries “take the strain” between deed and dream, fact and aspiration.⁶⁴

So that, when in the same argument Steele refers to “good poetry [as that which] braves the elements at once of life and art”, and to “the spirit in which [Heaney] refers to [Zbigniew] Herbert’s ‘unblindable stare at the facts of pain, the recurrence of injustice and catastrophe’ in the same sentence as ‘religion, literature and art... as a spiritual resource, helping him to stand his ground’”,⁶⁵ he is in the process of declaring

⁶¹ Seamus Heaney, “Crediting Poetry: The Nobel Lecture”, Faber, 1996, 18.

⁶² “Measures and Pleasures: Ancient Hopes, Modern Poems”, the 1996 Victor Couch Lecture, Australian Catholic University, Sydney. AJAF viii, 11. [“Measures”]

⁶³ “Measures”, MS 11.

⁶⁴ “Strain”, 66.

⁶⁵ “Strain”, 66. Steele cites from Heaney’s *The Government of the Tongue: The 1986 T.S. Eliot Memorial Lectures and Other Critical Writings*, Faber, 1988, 58.

Heaney's writing on poetry to be professing its salvaging potential, to be, that is, celebratory. Or to be more accurate, since "to profess" with its meanings of "to own, to declare openly, to announce, to affirm" has echoes of "to celebrate" with its meanings of "to make publicly known, proclaim, publish abroad", Steele is in the process of declaring Heaney to be celebrating the celebratory (salvaging) nature of poetry.⁶⁶

Returning to Steele's "Heaney's Tenderness and Hope" it is now possible to see why, in the midst of further forays into Heaney's biography and his summary of Heaney's educational and teaching experience, Steele's selection of two extracts from Heaney's work, one prose and one in verse, may be able to be seen as examples of writing that "come through constraint into felicity", the one, in the case of Heaney's memorial address on the occasion of the death of Robert Lowell, salvaging something that was lost:

When a person whom we cherished dies, all that he stood for goes a-begging, asking us somehow to occupy the space he filled, to assume into our own life values which we admired in his, and thereby to conserve his unique energy.⁶⁷

the other, in the case of the cited lines from Heaney's "Requiem for the Croppies", translating, in Steele's view, not so much rage as extant grief, into "tenderness and hope":

Until, on Vinegar Hill, the fatal conclave.
Terraced thousands died, shaking scythes at cannon.
The hillside blushed, soaked in our broken wave.
They buried us without shroud or coffin
And in August the barley grew up out of the grave.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ The citation from Heaney's "The Redress of Poetry: An Inaugural Lecture Delivered before the University of Oxford on 24th October 1989", (Clarendon, 1990, 18-19) in Steele's article "Strain", (62) gives Heaney's statement as: "On the contrary I want to profess the surprise of poetry as well as its reliability, its given, unforeseeable thereness, the way it enters our field of vision ...". Whereas elsewhere (Steele's "Lyrical", 42) Steele cites the passage from Heaney's *The Redress of Poetry: Oxford Lectures*, (Faber, 1995, 15), as "I want to profess the surprise of poetry as well as its reliability; I want to celebrate its given, unforeseeable thereness, the way it enters our field of vision ...".

⁶⁷ "Tenderness", 7.

⁶⁸ "Tenderness", 7.

Asserting Heaney's "tenderness and hope" and conceding that these amount to "a gentling to which some would object", Steele defends his approval of these attributes of the poet by saying that Heaney is also observant of "underlining stresses and strains". Steele cites instances of Heaney's facility to identify self-critical introspection and its attendant *metanoia*:

[Lowell's] ability to plunge into the downward reptilian welter of the individual self and yet raise himself with whatever knowledge he gained there out on to the hard ledges of the historical present, which he then apprehended with refreshed insight and intensity...⁶⁹

Steele also notes that Heaney's writing can be "troubled"; and that two predecessors to the Nobel Prize [Brodsky and Walcott] are "quizzical inhabitants of the English language". Additionally Steele asserts that Heaney, like Brodsky and Walcott can work the exiled state, the "Being thrust out or kept out from an incurable desired condition" into something "astoundingly fruitful". All of the jesterly statements above including the jesterly assessment of the expatriate's state as being thrust out while wishing to be in, and the further comment that Heaney's titles "suggest lodgement and dislodgement, both" are Steele's preparatory arrangements for bringing his views on Heaney to a focused conclusion. As if these were not enough, he reiterates his motifs - the *jesterly*: "[Heaney] would not, though, have what is, in the Western world, a huge poetical readership if all that were on offer were tensions and riddlements"; and the *expatriate* motif: "[Heaney] is haunted and a haunter".

This reiteration of things *jesterly* and *expatriated*, Steele carries out in the service of demonstrating that Heaney's celebratory action is credible and realistic. As Celebrant Heaney is a "kind of gift-strewer, his tongue having a diverse and potent magic" his lines "meet the stern criterion of Auden, that they 'Ought to be something a man of / honor, awaiting death from cancer or a firing squad, / could read without contempt'".⁷⁰ Heaney for Steele is such a gift-strewer and his lines are so appropriate for the condemned to read only because as Steele says in "Taking the Strain", "Heaney's own poetical 'work' has rarely gone on in forgetfulness of the blood upon

⁶⁹ Steele cites from Heaney's memorial address on the death of Lowell, 1977.

⁷⁰ "Tenderness", 7.

the green, and he is therefore well placed to reflect upon the tension between the powers that be and the powers of the imagination”.⁷¹ Or as Steele all but concludes in “Heaney Displayed”:

nobody knows better than Heaney that one day silence will have the last word, and his poems are reared up in the face of that awareness. Their brio, their succulence, their meditated-through insight, their rousing of esprit -- these gambits are played through in the presence of irreducible frailty.⁷²

Or put negatively with the accent on the *constraint* rather than on the *felicity* of Heaney’s “through constraint into felicity” Steele adds:

Heaney has been much influenced, much irradiated, by that most celebrated of exiles, Dante, who, had he returned to Florence, would have been burned alive. The *Divine Comedy*, famously, ends well for the figure who doubles as its author and its undergoer: but even at the pitch of Dante’s Heaven, vulnerability and loss are written into the score.⁷³

Steele’s view of the celebratory character and action of God:

For Steele God is the arch-Celebrant. Steele told a congregation in Illinois:

My brothers and sisters, I am tonight as every priest is at a Eucharist the Master of Ceremonies. But to celebrate the feast of the Trinity is always to remember that God Himself, through and through, is the Festival of our lives.⁷⁴

While holding this view Steele also regards God as “serious to the death in his demand that people... be changed from the heart”;⁷⁵ as the one whom “you cannot afford to let... into society or he will destroy the whole thing”;⁷⁶ and as the one “who is a killer”.⁷⁷ Steele is able to proclaim God as high-celebrant and to see him also as a killer because he interprets the divine “rationale” behind the “killing” of the Son of God as an act of retrieval, of redemption and of transformation. Speaking of Christ as

⁷¹ “Strain”, 66.

⁷² “Tenderness”, 7.

⁷³ “Tenderness”, 7.

⁷⁴ “Eve Trinity”, 5.

⁷⁵ “Steerage”, 13.

⁷⁶ “Steerage”, 14.

⁷⁷ “The God of Life and Death”, *Madonna*, November, 1978, 10.

he “engages, bloody hand to hand, with death, and is once and for all triumphant”,
Steele says of the Trinitarian God:

This is what we celebrate at any and every mass, be it a funeral Mass, a wedding Mass....
We make the claim that in spite of the vilest and most heartbreaking things that can happen,
the Father of all vitality ensures, through the loving obedience and fraternal solidarity of his
Son, that the Spirit of their shared life and love will be eternally ours.

Similarly Steele considers other ramifications devolving from God’s vitality “all that is
deathly in our experience can be made lively by his Father”;⁷⁸ “the power of his Father
can indeed be called upon to defeat deathly forces in our hearts and in our world”.⁷⁹
For Steele he is the God who “has mastered ‘the last enemy, death,’ [and whose]
mastery is final”;⁸⁰ one who “continues to invest himself in our death-prone world”;⁸¹
one who blesses, a joy giver.⁸² He is the God who permits the crucifixion and the one
who brings about the resurrection: “that dark celebration which turns to a bright
one”.⁸³ He is, moreover, the “Father” who has the “loving power to bring something
permanently good, eternally good, from that mess”.⁸⁴

This archetype of transformation, the raising of Christ from death to life, and the
model it establishes for christian dying to the self and rising with Christ become in the
work of Steele the paradigms for all transformational events of whatever magnitude.
Steele writes:

It is only because we always insist on naming his being raised from that vile, unjust death,
that we can come after all to communion. And... this presses us to consider how, in our
personal distresses or in the distresses of a gravely suffering world, we may hope after all to
trace some retrieval, some creativity, some transformation. The biblical saying, ‘Leave your
country’, can refer not only to geographical manoeuvres, but to the closed country of
disappointments, of burned fingers, of partly atrophied hearts.⁸⁵

⁷⁸ “She’ll Be Right”, 3.

⁷⁹ “The Wars of Love”, 1995, 2.

⁸⁰ “Poemind”, 17.

⁸¹ “Dinny Homily”, 2.

⁸² “Poemind”, 4.

⁸³ “A Requiem for Judas”, *Madonna*, June, 1994, 5,

⁸⁴ “Bethany”, 2.

For Steele the belief that God will sponsor these transformations is something to be claimed, proclaimed, celebrated if not by God himself, then by his spokesmen. Sometimes for Steele they are prophets:

what Ezekiel's prophecy claims is that we need not be disabled by the contemplation of life's distresses: and that, for every entrance into dismay and despair and callousness, there are corresponding exits. 'I will open your graves and have you rise from them', says the prophet. He is talking about the dark spaces, the black holes, in our own personal lives.⁸⁶

Frequently they are the disciples: "St Paul's claim that God is... making things work together for our good...";⁸⁷ often they are priests: "the task for the priests of the true God is to celebrate and proclaim...";⁸⁸ "Our [Jesuit] project is to help to celebrate...";⁸⁹ "We were ordained to celebrate, sacramentally and otherwise...";⁹⁰ "priesthood celebrates...".⁹¹ Sometimes they are groups of people: "We make the claim that in spite of the vilest and most heartbreaking things that can happen, the Father of all vitality ensures...".⁹² And often they are artists: "Dante refers to 'the Love that moves the sun and the other stars'. ...And when he says this, Dante... is... claiming what Christianity has always claimed...".⁹³

One other matter should be mentioned with respect to Steele's understanding of the proclamations on behalf of God, the Celebrant. Steele also holds that the powers of evil endorse negative and erroneous claims that dismay and despair can never be transformed into their opposites. He warns that "[the cry of the pagan] proclaims that our lives are driven by forces... which do not care about us...".⁹⁴ This conviction

⁸⁵ "The Abraham Within", 1996, 2.

⁸⁶ "5th Sunday", Newman, 1993, 2.

⁸⁷ "She'll Be Right", 1996, 1.

⁸⁸ "Servants".

⁸⁹ "Jesuit Family", 1987.

⁹⁰ "The Consecration of the Commonplace", 1988, AJAF vi, 2.

⁹¹ "Priesthood as Prophecy", AJAF vi.

⁹² "Realms", Washington DC, 1994, 4.

⁹³ "Power/Wisdom/Love", 1995, Newman, 1995, 2.

⁹⁴ "So it Goes", 1996, Newman, 1996, 1.

will be treated at length in the discussion of the tension between what can be seen as divine radiation on the one hand and malign radiation on the other.⁹⁵

Steele's view of God's celebratory character and action shared with Christ:

Just as God for Steele is the "Festival of our lives", and the priest officiating at a Mass is the "Master of ceremonies", so Christ is "the primal priest",⁹⁶ and "the festival of the ages". While holding these views as to the celebratory attribute of Christ, however, Steele does not gloss over Christ's death in order to rejoice in his resurrection. Instead he gives equal weight to the death and resurrection of Christ, eschewing, in his words, "any glibness" about the death because of the resurrection.

Christ is the Incarnation of the God who, as we have seen Steele claiming, "will destroy the whole [society]".⁹⁷ He sees Christ as a man "whose world certainly fell apart... during his life, decisively at his death"⁹⁸ and yet even before he begins to consider the resurrection Steele finds some benefit 'coming through' from the death. He says Christ is the one who "blesses dying with his being"⁹⁹ and insists that Christ

is rescuing death as a reality which can be one of God's, not one of the devil's. ...the side of death which is a yielding in trust to the Father of one's whole being, the side of death which is a blessing and a vocation, has to be retrieved. Christ blesses dying with his being...¹⁰⁰

At the same time Steele regards Christ resurrected as the Incarnation of the one who has mastered death. He is "the loving Lord of drastic situations";¹⁰¹ he is "the radiant life-giver",¹⁰² he is "God's triumph".¹⁰³

⁹⁵ See below p.202.

⁹⁶ "Priesthood".

⁹⁷ "Steerage", 14. See above p.173.

⁹⁸ "Hopeful", 7.

⁹⁹ "Steerage", 13.

¹⁰⁰ "Steerage", 13.

¹⁰¹ "Bethany", 3.

¹⁰² "Stills: 4. The Doctor is Here", *Madonna*, August, 1985, 8.

¹⁰³ "Poemind", 17.

Since Steele believes that “there will probably never be a resolution in this life of the sway back and forth between a *theologia crucis* and a *theologia gloriae*”,¹⁰⁴ his understanding of the theology of the cross becomes inseparable from the promise he holds to in the resurrection. He writes:

More: each of these experiences of Christ’s, a little death in itself, becomes a part not of doom but of vocation, becomes heavy with promise. Without any glibness in the face of the obscenity of the Passion, one must still say that here we have disclosed again and again that *nothing* in life is doom. Our unconverted hearts cling ferociously, and self-laceratingly, to the conviction that doom is a reality, and that its evidences are all about us and all within us. Christ denies this, and the resurrection is the Father’s vindication of the denial.¹⁰⁵

Steele stresses the relevance of the death and resurrection for the possibilities of personal transformation in the day to day existence of the individual. He insists that:

We did not celebrate, at the Easter Vigil and on Easter Sunday, the retrieval from death of a completely distinct individual, however excellent he might be. We did not light the candles... to remember someone *else*. We did it because what he said is true: that his story is our story, we are branches of himself the vine, and our fortunes are organic to his fortunes, his being raised is the dynamic through which we are being raised.¹⁰⁶

For Steele’s “we are being raised” one could read ‘we are being transformed throughout life and raised eternally’, especially in the context of his references to the vine which on another occasion he refers to as “the great Vine, [which] brings for survival, and for celebration.”¹⁰⁷

Steele not only regards Christ as Celebrant because of the death and resurrection, he also sees Christ as Celebrant during his earthly life. He speaks of “the Lord’s celebrant style among his followers”;¹⁰⁸ and he interprets the incident of the raising of Lazarus not only as an instance of Christ’s retrieving role but as Christ’s opportunity to claim

¹⁰⁴ “Eagle”, 15.

¹⁰⁵ “Steerage”, 13.

¹⁰⁶ “Easter Vine”, Georgetown, 1994, 2.

¹⁰⁷ “Valete Newman 1993”, 2. q.v. “Wield of a Life, Wield of a World”, Dahlgren, 1994, 1.

¹⁰⁸ “Fr. John Casey S. J., R.I.P.”, 1.

and proclaim that ““this sickness... is for God’s glory, so that through it the Son of God may be glorified”” and that as Steele himself proclaims:

Jesus the Lord has experienced just such a mess [as those evident in life today], has acknowledged the experience, and has acted so as to guarantee that when this comes our way, he will not step away from us , and that he will give us the power to turn even this muddled, bitter, and often revolting business to a good result. The gospel is about Jesus in the middle of mortality’s mess: but is also about Jesus’ deploying his Father’s loving power to bring something permanently good, eternally good, from that mess.¹⁰⁹

As a Celebrant Christ is frequently described by Steele in the act of saying or claiming or proclaiming or celebrating. Steele speaks of “the Lord’s claims about himself”;¹¹⁰ “this is what Jesus claimed...”;¹¹¹ Christ after all is he who “claims and proclaims, but he does not explain... that all that is deathly in our experience can be made lively by his Father”.¹¹² Christ, Steele says, “celebrates himself”: “He habitually stresses how good it is for the others that he should be among them.... At the same time he writes large... that he himself must go... into death... if he himself is to be truly available. ... It is not only at the Last Supper... but all through his relationship with his disciples that they are being required to ‘celebrate the death of the Lord until he comes’”.¹¹³

Ultimately after Paul, and following the proclamation of the liturgy, Steele claims that of Christ “we will say that it was ‘for us and our salvation’ that he lived his life, died his death, and was brought unkillably to life once more in what we call his resurrection”.¹¹⁴

Steele’s view of the Scriptures as reflecting the celebratory character and action of God and Christ:

¹⁰⁹ “Bethany”, 2.

¹¹⁰ “The Lord Within and Without”, Newman, 1996, 2.

¹¹¹ “Power/Wisdom/Love”, 2.

¹¹² “She’ll Be Right”, 3.

¹¹³ “Hopeful”, 12.

¹¹⁴ “The Wars of Love”, 2.

Steele emphasises the proclaiming action of the gospels: “In the Prologue, John... proclaims...”.¹¹⁵ What, Steele says, is proclaimed is that Christ vindicates “the notion that the world make sense...”;¹¹⁶ that Christ claims “that death is not a retort upon the meaning of life, but an indispensable part of the meaning of life”;¹¹⁷ that God’s *metier* is transformation:

The new testament keeps insisting that God is adequate to the brutal circumstances of our need, is ‘what will suffice’, not by circumventing it but by transforming it.¹¹⁸

and that:

In the Prologue, John, having acknowledged how circumambient the darkness can be, and how stubbornly we can head for it, proclaims that this death wish, this black tropism, has been thrown over after all by the Lord whose patience was more potent than our headstrong plungings.¹¹⁹

As we saw apropos Steele’s views of the incident of Christ’s raising of Lazarus, individual incidents in the gospels appear to Steele as celebratory events. The “whole rationale” of the event of the transfiguration is for Steele “a celebration of life”: “If it is in the teeth of death that life’s affirmation is made, life, says the occasion, will have the last word”.¹²⁰ And thinking of the Last Supper, where, Steele says, Christ drank the wine, in both grief and joy,¹²¹ Steele claims that

one thinks of a milieu of intense foreboding and intense resolution: even this final meal is innately festal. ... A Last Supper is remembered and re-celebrated not only for the sake of what then occurred, but for the sake of the meaning which men have made of it from the first.¹²²

Translating these affirmations of life over death, of order over mess, into contemporary mode, Steele entitles a homily “She’ll Be Right”, “an expression”, he

¹¹⁵ “Eagle”, 23.

¹¹⁶ “Hopeful”, 8.

¹¹⁷ “Hopeful”, 8.

¹¹⁸ “Poemind”, 10.

¹¹⁹ “Eagle”, 23.

¹²⁰ “Blinding Lights”, 11-12.

¹²¹ “Steerage”, 14.

¹²² “Singing”, 20.

says, which approximates in local idiom, to St Paul's "We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who have been called according to his decree".¹²³ Steele is not using the argot for local colour; rather he stresses the concept of "She'll Be Right" for what it is, a proclamation that things will turn out to be all right. Steele, as we have seen, repeatedly stresses Paul's proclamations of the same assurance as his precedent. He refers repeatedly to Paul's "We know that God makes all things work together for the good of those who have been called...", which Steele calls "St Paul's claim that God is ...making things work...".

Steele's treatment of God's and Christ's celebratory attribute as imparted to Edmund Campion, Jesuit saint and martyr:

Addressing various Jesuit congregations at different times, on the subject of Edmund Campion, Steele has been careful to nominate exactly what it is about Campion that he finds it appropriate to celebrate. As we have seen, on one occasion, Steele finds in a jesterly way that "any apt celebration of Campion should include an element of being troubled, of being provoked".¹²⁴ On a second occasion, as we have also seen, he finds it appropriate (given that he has been thinking about an imminent beatification of a twentieth century Jesuit and the daunting fact that he now lives in the heavenly milieu) to give an account of Campion's life troped in terms of the Pilgrim's journey: Campion's leaving that which is familiar to him, being drawn by, magnetised by God and finally being repatriated.¹²⁵ In addition to these perspectives on Campion, Steele has much to say about "celebrating the feast of a Jesuit"¹²⁶ and exactly what is implied in such a celebration.

¹²³ "She'll Be Right", 2.

¹²⁴ "Edmund Campion", circa 1970, 1.

¹²⁵ "Choices", 2.

¹²⁶ "Campion".

As we have also seen Steele does not condone as appropriate celebrations of Campion day which include cherishing the notion of Campion as “finely ascetic, the Jesuit armoured in his own excellence, the priest distilled into a private sacrifice, the martyr exquisitely fitted for drama”;¹²⁷ the tendency to separate Campion from his earthly political and social involvement;¹²⁸ the imitating of Campion (since only an imitation of Christ, and Christ remembered as the disciple of the Father, is valid).¹²⁹ Rather what Steele has in mind in celebrating Campion’s day includes: recalling Campion’s choice for priesthood by which (while “There is no succinct way of putting the whole tale of priesthood as a vocation”) Steele means his “being gathered into the celebration of Christ’s sacrifice, His hallowing, taxing and blessed endorsement of all that He does for his people - ...”. This Steele asserts is a vocation “calling, as our Lord called, for the awed adoration, filiation, and celebration that our Lord displayed”.¹³⁰ Celebrating Campion’s day also includes recalling Campion’s choice of apostolate. Since everyone is called, Steele says, to be a disciple of Christ’s, but only some “have the great privilege of being convinced of it”, such a summons therefore “entails sacrifices... mutations, transformations” but is followed by “blessings... to help us proclaim no One less than the source of all vitality, joy and blessedness”.¹³¹ Celebration of Campion’s day also entails, Steele says, recalling his choice for martyrdom in the sense of being “gutted by the Prince of this World” so that like Christ in “the filth and agony of execution” he is instrumental in “telling... us that ... in our ultimate privation, we were mysteriously blessed, and one day to be vindicated. ...that the Father who gave us... immeasurable joy would be... our Vindicator”.¹³² Campion day, in other words, is to be celebrated for the ways in which Campion was himself a Celebrant: plying his priestcraft in the Mass; proclaiming Christ’s vitality; coming through from being “gutted by the Prince of this World” to being vindicated by the Father of “immeasurable joy”.

¹²⁷ “Edmund Campion”, 1.

¹²⁸ “Edmund Campion”, 2.

¹²⁹ “Edmund Campion”, 3.

¹³⁰ “Choices”, 3.

¹³¹ “Choices”, 3.

¹³² “Choices”, 4.

A further application of the celebration of Campion day is to be found in the early homily “Campion”. Here Steele, reminding his Jesuit congregation of their practice of “praying... through the saints” - (“asking to be sustained through the prayers of people whose stature we haven’t matched, and don’t look like matching” and “asking with some confidence”) reminds the congregation that “This fraternity is itself a reproach to our own lack of stature, our lack of simplicity and courage and joy”. He recalls the Communion of Saints and the Society’s particular continuing fraternity with those saints. He then turns to the readings for the Mass which are recorded as beginning at Matthew, 10:17 (and following) and Romans, 8:31 (and following.) The homily responds to the essence of the readings - Christ’s warnings that people will be persecuted - “Brother will betray brother to death”,¹³³ and Paul’s reassurance to the Romans that since Christ died and was raised and continues to plea for them,

Can anything cut us off from the love of Christ - can hardships or distress, or persecution, or lack of food and clothing, or threats or violence; as scripture says: *For your sake we are being massacred all day long, / treated as sheep to be slaughtered?* No; we come through all these things triumphantly victorious, by the power of him who loved us.¹³⁴

Steele sees both texts as warranting “the simplicity, the courage and the joy - even when our own natural resources seem to be running out”. He interpolates Paul as stressing the paradigmatic transfiguring power of God: “It’s as if the forces of disappointment and cynicism and corruption keep bidding for allegiance, and God keeps outbidding them. He bids himself, and that is always a winning move”. Having completed this he returns to the opening placement of the homily within the context of the Communion of Saints. Campion, he says, died as those who died in totalitarian regimes during the Second World War, where Freisler, the Nazi judge, declared that “national Socialism and Christianity... both demand the whole man”.¹³⁵ Steele claims that it looks to him as if Campion, (who suffered a “small death” on converting to catholicism and who “came to what he called the ‘league of all the Jesuits in the world’”) “could have said of those fellow Jesuits - and could have said of us [Steele’s community] - what Helmut von Moltke said in his last letter to his wife before he was

¹³³ Matthew, 10: 21.

¹³⁴ Romans, 8: 35-37.

¹³⁵ “Campion”.

executed by the Gestapo: ‘You are not an instrument of God for making me what I am; rather you are myself. You are my thirteenth chapter of the First epistle to the Corinthians.’”

In so concluding the homily, Steele achieves several results. First he rejects the diminishing of Campion’s death as based on “mistaken ecclesiology” and claims instead that it is comparable to that of victims of Stalinist Russia or Nazi Germany, (and in von Moltke’s death he proffers a twentieth century instance of martyrdom); secondly in recalling von Moltke’s letter with its reference to First Corinthians he points to the transformation of that love into something perfected. Thirdly in taking his auditors full circle and figuring the present Jesuit fraternity as Campion’s “league of Jesuits”, Steele, with an intentional disregard of historical time, again attests to the Communion of Saints, and therefore to Campion’s relevance to those present. Only now at the end of the homily, Campion, first referred to as among those “whose stature we haven’t matched”, and the fraternity, first mentioned as itself a reproach to “our own lack of stature”, are now seen as part of that Communion of Saints where love, not reproach, is the last word. The homily moves from concentrating in the beginning on the lack of stature of the Society, to stressing, in the end, the love of Campion for the Society, even for the current members of the Society. In doing so it substantiates and completes the argument for Steele’s initial declaration that “penitence and cheerfulness” are both appropriate “when we’re celebrating the feast of a Jesuit”. Celebration in this case implies coming through from repentance to cheerfulness, or in the terms of the opening lines of the homily, from *reproach* to *encouragement*. In expounding on the ways in which Campion day may be celebrated, Steele not only shows Campion, himself, to have been a Celebrant, but also proclaims that there is there warrant for translating *reproach* into *encouragement*, and that even now Campion is still actively engaged in such transformation.

Steele’s treatment of God’s and Christ’s celebratory character and action as it informs the Spiritual Exercises:

Steele's writings on the *Spiritual Exercises* as they pertain to the Third and Fourth Weeks give specific directions as to how to practise celebration. In the Third Week, which considers Christ's Passion, Ignatius encourages exercitants to "draw [themselves] to grief and to pain and anguish, bringing to mind frequently the labours, fatigues and pains of Christ our Lord, which He suffered from the moment when He was born up to the Mystery of the Passion in which [they] find [themselves] at present".¹³⁶ The relevance of this experience for Steele, which is no more nor less than an orthodox relevance, is that such an identity with the suffering Christ becomes the basis for the enduring of personal crisis and personal suffering:

The being un-manned in the Garden, in the courts, under torture, under desertion, through execution - all this brings to terrible concentration the various ways in which Christ has been un-manned before, and every person is throughout life....¹³⁷

Ignatius' Fourth Week enjoins the exercitant "to consider how the Divinity, which seemed to hide Itself in the Passion, now appears and shows Itself so marvellously in the most holy Resurrection by Its true and most holy effects".¹³⁸ These effects Steele understands as Christ's "being sustained by the Father throughout these [tortures, which] is tantamount to a promise that so can we be, so will we be".¹³⁹ Most importantly of all in the *Exercises*, the *Contemplatio ad Amorem* which is usually offered at the end of the Fourth Week translates the contrasting experiences of Weeks Three and Four into one of joy, and exultancy. This is how Steele, with some help from Auden, sees it:

The note of elation that pervades the Bible, through all the blood and the bitterness, is there because of the things instanced in the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*: that nothing in me and nothing in the world is outside the ambit of God's creativity and, finally, of his joy.

What we have is a God so incurably idiosyncratic as to cherish a world which persists in ignoring or rejecting him, a God who could never learn anything except how to give.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁶ *FlemingSpEx*, 122.

¹³⁷ "Steerage", 13.

¹³⁸ *FlemingSpEx*, 132.

¹³⁹ "Steerage", 13.

¹⁴⁰ "Steerage", 18.

The *Spiritual Exercises* in their Third and Fourth Weeks respectively take the exercitant through the sorrowful event needing celebration (as Steele says “Paul’s injunction is to ‘celebrate the death of the *Lord* until he comes’”¹⁴¹) and the joyful resurrectional event requiring celebration. This relationship between death and resurrection becomes, for Steele, the paradigm for that between despair and hope and for that between what he refers to as com-mortal conditions and convivial ones.¹⁴²

Steele’s treatment of God’s and Christ’s celebratory attribute as it informs his own poetic practice:

In 1962 Steele saw that the poet celebrates as follows:

[The poet’s] sense of humour will save him then from scrapping the poetic enterprise as a mistake..., and he will begin to see the creative side of the thing, the side of celebration. ...he will come to see that one real poetic concern is with... giving us back our love of the verb ‘to be’. In this sense a man’s poetry begins to have worth at the moment he sees the point of the liturgical phrase, “we give you thanks for your great glory” - at that moment, that is, when he begins to celebrate the value of things simply because they exist; to exult in that core of goodness which none of evil’s ravages can impair.¹⁴³

Since writing these early views on celebration and the poet, Steele evinces a strengthening of his conviction of the poet’s obligation. “‘Bless what there is for being’ is God’s instinct, the poet’s charge”,¹⁴⁴ he says ten years later, and his mature critical work abounds in instances of his finding this obligation fulfilled in prose and poetry alike. He writes for instance that George Steiner’s “*Real Presences...* is as tellingly a celebration, a *laudatio* of artistic experience”;¹⁴⁵ that “Hecht’s *On the Laws of the Poetic Art* and Heaney’s *The Redress of Poetry* join the company of earlier

¹⁴¹ “Poemind”, 17.

¹⁴² “Poemind”, 5.

¹⁴³ “Time-Death and the Modern Poet”, *Twentieth Century*, XVII (Spring, 1962), 8.

¹⁴⁴ “Pen”, 9.

¹⁴⁵ “Strangely Enough: George Steiner’s *Real Presences*”, 224.

celebrations of poetry”;¹⁴⁶ that “Hopkins [is] ...savourer and celebrant”.¹⁴⁷ Steele comments regarding Auden’s verse “Bless what there is for being” that “That is the nerve of poetry...: praise”;¹⁴⁸ he says that when Heaney writes “a sonnet out of love for a dead relative or a living friend, he is blessing them with the little ritual of this old form, and blessing it with the treasured ones whom he consigns to its keeping”;¹⁴⁹ he endorses Brodsky’s own “‘art is... not an attempt to escape reality but the opposite, an attempt to animate it”;¹⁵⁰ and speaking about Yeats but with Walcott in mind, Steele says: “We want to hear his hurt said in such a way that we know in it something of our own: and in the good saying of that hurt, something of our healing. What is on offer from Walcott is there on those terms”.¹⁵¹

It is not uncommon for a writer or critic to recognise and praise the celebratory activity of another writer. Steele says of Buckley’s criticism, for example, that the many essays “are often instances of the *laudatio*” which incidentally calls for “the greatest available precision”.¹⁵² Bruce Bennett finds Peter Porter’s verse “celebrating the revealing accidents of everyday discourse”¹⁵³ or fostering “a host of celebrants”. Bennett also finds that a Porter poem essentially “celebrates energy, desire and inventiveness while death lurks around the corner”, which raises the question of the particular nature of Steele’s vision of poetry as celebratory and his understanding of what that celebratory activity is. Let us return to Steele’s thinking on “death” and “resurrection”.

Death:

¹⁴⁶ “Lyrical”, 38.

¹⁴⁷ “Lyrical”, 40.

¹⁴⁸ “Poems and Prayers”, 1. Steele cites from Auden’s “Previous Five”.

¹⁴⁹ “Nobel SH”, MS 2.

¹⁵⁰ “Brodsky”, 17.

¹⁵¹ “The contours of exile”, 36.

¹⁵² “Buckley’s Anamnesis”, 135.

¹⁵³ Bruce Bennett, *Spirit in Exile: Peter Porter and his Poetry*, Oxford University Press, 1991, 51.

Bennett's implication is that poetry can still rejoice as trouble looms. For Steele, this is not the whole extent of the matter. Poetry does not celebrate while the going is good, while, death, for instance, is close but still at bay, while it still "lurks around the corner". Steele sees it as the poet's task to celebrate, affirm, proclaim, rejoice, bless, even as, and especially as, death, depression, dismay, bewilderment, betrayal, present themselves. For Steele as for Bennett, Porter is Celebrant,¹⁵⁴ sometimes "warily celebratory",¹⁵⁵ but for Steele, Porter is Celebrant in the particular sense that "he is the herald of a residual joy in the midst of disaster".¹⁵⁶ This is what Steele means when, speaking of Porter's frequent preoccupation with death, he names Porter a Celebrant. He says of Porter:

We are so accustomed to poems which speak, in many traditions, about death, that it is easy to forget that all of these are talking about a 'beyond' - not a life beyond death, but death itself. None of us has been there... With Porter, one feels as if he has been there, not only in the vicarious sense that he writes often of the dead, but in the sense that he knows 'Zero at the bone'.¹⁵⁷ And yet it never feels like 'deathly' poetry, as, say, Kinsella's or Larkin's can. This is not because cheerfulness keeps breaking in, which it by no means always does, but because although death's horizon pangs him so much of the time, his sensibility is flooded with things which count against death. Death constantly reaches towards him, but it always has to reach.¹⁵⁸

"Death's horizon pangs him so much of the time" could be Steele on Steele. He has spent time contemplating the deaths of those who have, in life or literature, been of significance to him. Of *Campion's* he says: "And there was the same dreadful loneliness that comes when reason will not do, and generosity will not do, and patience will not do, and wisdom will not do: when only death will do";¹⁵⁹ of Mandelstam's: "Mandelstam, with the other millions, went into a worst-than-Stygian stream";¹⁶⁰ and generally of dead "storied and celebrated ones", but with Buckley in

¹⁵⁴ q.v. Steele, *Porter*, 90: "the modes in which the world is alluded to, pried at, celebrated..."; and p.7: "[poems] which celebrate the recovered presence of artists in their work".

¹⁵⁵ Steele, *Porter*, 29.

¹⁵⁶ Steele, *Porter*, 48.

¹⁵⁷ Steele cites Emily Dickinson, "A Narrow Fellow in the Grass", *Complete Poems*, ed. Thomas H. Johnson, Faber and Faber, London, 1975, 459.

¹⁵⁸ Steele, *Porter*, 51

¹⁵⁹ "Campion".

¹⁶⁰ "Hurt", MS 12.

mind, he says: “there is an element not only of the affronting but of the outrageous about the exilic death of those who have immortalised themselves to us”;¹⁶¹ and of Brodsky’s he says: “Still, you are off, as the master said of another, / at the dead of winter”.¹⁶² But there is more than sorrow and grief to Steele’s preoccupation with death.

Steele marked the twenty-first anniversary of the death of Albert Camus with an article in which he speaks of death as having “exercised Camus’ thoughts from the time of his earliest writings: death as... the meaning of our daily-received metaphor, the night”.¹⁶³ This is true also for Steele but his perceived reason for Camus’ preoccupation with death can say much about Steele’s own obsession. Steele says of Camus that:

If he was absorbed by the topic of mortality, it was because the passion for life - his own and that of others - had a constant sway over his imagination. He scorned distaste for life, and he scorned illusions about death.

The second part of this statement is true also for Steele as is testified by his own aphoristic warning to himself: “I cannot look forward to life everlasting if I do not look forward to life”;¹⁶⁴ but the first part of Steele’s comment on Camus, his recognition of Camus’ “passion for life” is a recognition of something which in finding in others he fails to find in himself. Not having this passion temperamentally, (“I have rarely wished to be either older or younger, but I have often wished to be more or less alive”;¹⁶⁵ “I live in a cool climate”;¹⁶⁶) Steele nevertheless wishes to have it, or at least knows that it is a desirable thing to have. The aphorisms again: “Nietzsche: ‘One should part from life as Odysseus left Nausicaa - with a blessing, but not in love.’ I do

¹⁶¹ “The contours of exile”, 36.

¹⁶² “In Memoriam: Joseph Brodsky”, *Eureka Street*, 6, 2 (March, 1996), 23.

¹⁶³ “Camus, Twenty-Five Years On”, *Quadrant*, 25, 9 (September, 1981), 31.

¹⁶⁴ “Pen”, 15.

¹⁶⁵ “Pen”, 7.

¹⁶⁶ “Reveries”, 4.

not think that Christ agrees”;¹⁶⁷ “The historic attempt to bless the world daily is one’s share in God’s radical creativity”.¹⁶⁸

Readings of Steele’s oeuvre signal a personal melancholia, a throttling depression having its sway over an adult lifetime. Hence we find numerous references to depression and to those whom Steele hails as fellow sufferers. Steele’s poem “To Robert Burton” addresses that authority on melancholy by requesting that he

...Consider then,
dead wit, physician, cleric, dead contemplative
of the riven heart and the drifting fancy, whatever
may bond us through the years.¹⁶⁹

With Hopkins in mind, but concerning Burton’s advice to the melancholiac, “be not solitary, be not idle”, Steele comments:

There is an inescapable irony in this when one thinks of the practice of poetry, since unless it is to be no better than the dressing up of received sentiments its making requires both becoming a solitary and becoming ‘idle’....¹⁷⁰

Additionally we find Steele writing in a review of a collection of the letters of David Jones: “Jones himself seems to have been... like so many other artists, the victim of that internalized rage which we call depression”.¹⁷¹ We also find Steele noting aphoristically: “Nowadays part of the journey is through the valley of the shadow of psychic death”;¹⁷² Steele citing in *The Autobiographical Passion* from Boswell’s Journals: “A total indifference as to all objects of whatever kind, united with a melancholy dejection. I saw death so staringly waiting for all the human race... I awaked in terrible melancholy”;¹⁷³ and commenting: “The poignancy needs no dwelling upon: and the condition, alas, is not so rare as to need much articulation”.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁷ “Pen”, 7.

¹⁶⁸ “Candle in the Wind”, 6.

¹⁶⁹ “To Robert Burton”, *Paradise*, 15.

¹⁷⁰ “Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Case of the Trumpery Priest”, *Scripta*, 8, 1 (1992), 170.

¹⁷¹ “David Jones Soldering On”, *Scripta*, 1, 1 (Winter, 1981), 48.

¹⁷² “Pen”, 6.

¹⁷³ *Autopassion*, 16. Steele cites from James Boswell, *Boswell in Extremes, 1776-1778*, ed. Charles Mc C. Weiss and F. Pottle. Heinemann, 1971, 80.

¹⁷⁴ *Autopassion*, 16.

We also find Steele saying apropos Herbert's poems: "Ferrar's publishing them has served many a dejected poor soul well...";¹⁷⁵ and remarking about Hopkins' nature: "If depression, that hostile mutant of a disease, consistently does anything, it reinforces the sense of solitude. It privatizes even those public by nature: and Hopkins was never that".¹⁷⁶ In his mini-autobiography Steele confesses that should he have been in certain ecclesiastical predicaments "knowing my temperament ...I would have slumped into depression...".¹⁷⁷ And in an article for *Quadrant* he describes the effects of an engrossing materialism by comparing it to personal depression. He refers to "what happens when one is in persistent emotional depression. Washing is too much trouble, shaving is too far-reaching, horizons close in, and then the walls. The milieu in many prisons is one of diffused depression, and what is most hoped for is sleep. An embraced materialism is something like that".¹⁷⁸ And in a recent poem "A Drink" he writes:

...you might
 Go back straight off to the downs of calm, expecting

 Placidity for the soothed body, a notch
 In the mind at another year dealt with, a shrug
 When the swing of a door cuts off the light and sound.
 As it is, you linger, an eye on the white movers,
 the *grand cru* of mortality filling your mouth.¹⁷⁹

When Steele declares it the poet's task to celebrate, (indeed when he follows the *Contemplatio ad Amorem* and finds it the individual's onus to give thanks) it is never naively, but with the familiar taste of the "*grand cru* of mortality", certainly of depression, perhaps of dismay, that he strives to mouth celebratory phrases such as: "Praise is not the aim of creation but its issue"; "The lapse of praise is already the lapse of love"; "God is what praise means".¹⁸⁰ Seasonally Steele's dismay could be

¹⁷⁵ "Silences", 16.

¹⁷⁶ "Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Case of the Trumpery Priest", 170.

¹⁷⁷ "Stay", 12.

¹⁷⁸ "A Slightly Crooked Line", 28.

¹⁷⁹ "A Drink", poem 71, *Potomac*.

¹⁸⁰ "Pen", 1.

seen as a spiritual desolation rather than depression, and in some cases there may be little difference between them.¹⁸¹ However this may be, thinking about the poem, “Hymn”, by A.R. Ammons,¹⁸² Steele writes that “Being of the earth, we have our seasons as pervasively as the earth has its: the seasons of enchantment and the seasons of disenchantment” as if he believes that the seasonal variations are not attributable to desolation and consolation but temperament: “My blood, or my genes, or a trick of the mind, cajole me more towards the second [disenchantment]: I live in a cool climate”.

In celebrating under duress himself Steele says apropos Ammons’ “Hymn”, that he understands Ammons’ “I will have to stay [with the earth...]”. He is also able to recognise the efforts of others who celebrate against the grain: Buckley, Steele writes, was “seasoned to dismay at himself and at others, but still pursuing joy in himself and in others”;¹⁸³ [Herbert] “had griefs enough, and was determined to seek [God] through them and in the teeth of them”;¹⁸⁴ and, as has already been seen, of Heaney writing on Zbigniew Herbert, Steele speaks of “the spirit in which [Heaney] refers to Herbert’s ‘unblindable stare at the facts of pain, the recurrence of injustice and catastrophe’ in the same sentence as ‘religion, literature and art... as a spiritual resource, helping him to stand his ground’”;¹⁸⁵ of Hecht Steele says: “he writes... looking for joy in the midst of pain”;¹⁸⁶ and “in Walcott”, he says, “there is much prizing, much laudation, but this will be imaginatively credible only if one senses that it is accompanied by an appraising, some tenting of grief near the quick”.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ William Johnson S. J. asked after a lecture on mysticism at St. Ignatius College, Riverview, N.S.W. (December 9, 1995) if depression could sometimes be a spiritual desolation, replied that he used to think that it was not the case but that now he does believe they are sometimes the same thing. Balthasar writes of a “christological unity of dispositions” which he says, “may then be attuned in a variety of ways in the believing person: times of predominant suffering may alternate with times of predominant joy; times of consolation with times of desolation; times of felt nearness to God with times of felt distance from God; times of exuberance with times of dejection. All of these are but variations of the Christian’s one fundamental disposition, which derives its real - and not only its supposed or contrived - unity from the disposition of Christ. (*Glorylord*, I, 253.)

¹⁸² Steele, “Reveries”, 3.

¹⁸³ “Buckley’s Anamnesis”, 136.

¹⁸⁴ “Silences”, 16.

¹⁸⁵ “Strain”, 66.

¹⁸⁶ “Silences”, 16.

Given these instances of Steele's observation of poets finding joy in pain, praise in the midst of sorrow, the question could be asked if this salvaging of something positive in the teeth of something negative is a part of Steele's own poetic practice? The answer will necessitate examining some of his poetry, in particular, some from 1995 and then other work from 1994.

Steele's poetry of 1995:

Steele's 1995 poetry, with the working title *Retrievals* is, in part, an observation of a nightmarish catalogue of societal evil. In "The Culler of Dreams" Steele writes of decimation and hatred :

'Arbeit macht frei' they intone, hatred
surging within them, as the mercury
shocks the glass.

In "The Guilt-Catcher" it is envy:

By night
he speculates on the scale of their laceration,
the warranting lecheries, the defamed
neighbours, the fostered lesions to hope.

unscrupulous rapaciousness in the "Red Queen":

She dines only on the living.

ensnaring compliance and flattery in "The Dutchy of Charm":

the spellbound attending upon your beaux yeux, the beglamoured
falling in with each half-formed wish,
the graces without any airs, the ravished acclaim--
once met, they are yours forever.

And of course, you theirs.

satanic deceptions in "Futility":

Sometimes, with eyes like pebbles, he reads in *The Book
of the Dead*, 'I have made no-one weep'
and goes to work as only he can.

¹⁸⁷ "Derek Walcott: Prizing and Appraising", 59.

What comes through the *Retrievals* collection, poem after poem is not a judgement from high moral ground, or (to use Steele's jesterly image¹⁸⁸) an attempt to move the world from some Archimedean point, but rather the pain of unrelenting evil. What convinces that the poet is severely beset by what he evinces is that each of these pieces concludes with a clearly indicated observation that the malevolence is a continuing factor. These are some of the final statements: "At dawn, / ...he rises and suits up for more of the same...";¹⁸⁹ "She grows, if anything, younger, / the gray eyes unshadowed, the brow serene, / the lips contained. She dines only on the living";¹⁹⁰ "The Master of Sayings rules up a new page";¹⁹¹ "The heart plays host to the guest who plans its destruction".¹⁹² The same expectation of a continuity of pain drives the two line poem "Attention":

Putting on the blindfold of sleep

I wait again for nightmare's volley.¹⁹³

And the two other two-line poems catch the intensity of the painful present without any thought to a cessation of it. As in "Memoir":

Downhill the sour water keens in its pit,

Calling to red tides running downhill.

and "Parity":

Inane furor of waves against a headland:

The freezing passion of envy mounting the heart.

For many years Steele was fond of quoting Sebastian Moore's claim that "the question 'Do I believe in the resurrection?' is really the question, 'Have I died?'".¹⁹⁴

Michael Ramsey recalls "The sight of God, wrote Westcott, is the transfiguration of man".¹⁹⁵ Twenty years ago, and in its own way reminiscent of Westcott, Steele

¹⁸⁸ Rahner uses it too; although in a different context. *Opportunities*, 202.

¹⁸⁹ "The Guilt Catcher".

¹⁹⁰ "The Red Queen".

¹⁹¹ "Futility".

¹⁹² "The Looking Glass Suite IV".

¹⁹³ "Attention".

¹⁹⁴ "The Moment of the Mass", 5.

¹⁹⁵ *Glorygod*, 62. Ramsey cites from B. F. Westcott. *The Historic Faith*, third edition, 1885.

declared “I do not know how to talk about the resurrection, and that is because I have not been changed enough”.¹⁹⁶ In many of these poems of 1995 Steele is the spokesman for, and the inventor of, characters and personae from the race that has not been changed at all. It is not surprising that in these examples of oppressive poetry about malevolent matters there is little to “spit into the eye of death”,¹⁹⁷ little talk of resurrection or its traditional associates, joy and light.

There are exceptions in the collection, “The Empire of Trash” evokes the meaningless of an imperial civilisation “dedicated to dissolution”. The poem proceeds by a negative route to celebrate the fact that the poem’s character, the envoy of the Empire of Trash, has failed in his mission to convert the *barbaroi* to the ways of his decadent civilisation. His message to his superiors

That the barbaroi
regard The Way with lucid contempt,
that they laugh at its proclamation and go on building,
that they are many, and have memories--

is sufficient to “unman” him but sufficient also to suggest that there are signs that the empire will not easily make conquests of the “many” who “have memories”.

“Palms”, “Brother”, and “Snowballs”, from the same collection, proffer within themselves something to be asserted, affirmed or celebrated. Some of the last lines of these poems, indicate the capacity of the poem or the speaker or the poet to “come through”, in Heaney’s sense from “constraint into felicity”: “Palms” concludes with the assertion of the palms’ regenerative durability:

The wind orchestrates their saying,
as Odysseus to Nausicaa,
‘I am stunned in spirit: even so is the palm’.
A phoenix every one, they are fearless
amidst the burning and, watched or unwatched, they flourish:
unbowed, greening, and flaming.

¹⁹⁶ “Steerage”, 15.

“Brother” is not a threnody for but an affectionate affirmation of the laconic nature of a brother, now deceased. The poem not only attests to the brother’s style in life but affirms his “haunting” presence after death, since silence was never for this man a sign of death. In what is a play on the names of Paul and Peter, respectively, the poet in a double gesture, compliments the deceased brother and humbles the living speaker.

There is, as your brooding gaze always implied,
Nothing to say. But as I back towards

Your veiled country, let me say only
That you were never slight, nor I the rock.

And “Snowballs” concludes with the affirmation that the thrower of snowballs who is at first “confused”, and later “as if reborn”, perseveres in his activity until

In the end,
Old and childish, he lobs a perfect sphere.

Despite these (and other) exceptions in *Retrievals*, many of the pieces in the collection show little evidence that the poet’s function is a celebratory one in the sense of his affirming that something is retrieved, saved, redeemed, salvaged or blessed. Rather, much of this poetry, by dint of its subject matter, (which, as we have seen, includes guilt, flattery, superficiality, futility, fear, hatred, envy, sloth), validates Michael Ramsey’s description of the “Old Testament doctrine” - “that virtue, Israel, the sanctuary and the Law, all bring down God or the Shekinah from heaven to earth, while sin and idolatry remove him”.¹⁹⁸ When, (in a prose piece) Steele tartly speaks about the “terms, and at what cost to Christ, it is possible for experienced adults to celebrate the presence of the Lord”,¹⁹⁹ he is speaking about the personal cost to Christ of securing the enduring presence of God in the midst of a race committed to unrelenting evil. *Retrievals* for the most part is Steele’s understanding of the late twentieth century’s version of the Johannine darkness into which, he believes, Christ came to translate death and despair into light and hope. As he says in a series of retreat notes written over twenty years ago: “The Shekinah, the glory of the Lord, can

¹⁹⁷ Steele, “Fortunate”, 30, cites from Anthony Hecht.

¹⁹⁸ *Glorygod*, 20.

¹⁹⁹ “Steerage”, 14.

come to seem nothing but a faded dream, or nothing but an attribute of a God very far away, very retired in the future. And so can its acute opposite, the pit of nightmare and of nullity”.²⁰⁰

There is, however, another sense in which the tentative title *Retrievals* may be more than apt for the collection. In his lecture, “Measures and Pleasures: Ancient Hopes, Modern Poems”, Steele leaves a discussion of the poetry of Billy Collins (where he regards Collins’ genre as not hagiography but as “plainly also a form of applause, of celebration on the rise”²⁰¹) and turns instead to Mallarmé’s dictum that poetry is “the language for a state of crisis”²⁰² and introduces Osip Mandelstam’s poem “The Stalin Epigram”. Steele proceeds:

This is my cue to introduce a second poem, one which is the antithesis of charming, and certainly written with an acute sense of crisis. The poem cost its author his life. In November 1933, when Stalin was like Death incarnate, eating his people by the millions, Osip Mandelstam, who did not customarily write ‘politically,’ had had enough. Contemplating the blend of sycophancy and state terror with which Russia was governed, he wrote [“The Stalin Epigram”].²⁰³

Citing Mandelstam’s poem in which Stalin is depicted in heinous manner, Steele reminds his audience that the leaking of the poem to the secret police caused the poet to perish in the Gulag, but then follows that grim report with the further observation that:

The poem like many others, was preserved by Mandelstam’s widow Nadezhda, as remarkable a person as Osip was a poet, and conceivably it was of some comfort to her in the long years to come to know that the poem on Stalin has become one of the indispensable residua of our so-often bestial century.²⁰⁴

Clearly this is also of some comfort to Steele and it contributes to a sense in which there is something to be retrieved or salvaged from the disaster - of Stalin, of the

²⁰⁰ “Singing”, 17.

²⁰¹ “Measures”, 3.

²⁰² “Measures”, 6.

²⁰³ “Measures”, 6.

poem's coming to the attention of the police, of Mandelstam's death, of Nadezhda's grief. Having set in motion a case for regarding the poem as a retrieval of something from the chaos, "one of the indispensable residua of our... bestial century", Steele proceeds not only to honour Mandelstam, but to plead a case for what he sees as a genre of poetry which is obversely related to celebratory verse, that is, the poetry of denunciation (for things like "various forms of sin and criminality" about which "we can do something") or the poetry of deploration (for those things, such as mortality, about which "we can do nothing").²⁰⁵ This is Steele's defence of such poetry:

It may seem strange to claim that one proper pleasure of poetry can be that of denunciation, but so it is. 'Righteous indignation' can of course be a self-serving demeanour in a writer as in anyone else, but that does not mean that there are no cases, or few cases, where something else is called for. No one doubts that poetry is often about its proper business when it is overtly relishing and celebrating; an immense anthology of good-to-excellent verse bent on just that could be assembled, rapidly. In those cases, things are being called by their right name... By the same token, the calling of odious things by odious names is not only good behaviour, it is sometimes morally demanded, if appropriately gifted people are to be found to rise to the challenge. Denunciation in short, can be a vocation, temporary or permanent: and that it is imperfectly observed and often abused makes it like other vocations rather than unlike them.²⁰⁶

As with the Pilgrim figure where Steele's poetry of expatriation was found to have a corollary in the poetry of outcry, there being an obverse relationship between the yearning of the former and the outcry of the latter,²⁰⁷ so there is in this poetry of "denunciation" a counterpart to the celebratory and positively affirming quality that Steele looks for in poetry generally. (Steele says of Swift that "Celebration and denunciation are his two preferred intellectual modes..."²⁰⁸) This is not to say, however, that there is nothing of a positive nature about Steele's so called poetry of denunciation. As Steele makes it quite clear in his paper when he returns to further

²⁰⁴ "Measures", 7.

²⁰⁵ In "Measures", 8, Steele explains: "Broadly speaking, the objects of denunciation, in poetry as elsewhere, are of two kinds -- those we can do something about, and those we can do nothing about. Amongst the first are the various forms of sin and criminality, which have been appraised with such clinical intensity by so many people for thousands of years. Amongst the second are all those features of our predicament for which the word 'mortality' is the most eloquent shorthand."

²⁰⁶ "Measures", 7-8.

²⁰⁷ "Eagle", 6. See above p.130, *n.* 192, and p.135, *n.* 213.

²⁰⁸ "Passages of arms", 32.

discuss Mandelstam's "The Stalin Epigram" there is a wholesomeness, a giftedness, courageous (and rash) in the denunciation of Stalin's totalitarian malevolence:

It is not good that vile behaviour go un-named, or that vile persons go un-denounced; and it is good that the expert and truthful deployment of verbal skill be relished - doubly so, in a regime of lies.²⁰⁹

Curiously the poetry of denunciation, which, in part, Steele's *Retrievals* collection is, features a figure who is the obverse of the Celebrant, that is the Denunciator, and at times the Deplorer, (as in Steele's "The Looking Glass Suite II" where the speaker says to Tweedledee or Tweedledum "Contrariwise, as you and your brother would say: / certain matters present themselves / for deploration".) Poetry of denunciation, however, also employs both the Jester and the Expatriate. Having stressed that "It is not good that vile behaviour go un-named, or that vile persons go un-denounced" Steele relates this process to the functions of the Jester and the Pilgrim. He writes:

however Mandelstam felt about it all, he was certainly furthering a tradition of which, in Rome, Horace and Juvenal were exemplars, and in Israel, Jeremiah and Jesus. If you elide from what we are accustomed to call The Classics the influence of its resident mockers, you take away half its brain and half its heart; and if you deny the Palestinian voices their recurrent 'j'accuse,' you cut the defining moral nerve of western civilisation.²¹⁰

Steele's reference to "resident mockers" can be read as resident *jesters* and his reference to "the Palestinian voices" speaks for itself as the outcry of the Expatriate as eloquently as does the poetry of Ovid, Dante, the Irish "beyond the pale", and Joseph Brodsky, all of which, at some point or other in his writings, engage Steele's attention.²¹¹ What he says here is that denunciation is as old as Horace and as current as the statehood of the Gaza, but what he implies here is that the poetry of denunciation negatively related as it is to the Celebrant, relates also to the Jester in that it opposes something. (Although where the Jester sets up contrasts, dialectical oppositions, and ironies, the Denunciator uses invective and speaks out directly

²⁰⁹ "Measures", 9.

²¹⁰ "Measures", 9.

²¹¹ q.v. "Hurt" in which Steele refers to Mandelstam and Dante, in addition to Kinsella and *Poems of the Dispossessed*.

against something such as folly, or someone, such as foolish prattlers.) And the poetry of denunciation also relates to the Expatriate in that it yearns for a more acceptable milieu or regime where those things being denounced - meaninglessness, superficiality, mediocrity, guilt, fear, envy and so on - are not accepted, let alone courted and feted. As such the poetry of denunciation, comprised as well of jesterly and peregrinatory elements, stands against sin and evil in the world in an attempt to retrieve it.

Applying the theory of Steele's lecture on the poetry of denunciation and deploration to the collection *Retrievals* it can be seen that the Denunciator repudiates sin:

...the scale of their laceration,
the warranting lecheries, the defamed
neighbours, the fostered lesions to hope ...²¹²

and derides meaninglessness:

...all is dedicated
to dissolution, each day a kicking of heels
until the night confirms

that love of darkness dear to the sound of mind,
the avid, lockstep waiting for
paper and hopes to crumple....²¹³

While the Deplorer grieves over "all those features of our predicament for which the word 'mortality' is the most eloquent shorthand", and refers to death as "the bony jubilant";²¹⁴ "the great pallium which fits us all, / Slung though it is from such bony shoulders",²¹⁵ he also bewails other occasions or circumstances "when human agency bonds with more arcane agencies - nature's, a devil's, a God's - to intensify our distresses".

²¹² "The Guilt-Catcher" .

²¹³ "The Empire of Trash".

²¹⁴ "Assuagements" .

²¹⁵ "The Course" .

The Deplorer also sorrows at the sway that Satan, figured as “The Master of Sayings”, “the Interloper”,²¹⁶ “the Prince of Rectitude”,²¹⁷ exercises over a tense and aggressive world:

...that pride reaches only as far
as you can spit, and that the oleander,
for all its beauty is bitterer still –
these are our analects, passed from mouth to mouth;
and once in a while, with fingers crossed,
‘In time the mulberry leaf becomes satin’.

If the Interloper were still endowed with something
resembling a heart, these jactations
would do it good – all but the last, which he
identifies as self-deception.
Sometimes, with eyes like pebbles, he reads in *The Book
of the Dead*. ‘I have made no-one weep’
and goes to work as only he can. The relief maps
unroll once more, nozzles dock
in freshly-released tanks, diplomats shrug....²¹⁸

Although less subtle than the Jester, the unseen Denunciator sets up an invective against folly. This invective is from “The Looking Glass Suite IV”:

You would think. To judge by the yarns in the daily kerygma
That raw-kneed devotees had been at the shrine
Of beloved Santa Stupidita, all year round,

The coals of their fervour kept red by the month’s events.
A friend, God rest him, accustomed to say that fool-proof
devices are foiled by a better class of fools,

May wonder these days at so many vindications.
To the Laodicean: count ten and, on turning around,
There within earshot will be some plonking instructor

²¹⁶ “Futility”.

²¹⁷ “Bracing the Hermit”.

Eager to write about the melee of Bears
And Bulls, the Valetudinous Perils of Ginger,
The Power of Positive Thinking, the Uses of Death.

Oh yes, they mean well, the whole boiling lot of them:
Her coxcomb is worn as a chignon, his as a cap,
And they stump with zest about our abutment upon

Paradise Lost, strewing their melting bon-bons,
Displaying their gift for rhetorical bricolage in
A percussion of slogans, a flambeau of pithy dicta,

A decoction of insights over the crackle of thorns.²¹⁹

And in the macabre world of these poems where hope, yearning,²²⁰ and questioning²²¹ are outlawed, Steele's Expatriate figure is represented by those "submissions" from "the Ad-Hoc Working Party / on unwarranted Yearning";²²² by "the hunger" of "Giacometti, / drawing his brother daily for years";²²³ and those "records" from "The Institute of Mal de Terre" which "should the planet be vacated, / all these data, sent before us, / will help us be at home elsewhere";²²⁴ while the paradigm of an unacceptable milieu is "The Empire of Trash":

Still, it is good to be coming home, where trash
has no need to be making room
for the votaries of spade and rake, addicts
of gleaming marble, polished bronze,
the spank of fountained water. At the heart

²¹⁸ "Futility".

²¹⁹ "The Looking Glass Suite IV".

²²⁰ cf. "The Mortality Sub-Committee":

... it's incumbent on this group
to address submissions from such other
quarters as the Commission for the Testing
of Moral, or the Ad-Hoc Working Party
on Unwarranted Yearning.

²²¹ cf. "The Looking-Glass Suite I":
she still contrived

to frame that novelty, a question ...

²²² "The Mortality Sub-Committee".

²²³ "Help".

of the Empire, all is dedicated
to dissolution, each day a kicking of heels
until the night confirms

that love of darkness dear to the sound of mind,
....

Malign and Divine radiation:

In the poetry of 1996 there is more light but still an awareness of the darkness surrounding it. Something said simply in “Sunrise” a poem of March, 1996 instances this:

I believe
in light and joy as the last word,
but wish that a brothel-keeper were not swinging
incense before the Grand Prix,

that nobody mentioned at dinner the million dead
for each of Stalin’s years in office,
that we had something more tasteful displayed to those
on the moon than the Great Wall, that morgue.

This coming so soon after the blackness denounced in the collection of 1995, and coming as it does, still interspersed with regret for civilisation’s propensity to ignore evil, is tantamount to a poet’s apology for not being able to write, at least not often enough, about that light and joy which, he believes, should be the last word; and for not, at least for some time, being able “to come through”, which is after all one of Steele’s expectations of art: “we look to all art in some measure to see the artist’s

²²⁴ “Mal de Terre”.

coming through, and we remember it with gratitude when that is what we have seen”.²²⁵

In the structure of Steele’s thought, the Celebrant operates throughout one of the projections from the theocentric structure of the radiating sunburst, but the sunburst can only radiate into the darkness.²²⁶ Steele’s concept of darkness, evil within or without, is the milieu or the environment in which the beset and belaboured Celebrant (and sometimes his colleagues, the Denunciator and the Deplorer) must operate. This evil Steele sees as some kind of malign radiation.

Leaving aside, for the moment, the “malign” aspect of the idea, the concept of radiation is one which occurs to that part of Steele’s mind which informs itself with scientific structures, borrows them, transforms them and incorporates them in his criticism. He describes Loren Eiseley, for example, as “filamental man” where filamental suggests having “both immense energies - as in those ‘filaments’, flames of gas in the sun’s chromosphere, which can flare out to 400 000 kilometres from the surface - and an essential fragility - as in the series of cells in some algae”.²²⁷

As we have seen Steele applies the nuances of the nuclear age with both positive and negative ramifications of radiation to his consideration of Porter’s poetry. Introducing an article on Peter Porter he writes:

But to our ears radiation is more likely to denote those rayings which we know as dark or light, as malign or benign. What we call “the nuclear age” may be little understood by most of us, but it is big with significance for all of us. A moment’s reflection shows us all as siblings of the ray. More than that: we know that controlled exposure to one kind of radiation may make for life, whereas uncontrolled exposure will make for death. Associating this with the singular powers of the laboratory, we can with a more ultimate

²²⁵ “Fortunate”, 30.

²²⁶ q.v. Steele’s homily, “Winter”, 1992, AJAF viii.

²²⁷ *Autopassion*, 46. In *Porter*, 67, Steele writes “The image of the incandescent coil, itself a bit bedazzling, is well-chosen, when we think not only of poetry at large but of Porter’s activities. It picks up his polar or tensional habit of mind...; it implies both resistance and receptivity; it is small-scaled but laden with power. One can see all of these attributes on display, and the coil-analogy vindicated, in many of Porter’s essays in lexical splendour ...”.

accuracy associate it with the more singular powers of the sun. But whether we think of nature's initiatives or of man's, we know that whatever radiates bears in it the potency of its source and the promise or menace of its identity.²²⁸

Elsewhere he says it aphoristically:

The radiances that do the damage, like many that do the good, are invisible.²²⁹

And of Samuel Johnson Steele asserts:

[He] carries himself with his usual air of being full of potential for either benign or dangerous radiation²³⁰

Or yet again, he uses the concept to refer to both physical and spiritual damage:

Perhaps one day we shall get rid of smog, or even... of the yet-more-lethal forms of physical pollution with which we surround ourselves. But there could then still remain the smog of half-truths, the tissue-rotting radiation of lies.²³¹

What Steele usually has in mind when he speaks in this way however is not only scientific but satanic phenomena. In this matter of satanic forces and consequent evil, Steele sees that the confrontation is often one between an apprehension of the satisfactions, accomplishments, pleasures and enthusiasms of the world on the one hand, and the deceptions of the devil on the other. This is expressed in the opening stanza of "Alternatively" from *The Potomac Sheaf* of 1994.

Agreed, that when the Prince of Darkness goes
his daily rounds, you can tell him
by the denial in his eyes. To breathe
distaste is what keeps him alive;
dismantlement's the whole agenda, feral
indignation all his pleasure.
Making the most of a good breakfast or
a clean catch on a sunny field,
congratulating the cherry blossom on bringing
its annual miracle off again,

²²⁸ "Radiations", 65.

²²⁹ "Candle", 6.

²³⁰ *Autopassion*, 60.

²³¹ "Reveries", 12.

clapping with all-but-Mediterranean zest
 when the plane touches down in Rome--
 it's all, the dark one says, no better than
faute de mieux. Like Henry Ford
 putting the T-model on the market,
 he offers things in any colour,
 so long as it's black.²³²

The confrontation between light and dark can for Steele be seen to take the form of a specific opposition between those “artists and others”, who, he says, “keep on trying to say” [that “The world is in many ways better and more beautiful than we can possibly say”] and “evil influences” which, he says, “our Lord went so far as to attribute to ‘the ruler of this world’, meaning not his heavenly Father but the devil who rejoices in our unhappiness and destruction...”²³³

Balthasar speaks of evil in terms of the potencies, seductions, threats, illusions, lies and the seeming inevitability of a “whole atmosphere that weighs us down” which he identifies as “radiating innumerable from a single central point”.²³⁴ Steele echoes Balthasar in his (Steele’s) “whatever radiates bears in it the potency of its source and the [promise or] menace of its identity”. Balthasar and Steele are talking about the same negative radiating force. Balthasar’s understanding of evil ‘powers’ becoming world powers and ideologies sits closely with Steele’s imaginative concepts in “Futility”²³⁵ where, in the genre of poetry of denunciation, the satanic “Interloper” is said to go “to work as only he can”:

The relief maps
 unroll once more, nozzles dock
 in freshly-released tanks, diplomats shrug,

²³² “Alternatively”, poem 40, *Potomac*.

²³³ “The Wars of Love”, 1.

²³⁴ Balthasar, *Glorylord*, I. 662-663, gives as his references Ephesians 2.2; Revelations, 13; John, 14.30 and 16.33.

²³⁵ “Futility”, (*Retrievals*, MS 1995) Other satanic qualities listed by Balthasar have parallels in the same collection of poetry: *seductive and threatening* have echoes in “Red Queen”: “She is on for any quarry that makes a move / in the scarlet halls of the heart”; *temptation*, *illusion*, in “The Looking Glass Suite I”: “The morning after an exit he tried to construe / as a change of scene”; or “One day, indeed, our egress will be divined, he said, as a kind of inspired blunder”.

palms-outward, at their opposite numbers.

More than once Steele reveals his hatred of military activity and in particular his abhorred fascination with the bitter irony that the bombing of Hiroshima occurred on the Feast of the Transfiguration. This is his poem “August 6th” from *The Potomac Sheaf*:²³⁶

You put an Ohio Blue Tipped kitchen match
To the black wick, and they are bonded in
A momentary fireball, each the catch
Of the other’s fervour. Time now to begin

The daily ritual, bread and wine on the table,
A tale to be told of murder and its work
Which, stultified and annulled, the spirit’s Babel,
is overturned by the life it could not burke.

And you think, as on each such date, both of the one
Soon to go the gallows-route, but shining
Briefly to hearten the few who had begun

To catch his version of love’s contagion - of him,
And of the flash-kept moment still refining
A sea of fire not even the damned could swim.

The bitter irony that presents itself to Steele is that Hiroshima was transfigured lethally on the day set aside to mark Christ’s transfiguration into corporeal luminosity before the dazzled eyes of Peter, James and John. He writes:

Every year, when August 6th comes around, I think as many must of the coinciding of two things: Hiroshima Day and the feast of the Transfiguration. They belong on the face of it in different milieux: one is utterly secular, the other a sacred fiesta. But my sense of reality is that the milieux are only intellectually, or imaginatively distinct. I do not believe in a godless world any more than I believe in a rainless Melbourne, though there are seasons to give one pause; and I do not believe in a wordless God any more than I believe in a

²³⁶ Poem 68, *Potomac*.

narcissistic Mother Teresa, whatever reservations I might have about some of her policies. When one gets August 6th, one gets the package.²³⁷

The extremity of the shock for one so struck with the co-incidence of the Transfiguration and Hiroshima is reinforced if it is remembered that Christian thinking about the events on the mountain (Hermon? Tabor?) hails the Transfiguration as having remarkable significance in proclaiming the glory of the cross²³⁸ and of Christ's resurrected life²³⁹ but also that in signifying that the earthly Jesus already participates in God's glory.²⁴⁰ Additionally the event has been heralded as for-showing the glory expected to be revealed and shared at the Parousia.²⁴¹ In *The Glory of God and the Transfiguration of Christ* Ramsey paraphrases Paul's conviction that

in the life, death and Resurrection of the Messiah, the hope of the entry of mankind into the radiance of the world-to-come is brought near, and at the Parousia the hope will be more than answered.²⁴²

And he recalls Paul's further conviction:

But Saint Paul goes on to make a bolder claim. Here and now Christians can see the glory of God, mirrored in Jesus Christ, and can be transformed into its likeness.²⁴³

Participating in a tradition that upholds the commemoration of the event, Steele has this to say:

The gospel story is one about Christ's becoming, for an unprecedented moment, radiantly luminous. It is impossible to picture this without theatricality. What is being signalled is, surely, a plentitude of life, just as our sun offers us all the conditions of our vitality in the form of radiant energy. For that one moment, the few disciples are being given access not

²³⁷ "Blinding Lights", 11-12.

²³⁸ *Glorygod*, 39: "[Saint Luke] says specifically that on the mount 'they saw his glory {Luke ix,32}, and it is he among the evangelists who deliberately makes the connection between the Transfiguration and the Cross explicit...."

²³⁹ *Glorygod*, 117: "Plainly therefore the Transfiguration prefigures a glory that lies in the future... Many scholars have held that the forward reference is to the Resurrection appearances."

²⁴⁰ *Glorygod*, 119. Ramsey writing on Mark's treatment of the event says: "On the mount of Transfiguration a veil is withdrawn, and the glory which the disciples are allowed to see is not only the glory of a future event, but the glory of Him who *is* the Son of God."

²⁴¹ *Glorygod*, 103. "[G.H. Boobyer] seems to the present writer to make good his main thesis - that Saint Mark regarded the Transfiguration as a foretaste of the glory of Jesus at the Parousia."

²⁴² *Glorygod*, 49.

²⁴³ *Glorygod*, 51.

just to the comrade and the brother and the mentor, but to the Lord - the Vitalizer, the Sun.²⁴⁴

Hence the congruence of Hiroshima and the Transfiguration emphasises for Steele the force of negative radiation at its worst literally in the obvious nuclear sense. But also figuratively it appears in the sense of the malevolent intent of one realm²⁴⁵ towards another, and theologically in the very absence of any evidence that humanity is in the process of being transformed (in Ramsey's phraseology) into any likeness of the glory of God.

Returning to Steele's "August 6th" it can be seen that his word play in this poem ensures that the contrast is between the "shining" one who radiates a "contagion" of love and the "flash" of the nuclear explosion, ("flash-kept" also because Steele's image of it is like most people's, kept in the memory of a photographic still), which, in being deathly and the obverse of love is reminiscent of Dante's damned. Ironically the speaker feels that it is the love, not the bomb that is a "contagion", and that it is a desirable thing to catch: "To catch his version of love's contagion". These are the thoughts running through Steele's (speaker's) mind as he lights the candles (with Ohio Blue tipped matches) before saying the mass of the Transfiguration on August 6th.

In a homily for the liturgical celebration of Christ the King at St Patrick's, Washington D.C., Steele reminds his congregation that "the Roman army was to do to Jerusalem the same sort of thing that Sherman did to Atlanta or the German air force did to Warsaw or the American Air Force did to Hiroshima" and further claims that in "the argument between one bound Jew and the military governor" the worldly-wise saw only one possible outcome. Giving over his historical catalogue of international brutality, Steele heartens his congregation with a contrast - that between

²⁴⁴ "Blinding Lights", 11.

²⁴⁵ q.v. "Realms", (St. Patrick's Church, Washington DC, 1994, AJAF viii), for Steele's views on this militancy.

the “worldly-wise observer” who sees Christ’s death as the world winning the battle, and a faith which knows that Christ “won the war”:

Paintings of the Resurrection show the Roman soldiers thunderstruck or recoiling, and in their beaten condition we are invited to see the beating back not only of the Roman imperium but of all the forces of death. ...Christ, the Way, the Truth, and above all the Life, engages, bloody hand to hand, with death, and is, once and for all, triumphant.²⁴⁶

This claim incorporates Ramsey’s interpretation of Jesus’ prayer²⁴⁷ as one existing on the level of the shared glory of the Father and the Son; on the level of the Son revealing the Father before men; and on the level of the human race participating, like the Son, in the love of the Father. And what Steele is saying in his homily for Christ the King is that “in spite of the vilest ...things that can happen” the human race, because of the Passion, will share in the glory of Christ and therefore of God.

Returning once again to Steele’s poem “August 6th”, it can now be seen that the speaker (more accurately, Steele himself) is the Celebrant both in the Mass said on August 6th and in the poem about it, of the triumph of God’s glory over evil. The drama of the poem can be seen to rely heavily on the concept of the glory of God as a benign radiating force and this, despite, or in the face of, negative radiation, is what the Celebrant, priest and poet, celebrates.

Steele’s “the one / Soon to go the gallows-route, but shining / Briefly to hearten the few” is reminiscent of Balthasar’s comment on the Transfiguration: “What we have before us is the very glory of God on its way to the Passion”.²⁴⁸ This correspondence between the event of the Transfiguration and the revelation of the glory of God is what is at the heart of Ramsey’s thinking on Luke’s account of it as “an inner crisis in the life of Jesus. The vocation of the Cross has been accepted; Jesus is communing

²⁴⁶ “Realms”, 4.

²⁴⁷ Ramsey gives his references as John, (xvii, 1-8,) (xvii, 9-19) and (xvii, 20-26).

²⁴⁸ *Glorylord*, I, 671.

with the Father, and His submission to the Father's will that he must suffer has its counterpart in the shining around Him of the radiance of the glory of God".²⁴⁹

"August 6th" is therefore a hugely celebratory poem in the thick of the poet's meditation on one of modern history's atrocities. It can only be so, however, because of something understood in the poem, or understood in the soon to be celebrated Mass in the poem, namely what happened after the completion of "the gallows route". "And then", as Steele says elsewhere, "there was resurrection".²⁵⁰ Or as he says in the Washington homily for Christ the King: "Every Sunday is a mini-Easter Sunday".²⁵¹

Resurrection:

"I want nothing to do with a God who would leave us in the dirt"²⁵² is one of Steele's quasi-apophatic celebrations of the resurrection. While Steele does not overlook the celebration of the resurrection as a jubilant transformation of Christ dead to Christ living, ("Resurrection is irradiation"; "resurrection is the embodiment of our dreams"; "Resurrection is the seventh day"; "Resurrection is the fruit of time";²⁵³) and as the promise of a similar transformation in people in the future ("et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum, et vitam aeternam";²⁵⁴) it is true that he does not know how to talk about the resurrection in a glib, triumphalistic interpretation of the event. The Jester is hereabouts again in that while Steele cannot consider the death of Christ without looking to the resurrection, neither can he rejoice in the resurrection without recalling the reality of the death of Christ. This latter state of affairs ensures that his concept of resurrection is not trivially celebratory. This is Steele's complaint:

²⁴⁹ *Glorygod*, 122.

²⁵⁰ "Hopeful", 17. q.v. "A Requiem for Judas", *Madonna*, June, 1994, 5, where Steele refers to "that dark celebration which turns to a bright one."

²⁵¹ "Realms", 4.

²⁵² "Stills: 7. The Sleeping Lord: Matt.: 23-27", *AJAF* iv, 3.

²⁵³ "Pen", 16.

²⁵⁴ "Silences", 16.

People talk, sometimes, as if any title like [“The God of Life and Death”] ...should prompt a quite even-handed discussion: as if it were possible, having said one’s piece with death in mind, to say a similar piece (slightly longer, perhaps) with life in mind. I don’t understand this at all....

The Christ who is really shown [as risen in the gospels] is not some glittering hero, restored like a decaying masterpiece to the original splendour. In the gospels there was no such original splendour, and there is no such restoration.

The Lord risen is a man scarred.²⁵⁵

Nor can he talk about the resurrection, if by that is meant something divorced from a consideration of the realities of day-to-day living. In rejecting any glib resurrectional celebration Steele is very close to Rahner who recalls that

Nietzsche said, people should be able to see [christians] as those who are redeemed. But I fear that we show no sign of this. How then are we to come to terms with the Easter we are celebrating?²⁵⁶

Rahner deprecatingly rejects what he calls “paschal highspiritedness” or “a tortured pretence of joy”,²⁵⁷ and advises an acceptance of darkness and an ensuing “empty form of Christian joy, the longing for joy, the desire for it, and therefore the readiness to accept it whenever it is disposed to come upon us, in whatever form, in whatever measure”. He develops the matter as follows:

If we admit our arid joylessness... then a first experience of joy does indeed come upon us....

...we can forget our own joylessness and try to create a little joy for others. If we succeed, it might mean becoming even more acutely conscious of our own joyless state. But for that very reason the otherwise dead joylessness nevertheless comes to life. And in this lively pain we begin to suspect what paschal joy might be and we wait patiently until God puts it into our heart as his gift, as that which alone enables us to rejoice with the joy that is identical with Easter.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁵ “The God of Life and Death”, *Madonna*, November, 1978, 11.

²⁵⁶ *Opportunities*, 35.

²⁵⁷ *Opportunities*, 35-36.

²⁵⁸ *Opportunities*, 36.

Steele also, and more than once, comments on Nietzsche's remark about joyless christians and claims that

it would have been more striking if he had meant by it that christians didn't have a puzzling look, hadn't had something strange happen to their faces. The trouble with them was that they knew whether to laugh or cry. And that doesn't help: all you get that way is variety, not transfiguration.²⁵⁹

And on another occasion Steele says:

Nietzsche said of christians that they didn't look as if they had been redeemed. Most of the time perhaps they don't, and this means not mainly that they don't look all that cheerful, but that they don't look all that strange. The thing that tells against our impressiveness as the witnesses of the resurrection we are all called to be is not our glumness but our banality. It is as if we suppose that the best we can hope for... were business-as-usual with occasional flashings-in and-out of the Spirit of Father and Son

The Spirit of the risen Lord acknowledged by the first christians was not a residual presence, or a substitute presence: it was the Spirited presence of just that Lord. And they had never known the Lord except in the warp and woof of life. He was the refutation of the notion that God is the God only for special occasions. The broken wall, the rent veil - these are graphic images of the Lord's determination, not to be less sacred, but to be less secluded, than we perpetually suppose - and wish - him to be. Much later, the terminology of "Real Presence" with respect to the Eucharist, would have its deepest significance when it was taken in as the God-given celebration of the God resolved always and everywhere to be really present.²⁶⁰

Steele's understanding of the resurrection implies that the Celebrant must not be a glum, banal fellow who on occasion either laughs or cries. Rather he must be jesterly, that is, puzzled, trying to figure the dialectical nature of death and resurrection, the "warp and woof of life";²⁶¹ and he must follow the way of the Pilgrim, where the daily conversion can now be imaged as a daily dying to an old self and a daily rising to new life - there being a metaphoric relationship between the Pilgrim's experience of a personal, daily change from deathly to lively enterprises and the Celebrant's

²⁵⁹ "Circus", 6.

²⁶⁰ "Steerage", 16.

proclamation of Christ's coming through from death to resurrection. Noting the functions of the Jester and of the Pilgrim, the Celebrant can set about his function of celebrating, not just on ritual occasions, not just on joyous occasions, but celebrating "the dying and the rising [which celebrating] is to take place in the penumbra of the everyday",²⁶² where "penumbra" is of special significance.

This "penumbra" - "the partial or imperfect shadow outside the complete shadow (umbra) of an opaque body, as a planet, where the light from the source of illumination is only partly cut off"²⁶³ - is seen by Steele as the partially illumined condition in which a community or an individual struggles to survive. As Provincial of the Society of Jesus, Steele wrote to the Australian [and New Zealand] members of the Society that "the Province is dying".²⁶⁴ He meant that members exit by death or other causes, but he also meant that personal stress, disconcertments, fears and angers trouble all members. And his directive, to see these problems as "a sharing in the 'dying state'... of Jesus" is preamble to his further observation that since "no two of us go about our dying in the same fashion, so no two of us walk our resurrectional paths in the same fashion...", and that there are more opportunities for conversion at hand: "I am frankly playing a hunch that some of us, myself included, are still more reserved than we need be about being swept into the heart of the Paschal mystery" and accepting "all the transfusion of love we need...."

If for Steele it is true that "Poets for thousands of years have seen their work as something intended to outface mortality", and if like Anthony Hecht he sees art as "a polemic against death and meaninglessness",²⁶⁵ it is important to indicate some of those occasions within his own verse where he successfully addresses this outfacing, this "polemic against death" (depression, dismay). In other words, Steele can see that "some crocuses are making a statement / Defiantly against the tossed-down snow / ...

²⁶¹ "Steerage", 16.

²⁶² "Poemind", 17.

²⁶³ *Macquarie Dictionary*. Writing elsewhere on the particulars of any individual's response to God, Steele speaks of the importance of such a response for "all who do not wish merely to inhabit a shadow-land ...". "Shaft", 4.

²⁶⁴ "The Society in Holy Week", n.d., AJAF ii, 1.

and plans / Are afoot, I believe, to evacuate the tombs”.²⁶⁵ The 1994 work, *The Potomac Sheaf*, written at Georgetown University, is unlike the *Retrievals* collection in that in the most part it indicates a period of reprieve from melancholy: “the mannikin of grief easing his fingers / for the next stroke”²⁶⁷ as he describes it in “Sunday Morning”. In this collection it is clear that while “A Drink” leaves the speaker with “the *grand cru* of mortality filling [the] mouth”, and while there are poems to denounce charlatany in the world and in the academy and to denounce overarching ambition unrelated to personal effort,²⁶⁸ there are celebratory, “resurrectional” poems that, like “Alternatively”,²⁶⁹ aim to outface death, depression, the devil, winter (literal winter and “the winter way”) and the maladies of “the company town of power”.²⁷⁰ This poetry pertains chiefly to friendship, art, the Mass and the *Contemplatio ad Amorem* of the *Spiritual Exercises*.

The poetry of 1994:

Friendship

“At Tim Healey’s Grave”²⁷¹ finds the speaker on Australia Day beside the thirteen-month-old grave of a friend and compatriot who was a former President of Georgetown University. The poem opens with colloquial familiarity:

We make a pair of sorts: me in my long
coat, and you in your long silence -
not that you’d long keep mum in any world:
and now on Australia Day I think
of your hulking frame *in patria* at last.

²⁶⁵ “Fortunate”, 30.

²⁶⁶ “Interruptions”, Poem 29, *Potomac*.

²⁶⁷ “Sunday Morning”, Poem 10, *Potomac*.

²⁶⁸ See for example, from *The Potomac Sheaf*, “The Academy of Contempt” published in Peter Porter ed., *Oxford Book of Modern Australian Verse*, Oxford University Press, 1996, 146-147) and also from *The Potomac Sheaf*, “Charlatans”.

²⁶⁹ “Alternatively”, poem 40, *Potomac*.

²⁷⁰ “Felicity”, poem 31, *Potomac*.

²⁷¹ Poem 4, *Potomac*.

The comically odd comparison between the speaker in his long coat and the friend in his long silence sits well with the colloquial “keep[ing] mum” of which the friend is declared not capable. The verbal playing with worlds, “in any world”, “Australia Day” (implying a relevance of the place to the friend), and “*in patria*”, implies a lighthearted disinterest in locations - the *patria* being not Port Phillip Bay, but heaven. One could regard Steele’s recollecting a deceased person’s hulking frame at his graveside as macabre, but it is tempered by the implicit envisioning of that frame as really elsewhere. Despite the drollery of the opening lines, things, the reader feels, augur ill.

The scenario is bleak: graveside in the dead of winter, the speaker great-coated and thinking as he sees a red-ribboned wreath on the grave, of the friend’s father and the blood he saw shed at Gallipoli:

Gone there a year and a month ago, you’ve left
a wreath propped at your gravestone, ribboned
with a red flash as bright as any your father
saw at Gallipoli. You weren’t
much for the bays, and I doubt whether you miss it.

The “freezing rain in the offing” and “a scurf / of old snow” beside the grave set the speaker thinking of George Herbert and his “‘The life of man is a winter way’”.

There’s a freezing rain in the offing here, and a scurf
of old snow edges the plot:
‘The life of man is a winter way’, as Herbert
cull’d from his parish, and ‘every mile
is two in winter’. The sleet persuades us all.

Despite the frolic of the opening stanza and the puckish notion of the wreath “propped at [the] gravestone”, one could be forgiven for anticipating a glum and miserable outcome from all this. And anyone not identifying the reference to Herbert as the clue to Steele’s “resurrectional” mentality could well be surprised by the jaunty rhythms depicting a squirrel close by the grave. This squirrel, the harbinger of Spring at exactly half-way through the poem, is also the harbinger of joy:

But nothing will get this into the head of the squirrel

that flirts on a trunk nearby. Slung
at the side of a building you dedicated, a welder
is spangling the air with sparks. Cocky,
for all the splint on his arm, a freshman lopes
to classes....

The fourth stanza startles the reader out of the wintry doldrums not only by the antics of the squirrel but by resuming the direct address to the dead friend. It now becomes clear that the address of the first stanza was not a funeral formality. The poem, it seems, is not a typical *in memoriam*. There is something of a memorial gesture as the speaker notes a building the friend dedicated during his lifetime. He refers to it not as a building that is being merely maintained or repaired, but as one that is curiously in touch with life, both that of the workman “Slung / at the side” and that of the “sparks” issuing from his equipment. Clearly and not for the first time, the speaker does not doubt that the dead man is also alive. The resurrectional optimism incidentally facilitates even the cheery observation that the freshman with the broken arm is nevertheless cocky as he bounds across the campus.

And then Steele returns to Herbert:

‘He begins to die
that quits his desires’, ‘The singing man
keeps his shop in his throat’, ‘The shortest answer
is doing’: from Bemerton to Georgetown
is an easy span when the spirit’s on the wing.

Herbert’s aphoristic encouragements to warranted yearning: “‘He begins to die / that quits his desires’”, and to positive action: “‘The shortest answer is doing’”, hearten the speaker who recollects them, and the mood is one of spiritual buoyancy: “the spirit’s on the wing”. The grave first beheld as traditionally headstoned and skirted with snow is now worded quite flippantly in a play on the university campus as “your old turf”. The spirit of mourning, if it was ever that, more appropriately the mentality of ‘paying respects’, is eventually transformed into light-hearted but purposeful barter:

A guest on your old turf,
I'll trade a prayer with you. ...

and Herbert, more specifically Herbert on hope, is given the last word:

and the one who said,
'Who lives in hope danceth without music.'

Art

"A Line from Jarrell"²⁷² is also addressed to a dead man, one whom the speaker has known only through his writing, especially the poetry. It commences:

'All that I've never thought of -- think of me!'
Amidst the forlorn women and children,
the bored and guilty soldiers, the stranded beasts,
up you cropped

"All that I've never thought of -- think of me!" is a line from Jarrell's poem "A Sick Child" - the child being a yearner after he or she knows not what. As discussed with respect to the Pilgrim's proneness for yearning, the child knows that "If I can think of it , it isn't what I want" and so his or her pleading to whatever or whoever *is* in the universe is in the form of "And yet somewhere there must be / Something that's different from everything. / All that I've never thought of - think of me!"²⁷³ Steele, however, turns the line with which he opens his poem into a kind of request from the dead poet for thought (prayer) for him. To which imagined request Steele's speaker replies that although Jarrell never knew him, he will have his prayers:

I never knew you,
but you've *carte blanche* to any of my
wits' drift or body's blundering courses,
what I hope God will take for prayer.

Although as with Healy, Jarrell, for the speaker, is dead but alive, and able to be addressed, this is not the main thrust of the poem. Rather it is that Jarrell, although

²⁷² Poem 54, *Potomac*.

²⁷³ Randall Jarrell, "A Sick Child".

not known to the speaker (“I never knew you”) was to him a felt presence whose very emotional strains were known:

Oceans away I saw
a regal strain in a democratic heart

....

Earlier the speaker makes the parallel claim that just as God has been unknown to Jarrell (“He was nothing to you”), Jarrell has been “bereft” of God but “untainted by the loss”. The speaker says to Jarrell about God:

He was nothing to you, and of me you thought no more
than Procopius did, or the Queen of Sheba,
yet the odd, seductive feature of your mind
was a hospitality belonging
to someone bereft and untainted by the loss.

The implication is that Jarrell is bereft of the knowledge of God and not conscious of the loss, and that the speaker is unharmed by not knowing the poet since his mind is present to him as a reader of his works.

This power of which Jarrell is bereft and the reason why the American is “untainted by the loss” is explained in Jarrell’s own terms, more precisely, with respect to Jarrell’s own verse, in the third stanza:

Tomorrow,
when Washington, for once harmless, explodes
in coruscation on the Fourth,
I’ll think of your woman at the local zoo,
aching for transformation, and
to be known by powers hardly to be named
unless in love’s fugitive accent.

When the speaker recalls Jarrell’s “The Woman at the Washington Zoo” (or says that tomorrow, he will recall her) we are reminded of outcry imploring a personal transformation from the creatures at the zoo, more literally from powers whose works she reads in the form of creatures at the zoo. She seeks, Steele’s speaker says, “to be known by powers hardly to be named / unless in love’s fugitive accent”.

Here the poem raises an issue which will be discussed further in Chapter Five. The poem is celebratory of the presence of God to all, but especially to such a woman, and to such a man as Jarrell whose character she is and who remains unable to name those powers which he knows. When Steele refers elsewhere to the Eucharist as “the God given celebration of the God resolved always and everywhere to be really present”, he is especially mindful that the claim “must be made... when such an affirmation in faith seems like heartlessness or insult to that enormous majority of people who can make no such claim, and who suffer, sometimes agonizedly, because this is so”.²⁷⁴

The Mass

Poems about friendship, art, and now thirdly, the Mass, reveal Steele’s Celebrant relishing transformation from death to life and the respective transformation of all attendant negatives to positives. “August 6th” has already been seen as a celebratory poem and it is joined by other poems in which the speaker has just “celebrated” or is about to “celebrate” a Mass. In “Felicity”,²⁷⁵ for example, Steele’s speaker begins to place hope in small signals that will ultimately herald the spring - a dramatic affair for anyone used to less spectacular seasonal changes than the commencement of “thaw” beside a frozen river. The occasion, however, is not yet “thaw” but merely the official end of winter:

Squirreled away in the dark of Pandora’s box
was hope, which still diffuses itself
like a half-forgotten scent. Its wraith drifts
about the Potomac’s bluffs today,
the last of winter.

The second stanza continues to rejoice in the coming season -

time’s up for those who won’t fall in
with young-eyed, unillusioned Primavera,
who’s had possession of these slopes

²⁷⁴ “Steerage”, 16.

²⁷⁵ Poem 31, *Potomac*.

aeon by aeon, though winter did its worst,

....

At the same time, however, this repetitive natural phenomenon bears metaphoric implications, implications even of Parousia. Because of the theoretical arrival of spring, “time’s up for those who won’t fall in” with the new season and ‘those’ we are told are from among the inhabitants of (Washington D. C. ?):

the company town of power with all
its aphrodisiac derangement,
its blow-dried hearts and virginal limousines,

....

“Life” we are told “is on”. The indications for such optimism, while they are there, are indications of things to come. As the speaker says the river is still “ice-chastened”:

whatever the ice-chastened river’s
hedging, life is on.

The third stanza finds the speaker returning from saying Mass at “the altar” and remembering accounts of the day Henry V was crowned, Passion Sunday, the same as the mass of the day. The weather, it is suggested, is also the same:

‘a sore, ruggie and tempestuous
day, with wind, snow and sleet.’

The correspondence of the day with that of Henry’s coronation day sets the speaker comparing Jesus’ story (as told in the Mass) with that of Falstaff:

It made good narrative, good theatre, like
the one I’ve just played through, with Christ
as jettisoned as any out-foxed Falstaff,
a young comer, an old player,
dumped alike for disposal.

Ultimately, however, it is the result of the Mass, that “good theatre” (“the one I’ve just played through”) that carries the speaker home in hope, “Esperanza and Nadezhda”. And the “happiness” is not on Hobbes’ terms but on Traherne’s:

If Hobbes,
describing happiness, thought it simply
‘restless desire of power after power,
that ceaseth only in death’, Traherne
was engulfed by desire that ‘the sea itself floweth
in your veins’, and called it ‘felicity’,
a thing he supposed as free as it is brave.

It is the felicitous mood, “free” and “brave”, so clearly stated at the end of the poem, and emerging from the flow of thought after the return from “the altar”, that has, after all, permeated the entire poem. This felicity has empowered the speaker to see, amidst the frozen landscape (and hear despite the noise of aircraft), the signs of the potential for hope and spring that he included in the first stanza:

Squirreled away in the dark of Pandora’s box
was hope, which still diffuses itself
like a half-forgotten scent. Its wraith drifts
about the Potomac’s bluffs today,
the last of winter. The chirr of birds, so often
brutalized by the idiot thunder
of planes zeroing in on National, sounds
by now as if it isn’t raw
fact, or rank insentience, but a signal
that Spring will arrive....

The second stanza’s “time’s up for those who won’t fall in / with young-eyed, unillusioned Primavera” implies that there is a transformation wished for, hoped for, almost being wishfully imposed upon, the citizens of Washington D.C. Such a transformation is from whatever is currently the state of affairs, something as arid and materialistic as “blow-dried hearts” and “virginal limousines” to life: “life is on”. To support this hoped for transfiguring phenomenon the speaker details the ineluctable

local transformations that for millenia have occurred seasonally: “aeon by aeon, though winter did its worst” spring has “had possession of these slopes”. The argument is for the inevitability of it: spring has “had possession... aeon by aeon”; “*though* winter did its worst”; “*longer* by far than any Eve / ... made a living”; “*whatever* the ice-chasened river’s / hedging”. “Life is on” declared in this stanza becomes the theme played out for the rest of the poem. The triumph is not to be Eve’s.

Steele’s poem, “President’s Day”,²⁷⁶ too, reveals the speaker’s attitude hinging on the implications of his return from saying a Mass. The piece opens with something that is either the speaker’s private meditation that has [one imagines] sprung from a lull in a conversation between him and his companion, or the speaker’s subsequent recollection of the conversation. He considers “what to make of the days”, what to make of oneself - a moment of jesterly introspection endorsed by the image of the mirror putting out its tongue²⁷⁷:

Hard to know, ever since Genesis-tide,
what to make of the days. They brim
out of the darkness, each with its own flourish
or onus. The mirror consoles, hectors,
confesses itself foxed, puts out its tongue.

It is the thinker’s companion whose direct speech is given as the opening lines of the second stanza: the suggestion being that the conversation occurs (or has occurred) as the two walk (or walked) past the “Washington Monument -“Farmer George and Father Abe”:

‘None of my business, this, anyway’ says
a truculent Australian voice:
‘let them alone with their New World fantasies,
the goggling and the glooming figure,
rumouring liberation from their zone,

²⁷⁶ Poem 14, *Potomac*.

²⁷⁷ Willeford refers to “figures” which are “sticking their tongues out insultingly, like the image in the mirror in Holbein’s drawing...”. (Willeford, *Foolscepter*, 37, refers to plate 8.)

The Australian companion is dissociating himself from the American dream, what he sees as perhaps an irritating and infantile continuous wish for the fresh start, the new world. For him as he regards the monument, Lincoln is “gloomy” and Washington, “goggling”. The speaker of the poem would agree with him: “No contest”, he says. His agreement however is tentative and is soon qualified by

if I hadn’t come from Mass,
 that play of slaughter and its sequel
 teased by the possibility of birth.

The speaker would agree, that is, if he hadn’t come from Mass where the slaughter and its sequel, the resurrection, have instructed him, in his Christian way, like the Americans do in the way of their national character, to look for new beginnings and new life.

The Contemplatio ad Amorem

The fourth category of Steele’s resurrectional poems pertains to the those celebrating the recommendations of the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*.²⁷⁸ Ignatius sets out this exercise as two preludes and four points: the first prelude being a standard envisioning of oneself in the presence of God, the angels and saints, the second being a prayer for insight into all good which one has received from God; the first point being to recall “benefits received”, and to reflect what one might offer in return; the second, to reflect the presence of God in elements, plants, creatures and in oneself; the third, to consider “how God works and labors for me in all things created on the face of the earth” and to reflect on oneself; and the fourth which is of particular importance to Steele’s work:

to look how all the good things and gifts descend from above, as my poor power from the supreme and infinite power from above; and so justice, goodness, pity, mercy, etc.; as from

²⁷⁸ q.v. above page 26, note 51, pertaining to the *Spiritual Exercises*.

the sun descend the rays, from the fountain the waters, etc. Then to finish reflecting on myself....²⁷⁹

Steele's poem, "Fixing the Fountain"²⁸⁰ commences with the speaker finding himself alone again in the fountain precincts "After the guy from Maintenance was gone". He is one of at least three Georgetown non-academic staff who feature in this *Potomac* series: the workman slung off the side of the building that Tim Healy is said to have dedicated; Officer Millet in "Corridors"²⁸¹ - "who jingles keys to show / his joy at having so down-to-earth a job"; and this "guy from Maintenance". (Just as in Steele's Australian work, Avril the cleaner at the University of Melbourne is the trigger for a homily.²⁸²) In each case, the speaker's seeing the man slung off the side of the building or his contact with these non-academic people leave him buoyant and reflective. In "Fixing the Fountain" the maintenance man who fixes the fountain is a "fakir" - (suggesting perhaps his "mystical" prowess) and whether one imagines he departs having spoken to the speaker or not, the impression is that the speaker has been focused on him and his task. When the maintenance man leaves, the speaker says of himself that he

sat
a dozy span and watched the light get drowned
in the silver palm sprung up as if
the guy had been a fakir after all.

Then the speaker says "his mind unhitched itself and drifted". Instead of being held by the presence of

magnolia or primrose,
forsythia or weeping cherry

his associative mind is

making for La Fontaine, Bandusia,

²⁷⁹ *FlemingSpEx*, 138-143.

²⁸⁰ Poem 42, *Potomac*.

²⁸¹ Poem 26, *Potomac*.

the great good place of Ponce de Leon,
Versailles' engorgement, Trevi's flourish
all of which fountains play in his mind. From literal fountains his mind turns to
Ignatius' image in *Contemplatio ad Amorem*:

even Loyola's image of the divine
aspill with its own amplitude,
nothing to get and all to give.

"Mostly, though", the speaker says, "until the sun blew over", and as he once more
becomes aware of the gardens, his contemplation drifts to a fountain he calls "a
childhood fountain".

Mostly though until the sun blew over,
and he came back to the outbursts of
azalea and scarlet tulip, what
possessed him was a childhood fountain,
able, he thought, to handle any thirst.

This memory of the childhood fountain becomes the symbol of the speaker's adult
envisioning of the fountaining God who is also able to "handle any thirst". While there
is no winter here to transform into spring, no death to return to life, the speaker's
reflection on the fixing of the faulty fountain and his mind's drifting from the newly
playing "palm sprung up" to the matter of quenching thirst is a meditation
nevertheless on the giver of the *Contemplatio*. It is telling that this meditation occurs
"until the sun blew over", (the sun and its rays being Ignatius' first image of the
Contemplatio ad Amorem) and that it ends as Ignatius requires it to do, with a
reflection on the self - in this case the speaker's childhood self. The speaker gives a
sense of being endowed and fulfilled.

²⁸² "Birds", 1. "One person who is about, well and truly before me, is the woman who does much of the
cleaning in the John Medley Building. ... Her name is Avril, which is French for April, and which stands in the
northern hemisphere for the coming-in of Spring, for new beginnings..."

As with “Felicity”, Steele’s poem “Phantom Pleasures” again associates the notion of happiness with the spring thaw.²⁸³ Cautiously (“for all your caution”) the speaker names his feeling as “happiness”:

there’s what, for all your caution, you’d have to call
happiness, pure and simple, transparent,
but implicating the future, as snow at thaw
contributes its cold crystalline being
to the flux of life and summons from the dirt
rumoured gold and remembered green.

This coming of happiness is a transformational and, in the literal sense of “the flux of life and summons from the dirt”, a resurrectional event, even though it is something for the future rather than the present. The image used to figure the coming of “what... you’d have to call happiness” is that of the fountain, since the “thing”, “happiness”, is described as “welling up”.²⁸⁴

And it happens, the unkempt thing, we don’t know how,
welling up from a childhood choked
with dismay, or guilt’s debris, or plain revulsion
at the way time insults itself - -
there’s what, for all your caution, you’d have to call
happiness, pure and simple, transparent,
....

Steele’s view of the Celebrant and the Glory of God:

In both “Phantom Pleasures” and “Felicity” the influence of the *Contemplatio* ensures that the effect of the resurrection event is not merely at the mercy of the individual’s capacity to envision the future - of personal resurrection or of Parousia; but is relevant to the individual in the “penumbra of every day”. This relationship between the resurrection and the *Contemplatio* is delineated in Steele’s “Starburst”, the aptly named conclusion to the unpublished Retreat Notes, “The Poem of the Mind: Variations on a Spanish Theme”. The piece is concerned with the Christ of the

²⁸³ Poem 52, *Potomac*.

resurrection narratives of the New Testament whom Steele calls the “radiant one”, and with what he calls the “radiant fountain” of the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*. It also insists on the contemplative nature of the apprehension of the “radiant Lord”. The section warrants citation in full since it is both pertinent to the discussion of the Celebrant and expedient in forecasting how the function of the Celebrant propels the discussion of Steele’s structure of thought into a discussion of the symbolic implications of that structure. This is from the last section of “Starburst”:

Each of the resurrection narratives in the gospels offers him as in some sense the radiant one. Sometimes this is imaged graphically by the angels, sometimes in the “burning hearts” of Emmaus, sometimes in the impulse which evokes worship and provokes mission. In all cases, the emblem of the sun, which became so important in christian art, is to the point: “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” is a testimony at once to [sic] splendour of the giver and to the abundance of the gift. “We saw his glory” is a claim about the *humanity* of God, and also about the humanity of *God*. The dream of God is one not of wistful solidarity or of bloody fraternity but of liberation and beauty. Paul’s injunction is to “celebrate the death of the *Lord* until he comes”: hence the appropriateness of the eastern sense of liturgy as inception of heaven, however steadily the shedding of the blood is remembered.

But, as is plain from the letters, Paul’s sense of that celebration is far from being confined to ritual occasions, which can all too easily fall from their splendid estate into being conservatories of growth which is otherwise too frail: the celebration of the dying and the rising is to take place in the penumbra of the everyday. At this point one can see the natural fusion between the resurrection narratives and the rest of the new testament emphasis on the one hand, and the Contemplation for obtaining Love on the other. I said earlier that the Ignatian pragmatism is mystical in impulse: it is and must be so because this is the situation with the new testament. The offering of all activity and all dispositions to God is one evoked by the lingering memory of God’s historic generosity, whether in my own lifetime, or at any earlier point, before, during or after his special action in Christ. The image of the radiant fountain in the Contemplation is one which has, as it were, been evolving throughout all the earlier courses of the exercises, just as the images of the radiant Lord have been evolving all throughout the earlier courses of the gospels. *Transfiguration is not translation*: the hope of the church consists largely in its being won back repeatedly to that conviction, by the Lord in whose name it is called together and according to whose commands it moves. The community at every point, like the individual at every point, has to be drawn into discovery

²⁸⁴ q.v. Steele’s “The wellspring of all Jesuit spirituality, the *Spiritual Exercises*... is a matter of saying”.

of how it can be that God, in being himself for us, neither indulges us nor competes with us, but makes his life our own.²⁸⁵

Clearly Steele cannot speak in “Starburst” about the resurrection without continuing to speak about the *Contemplatio ad Amorem* with its insistence (by means of Ignatius’ radiant imagery) on the continuous giving of God to the individual. With this juxtaposition, the resurrected Christ is the “radiant one”: (“Each of the resurrection narratives in the gospels offers him as in some sense the radiant one.”) He is so not only in the sense of a shining, resurrected one (as prefigured in the Transfiguration: “Christ’s becoming, for an unprecedented moment, radiantly luminous”²⁸⁶) but a shining one who continuously gives out in all directions. In the fourth week of the *Exercises* Ignatius writes the direction “to consider how the Divinity, which seemed to hide Itself in the Passion, now appears and shows Itself so marvellously in the most holy Resurrection by Its true and most holy effects”.²⁸⁷ That Steele sees “radiant” as both *shining* and *projecting in all directions* is evident from his merging in “Starburst” of Ignatius’ metaphors. When Steele says that “The image of the *radiant fountain* in the *Contemplation* is one which has... been evolving throughout all the earlier courses of the exercises, just as the images of the radiant Lord have been evolving all throughout the earlier courses of the gospels” - he can be assumed to be fusing Ignatius’ image of the sun with its rays, and Ignatius’ image of the fountain. Ignatius, at least in the English literal translation from the Spanish “autograph” text²⁸⁸ does not call the fountain radiant, this is Steele’s admixture of the concept of radiant and fountain. (One imagines a radiant fountain to be something like the El Alamein in Sydney.) This juxtaposition reinforces the dominance in Steele’s mind of the concept of radiant as both of shining and of having direction or projection similar to a radiant body or form.

(“Singing”, 1) and “[Ignatius] is concerned with the blocking of the wellsprings”. (“Steerage”, 3.)

²⁸⁵ “Poemind”, 17.

²⁸⁶ “Blinding Lights”, 11.

²⁸⁷ *FlemingSpEx*, 132.

²⁸⁸ In his foreword to Fleming’s *The Spiritual Exercises of Saint Ignatius: A Literal Translation and a Contemporary Reading*, G.E. Ganss notes that “the English translation chosen as best suited to the purposes of the present book is a literal version, that made from the Spanish ‘autograph’ text of Ignatius in 1909, and

Steele pronounces in “Starburst” the resurrected, radiant Lord, (often cast, he says elsewhere, as “the emblem of the sun, which became so important in christian art”,²⁸⁹) as at once the glorious Lord and the glory of God: “‘We saw his glory’ is a claim about the *humanity* of God and also about the humanity of *God...*” It is, in other words, Christ as God’s glory, and the divinity as Christ’s glory. It is this glory, which the Celebrant, (aware of the Transfigured Lord on the way to the Passion, of the Resurrection, and in the *Exercises*, of the radiant benefactor of the *Contemplatio*), proclaims, and which, Steele says, is apprehended by the evangelist: “‘We saw his glory’”. Elsewhere Steele says : “More than that: the bible is written not by men who are business-like, but by men who are rapt. And they are rapt predominantly, at least in the New Testament, in the glory of the Lord. ...it is that they find to their astonishment that he is radiant all about them...”.²⁹⁰

But this glory, Steele says in “Starburst”, is also there for the contemplation of the mystically able or inclined throughout the ages: “the Ignatian pragmatism is mystical in impulse: it is and must be so because this is the situation with the new testament”. Elsewhere Steele says of John’s gospel that:

There is the stress on the divine splendour, the customary habit of the Word, ‘Deus de Deo, Lumen de Lumine, Deus verus de Deo vero...’; and there is the stress on all this as having come into the houses and temporary shelters in which we find ourselves, into, indeed, our ‘tenement of clay’....

and that

The John who writes the Prologue is the John who, preoccupied with the display and attestation of the Father’s glory - the outflash of love - has shown the preoccupied Jesus saying, ‘When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself.’ The lifting up, the high display of the man brought low, is not only so that the best can be brought out in men by the sight...; it is so that the best can be poured out to them from that pitch of mercy and fidelity. The living water, the heartening vine, the infused blood - all are to spill out here, as the climactic instance of that ‘fountaining forth’ of God which Ignatius speaks of in the ‘Contemplation to Acquire Love’....

published in 1914, by ... Elder Mullan (1865-1925). One reason for its choice was its availability. Still more important, however, is its accuracy in reproducing Ignatius’ thought, nuances, and style.” xiv.

²⁸⁹ “Poemind”, 17.

²⁹⁰ “Steerage”, 18.

and that

Those men and women, who ‘saw his glory, the glory which he received as the Father’s only Son’, had not far to look. They need only look at one another and at themselves, with Spirit-filled eyes, to see that glory. And though they are dead, and our fathers are dead, nothing in the story has changed for us.²⁹¹

That Steele believes in the contemporaneity of the perception of God’s glory is substantiated by his claims, for example, that apropos the late John Casey S.J., “his understanding of the Ignatian ethos, and of the gospels which sustain that ethos, was one in which the radiance or glory of God is poured into our own hearts, and seeks an ever fuller home in the hearts of our brothers and sisters”;²⁹² and, to take another example, concerning “the care for the *Dei gloria*”, that “When it is pursued with confidence, a confidence founded on God’s known determination to be the Lord of all, things come to light which will otherwise never strike the eye, things which show the world (and this country) to be veined through with grace, and not to be the blockish terrain regarded by the wizened heart”.²⁹³

Throughout his work Steele refers frequently to the glory of God and often with emphasis on the contemporaneity of such glory: “the known character and action of Christ”;²⁹⁴ “the presence, and the character, of God in the world”;²⁹⁵ “the presence and action of God today”;²⁹⁶ “The power of the Lord and his adequacy to our time”;²⁹⁷ “God’s radiant presence”;²⁹⁸ “...in his resurrection, he was to be shown as what St James calls, ‘our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory’, and it is to that glory that we too are called...”.²⁹⁹

²⁹¹ “Eagle”, 24-25.

²⁹² “Fr. John Casey, S. J., R.I.P.”, 1-2.

²⁹³ “Shaft”, 8.

²⁹⁴ “Poemind”, 8.

²⁹⁵ “Servants”.

²⁹⁶ “Steerage”, 15.

²⁹⁷ “Poemind”, 7.

²⁹⁸ “Angels”, 1.

²⁹⁹ “Looking Behind the Mask”, Dahlgren, 1994, 2.

What is clear is that Steele's perception of the celebratory raying from God whether found in people, in natural phenomena, in art, or liturgical art, becomes inseparable from his perception of the glory of God. The very nature of the celebratory process as a proclaiming that something has "come through" implicates Steele in the apprehension of the presence of the glory of God. When Steele writes about celebration either in the form of "Something that has come through from constraint into felicity" as the paradigm governing Heaney's poetry; or in the form of a claim such as "the sponsoring patron of most literature is not the Lord who brought the ark to Ararat but the one who brought the flood in the first place - we are troubled, not tranquilized, into creativity";³⁰⁰ he is also writing about the presence of the glory of God in Heaney's poetry and in art generally. Similarly when he writes about the Mass as a celebration of Christ's death and resurrection, he is also writing about the presence of the glory of God. He says for example:

The language of crucifixion is the language of total disablement: the language of resurrection is the language of total enabling, an end to alienation of self from itself, of person from person, of anything or anyone from God. It is, as the familiar language goes, the "real presence" of God that is celebrated at the heart of christian worship....³⁰¹

The corollary to this is to be found in Steele's description of the feelings of the writers of the New Testament, namely:

the adumbrations they have of the glory are the great assurance that the acceptance of being transformed, burst open from within like wheat, is a vital, not a fatal, thing to do.³⁰²

How Steele attests to such "adumbrations" of the glory of God in the world today is the subject of Chapter Five - "The Word or Witness".

³⁰⁰ "Prejudice and Antisemitism in English Literature", *Gesher*, 1, 2, 36-40.

³⁰¹ "Hopeful", 17.

³⁰² "Steerage", 15.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE WORD OR WITNESS

“Something of us hungers... for the naming of bread...”¹

Unless I name things, I die: the tongue is a kind of eye, a kind of hand, a kind of lung. For its outgoing care to cease is for me to consent to that last retirement whose name is death. ...And you, big one, whose names we try again and again, never getting them dead right, sometimes not getting them dead wrong, what do you make, I keep wondering, of these thousands of gestures we make every day, the many millions of our lives? Do you confirm... that when your shadow becomes a shape, when your radiance becomes a light, we shall have to move out from the cavern of other names into the noonday blaze of the great name?²

In one way you have the helplessness of the sea, too: you can't help it if you can't be taken in, as you can't. All your showing leaves us with quaint, garbled words for what has happened, but the novelty wears off the experience and we go on using this meta-language as though it worked like any other.³

God's plenty, God's fullness, is indeed offered through such commonplace instruments as the English language....⁴

In Steele's poem written on the death of Joseph Brodsky (whose death Steele regrets among other things, since “he will now not be able to go on articulating his immense veneration for language”⁵) Steele requests that the deceased poet

stand up there, as once down here, to say
you give us tongues, in God's name.⁶

In addition to poetry itself, one of Steele's consolations is “the memory that the Spirit himself could choose the shape of tongues for his fire”.⁷ What at first appears to be Steele's absolute reverence for the written word ultimately discloses itself to be less

¹ “Presences”, 47.

² “Reveries”, 3.

³ “Silences”, 10.

⁴ “Vulnerability and Fullness”, Newman, 1995, 1.

⁵ “Measures”, MS 9.

⁶ “In Memoriam: Joseph Brodsky”, *Eureka Street*, 6, 2 (March, 1996), 23. This imperative is the reverse of one Steele notes in the *Commedia*. Steele comments: “St. Peter... says to Dante, ‘and you, my son, whose mortal weight must bring / you back to earth again, open your mouth down there / and do not hide what I hide not from you!’” Steele, “Love/death”, 64, (MS 17) cites from Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, III, trans. Mark Musa, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1984, 320.

⁷ “Singing”, 2.

reverence (since he has no illusions about “the abuses of the tongue... the dark exceptions in human discourse”⁸) than an esteem for its potential (albeit always unrealised) to name God.⁹ “It is when we find God too dear for words that we want to find words to say so”.¹⁰ Equally, there is its potential to attest to his presence: “Christianity... attests the many ways in which, on its account, God has visited man and visits him to illuminate his life and, in that illumination, to share God’s own life with him”.¹¹

The function of the “raying” of the Word or Witness, (the fourth “raying” of Steele’s theocentric structure of thought) is to word or to name, (both of which include to voice, utter, communicate, figure and emblemize: “we can only name a few of the things in the world, and we can only shape a few of them in explanations for other people”;¹² “Time, death, and the language by which we give them shapes... - these were [Brotsky’s] business”;¹³) and therefore to witness to the power and character (the glory) of God. There is also a reciprocal function of the Word. Just as it is used to name the presence of the glory of God, it is also used to glorify God or (in Ignatius’ terms), to praise, revere and serve God, another way of describing which is to do all things *ad maiorem Dei gloriam*.

There are three major processes in which this function of wording and testifying to the glory of God operates within Steele’s work. First, to an extent, the Word or Witness proceeds like the other three “rayings” from its source at the theocentre. It emanates from God, whom Steele sees as a communicator, (a God who has something “to say for himself”¹⁴) to Christ, the Word, who for Steele, is “what the father has to say for himself, the word he finds and the word he gives”.¹⁵ This raying as evident in Steele’s

⁸ “Eagle”, 4.

⁹ “We name him because he has previously named us.” “The Names of God: II: Speaker”, *Madonna*, April, 1983, 11-12.

¹⁰ “Stills: 11 - Bread and Prayers: Matt. XIV:13-23”, *AJAF* iv, 2.

¹¹ “Fortunate”, 31.

¹² “A Question of Life and Death”, circa 1970.

¹³ “Brotsky”, 16.

¹⁴ “The Moment of the Mass”, 4.

¹⁵ “Poems and Prayers”, 2.

writings emanates to the disciples, is embodied in the Scriptures, and touches Ignatius (as manifest in his writings), Campion, writers and poets, who testify (some wittingly, others unwittingly,) by means of the Word to the divinity. It is with both senses of the Word in mind, Christ and the utterance of speech, that Steele writes of the Word:

It is not my word: before such a word, if it did not bear me, I could only wither into silence. It is not mine - I belong to it; it grips me, lungs and throat and lips, and demands to be spoken.... Pray ...that I become simply a mouth uttering that poor word....¹⁶

The raying of the Word or Witness will constitute Part I of this Chapter.

The second process by which Steele's work words and attests to the glory of God occurs in a unique way as the Word underwrites the other three "rayings" and is, in the terminology in which Steele, as we have seen, conceptualises Peter Porter's poetry, the potent means or the "radiation" which empowers other motifs and concerns.¹⁷ This function of the Word will be discussed in Part II of this Chapter.

Thirdly and importantly the Word provides the writer not merely with the means of "prosing lumpishly along" but with the opportunity "to be iridescent with metaphor".¹⁸ "The Shafts of the Spirit", Steele writes, "run through and through us...; The Spirit is the one who cares enough about the flesh to glorify it...".¹⁹ This metaphorical way of testifying to the glory of God will be the subject of the Part III of this chapter.

¹⁶ Untitled, commencing, "'The people that sit in darkness' ..."; Campion House, circa 1970. AJAF viii, 2.

¹⁷ "Radiations", 73.

¹⁸ Steele says that "to be iridescent with metaphor is harder work than prosing lumpishly along". ("Silences", 3.)

¹⁹ "The Names of God: III: Spirit", *Madonna*, May 1983, 12.

PART I: THE WORD AS THE FOURTH “RAYING”

Steele’s views on the Jesuit tradition of preaching the Word as found in the unpublished reflection “Going After the Eagle”:

When, writing a set of Retreat Notes, Steele speaks of the resurrection as “Christ’s glorying in that reply [of God to himself] and beginning to draw into that glory all those who consent to hear it”,²⁰ he is descendant of those first Jesuits who saw themselves as “first and foremost ministers of the *word*”.²¹ It is not surprising to find that Ignatius highly valued literary activities in the training of those who were to preach and lecture. Polanco writes on Ignatius’ behalf that “As to studies, he [Ignatius] heartily wishes that all [his men] be well grounded in grammar and the humanities... Then he excludes no kind of approved learning, neither poetry, nor rhetoric”;²² and on another occasion expresses Ignatius’ views that

the man who thinks that it is not good to... employ his talent... has not learned well to order all things to God’s glory and to find a profit in and with all these things for the ultimate end, which is God’s honour and glory. [And later in the letter, he writes.] All [“the Greek Doctors”] employed human talents and efforts, learning, eloquence, skill... for the holy end of God’s service.²³

Writing on *The First Jesuits*, John O’Malley S.J. notes that “The *Constitutions* rank preaching and lecturing as, generally speaking, more important than hearing confessions and giving the *Spiritual Exercises*”.²⁴ In line with this traditional stress on the importance of preaching the word, Steele wrote papers and talks about *language and God* about the time of his ordination. In two early works from the seventies²⁵ he insists that speaking about Christ is only valid if it derives from the experience of a personal encounter with Christ. (O’Malley notes it was the opinion of the first Jesuits

²⁰ “Hopeful”, 17.

²¹ John W. O’Malley, S.J., *The First Jesuits*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1993, 91.

²² *Letters*, 236.

²³ *Letters*, 192-3.

²⁴ *The First Jesuits*, 92. [*Constitutions*, 623f.]

²⁵ “How to present Christ to modern man?”, AJAF ii; “Stories about God”, 1971, AJAF vii.

that “truly effective ministry rested first and foremost... on the union {*familiaritas*} of the minister with God in prayer and on similar realities that made him an instrument of divine grace in God’s hands”.²⁶)

In one early reflection Steele claims that “one cannot present [Christ] until one is gripped by him”. Using an echo of Ignatius’ “fountain” image, and likening the testifying to Christ to a description of a personal and individual artistic experience, Steele stresses the distinctiveness of the voice required to justly make any attestation of the experience of that presence:

In bearing witness you testify... to the decisive presence of Christ to your own life. And you do it for the same reason as St Paul did it: the words and deeds that bear the witness are a jetting up of the life itself. [And later in the same talk, he says:] testifying to Christ is something like testifying to the wellsprings of my own life, as this occurs in any of the arts. Each time that happens, a man speaks with a distinctive tone of voice. He invents a new dialect, or seems to, because he is for once speaking with the courage of his idiolect, the pattern of speech peculiar to him.²⁷

In a second early work, and also with preaching in mind, Steele says:

to write five consecutive lines without masking, exhibiting or faking - that might take you a year. It might take you a decade. It might take you more than the lifetime you have. [He refers to Marianne Moore’s “Poetry” eventually revised by her to three lines “I, too, dislike it. / Reading it, however, with a perfect contempt for it, one discovers in / it, after all, a place for the genuine.”] It seems to me that the stories we tell about God urgently need just that: “a place for the genuine”.²⁸

Twenty years later there is a certainty about the impossibility of finding words to fit the experience of Christ:

Words... are my business: words are my game. And that means that I understand how flickering and fragile they can be. I think that St Paul understood this very well - you can hear him in the letter to the church in Ephesus that he hopes that his hearers will be able to “experience this love which surpasses all knowledge, so that you may attain to the fullness

²⁶ *The First Jesuits*, 101. [*Constitutions* #813.]

²⁷ “How to present Christ to modern man?”, 1-2.

of God himself.” It is fine talk about high hopes, but there is also something helpless about it: how do you put to words an experience which sweeps all words away? You toddle up from the waterline of the beach, your little plastic bucket carrying some salt water sloshing around inside it: and out there, beyond the horizon, the caverns of the ocean go down more thoroughly than Everest goes up. St Paul knows that the best he can offer his hearers is smudged jottings on something majestic, world-encompassing and world-embracing. He is a graffiti-writer for God, hoping that some slogan or scribble will catch our eye and haunt our ear.²⁹

In the reflection “Going After the Eagle”, Steele isolates several problems pertaining to preaching the word. First, “the enormity of the gap between the word and the flesh is usually all too clear to see” when preachers are compared, for example, with John the Baptist, who “worded what he knew in his flesh, and [who] knew in his flesh what he worded.... What filled the gap was nothing less than God himself”;³⁰ or when they are compared with Jesus, for whom “there never was ground for the gap”.³¹

The second problem pertains to preachers feeling and appearing foolish:

Bearing witness through the Spirit to Christ and the Father is bearing witness that he has been effectual in us in these ways - that we experience both growth and liberation. There is thus no way of professionalising witness, though there are ways of making its expression more proficient; one cannot professionalize personal growth or its attestation without making a travesty of it. ...there will usually be a certain ungainliness about witness bearing, a lack of polish. One is likely to feel over-enthusiastic in one’s splutterings or a mere rumour-monger. And for some people it will be this palpable “inadequacy” that will make up much of the sacrificial element in the witness; anybody but a fool would shut up, we may feel....

And a third problem, according to Steele, is that witnessing is “vulnerable to many retorts”; and that all “christian witness”³² is, like most kinds of christian ministry, “questionable in some respect”: “What application of good intentions, and of

²⁸ “Stories about God”, 1.

²⁹ “The Sacred Heart: God’s Pledge of Commitment”, 1988, AJAF vi, 2.

³⁰ “Eagle”, 9.

³¹ “Eagle”, 9.

³² Here Steele includes “in word or in deed”. (“Eagle”, 10.)

inspiration claimed to be christian, is not questioned, for instance, in Jesuits by other Jesuits?”³³

Steele’s response to these problems operates in the “Eagle” reflection on two levels. One is pragmatic as it resolves the three problems - human weakness, foolishness, and criticism. The first, weakness, “the enormity of the gap between the word and the flesh” in preachers, (“where is the work which is not... impaired, attended by follies, mixed in its motivation ...?”) is addressed by “God gets witnesses where he gets saints - out of sinners...”; the second, that of preachers feeling and appearing foolish, is addressed by “and here we are, called it seems to be fools for Christ’s sake”; and that of preachers being criticised or in Paul’s case, being ostracised, is addressed by Steele’s comment that:

There is something most moving about Paul’s readiness to say, when he is witnessing to the crucified and risen Lord, that this will be repugnant to Jews and gentiles alike; he has, after all, unless one counts the small and shaky christian communities through which he is a transient, no other human company.³⁴

The other level of Steele’s response to these problems operates symbolically. The small details of responding to this or that problem with one or another reply are fitted into place to establish a structural pattern which symbolises the radiant luminosity of the Word and the unquenchable nature of the light. To both of which Steele refers in the opening pages of the piece: “the real ‘perpetual light’ radiating into the days of airports and deadlines, surprise and disappointment and... the twinned assertions that the darkness was not in the same class as the light, and that it could not overturn it”.³⁵ The preacher is expected to be a fool for Christ as he stammers out his witness; this represents the jesterly “raying”. Like Paul, exiled and transient, the witness is criticised and questioned; this represents the “raying” of the Expatriate. All witnesses, like all saints, are culled from sinners and “all the devil need do to disable any work is to dismay the workers: and to do that, all he need do is take our eyes off the crucifix

³³ “Eagle”, 10.

³⁴ “Eagle”, 10.

³⁵ “Eagle”, 5.

and keep them in the mirror”;³⁶ this represents the “raying” of the Celebrant where the positive and benign radiation from God contends with the negative radiation from Satan and where lifelong transformations from sinner to saint parallel the paradigmatic transformation of Christ from death to life. Additionally the “raying” of the Word pertains to the whole discussion of preaching - “splutterings”, “rumour-mongering”, and generally “witnessing in word”. The emergent pattern of radiance set up by the various “rayings” is Steele’s particular structuring of his motifs within his discussion of witnessing, to image, or trope, and thereby, to be, (as he recalls the Baptist was), “a witness to speak for the light”.³⁷

The entire “Eagle” reflection works in this way. That is to say, that as the discussion of John’s gospel moves from subject to subject, the organisation of the motifs constantly reiterates and substantiates what Steele calls John’s theme: “the insurrection of the divine, the resurrection of the human”³⁸ and Steele’s own theme (in the “raying” of the Word) which is “the Word’s utterance of himself among us, and his uttering of us as a kind of self-utterance, [which] comes from the heart of God himself, ‘who lives in inaccessible light’”.³⁹

Steele’s view of the communicatory character and action of God:

Even though for Steele God is “the nameless one”;⁴⁰ “the Lord [who] would not [‘go into words’] ...that was one of the ways... he was known as the Lord”;⁴¹ the God who is “beyond all words”, he is also, Steele says, the one for whom “we need words to say so”.⁴² Additionally for Steele God is the one whom “We don’t know... except

³⁶ “Eagle”, 10.

³⁷ “Eagle”, 11.

³⁸ “Eagle”, 2.

³⁹ “Eagle”, 4.

⁴⁰ “Shaft”, 2.

⁴¹ “Shaft”, 2.

⁴² “Fortunate”, 29.

through what he has to say for himself”;⁴³ he is a God whom “we can know... in the speaking”;⁴⁴ he is “a God who can and will speak to us”;⁴⁵ he is a God who has something “to say for himself”;⁴⁶ he utters himself;⁴⁷ he has a “passion for communication”;⁴⁸ he is “a speaking God who teaches us to speak”.⁴⁹ Consequently for Steele, “God knows the perfect language, and schools us for a lifetime in it”,⁵⁰ and “What God accomplishes is not explanation but meaning”;⁵¹ he is “the maker and keeper of meaning”.⁵² Ultimately for Steele, “‘God our Lord’ is not a hildago title, [meaning by this the title by which Ignatius, himself a Hildago, referred to the divinity] but a piece of verbal lightning”.⁵³

Steele’s view of God’s communicatory character and action shared with Christ:

While for Steele, God has something “to say for himself”,⁵⁴ Christ, (Steele says after Rahner), is “what the Father has to say for himself, the word he finds and the word he gives”.⁵⁵ Steele says that Christ is God’s “iterated wording of himself among us”⁵⁶ and that “The birth of Christ is not an aesthetic event, but the dead-serious language of God”;⁵⁷ “the birth of Christ [is] ...a bringing home of the meaning of the language

⁴³ “Poems and Prayers”, 2.

⁴⁴ “Eagle”, 3.

⁴⁵ “Eagle”, 3.

⁴⁶ “The Moment of the Mass”, 4.

⁴⁷ “Silences”, 11. “And when you utter yourself and we know it for your utterance...”.

⁴⁸ “Eagle”, 3.

⁴⁹ “Poems and Prayers”, 3.

⁵⁰ “Singing”, 24.

⁵¹ “Snowman”, 8.

⁵² “Singing”, 7.

⁵³ “Snowman”, 1. Ignatius was from the Basque territory of Northern Spain.

⁵⁴ “The Moment of the Mass”, 4.

⁵⁵ “Poems and Prayers”, 2. Steele’s student paper, “The Spirituality of Karl Rahner”, comments that: “Christ is at once what the Father has to say of himself and for himself to man, and what man, enabled by God, has to say of himself and for himself to God.” AJAF ii, 2.

⁵⁶ “Eagle”, 15.

⁵⁷ “Snowman”, 8.

uttered by and for [his] people”;⁵⁸ the Incarnation is God’s “speaking up”;⁵⁹ and that Christ “is called the Word made flesh”.⁶⁰

Conversely Christ for Steele is the one to testify to the Father: “As Word made flesh he voiced what was beyond him”;⁶¹ he is “the primal... Witness”.⁶² As such Steele regards Christ as: “God’s own nom-de-plume”;⁶³ he says that Christ’s “theme was not himself but his Father”⁶⁴ and that he is “called the ‘Word’ of God... he is himself the entirely meaningful one... he floods existence with meanings”;⁶⁵ and he is “Christ the Meaner, the Matterer”.⁶⁶ He “is always a Word in time”;⁶⁷ he is the “only one Word we need”.⁶⁸

(At the same time as Steele is prepared to name God and Christ in these terms, however, he also says “Christ is a listener - in which he is his Father’s Son”.⁶⁹ In this aphorism as in Steele’s references to God as “the gravity of silence, the weight of sleep”;⁷⁰ “the Lord whose voice is still and small”;⁷¹ and the many references to silence⁷² including the concept of poetry as “a way of learning to be quiet”,⁷³ it is clear that the Jester of contrariety has not left him or his apprehension of the divinity.

⁵⁸ “Poemind”, 10. “uttered by and for those people in more forms than we can now have record of, over something like a million years.”

⁵⁹ “The Ironic Heart”, 9.

⁶⁰ “Singing”, 2.

⁶¹ “Singing”, 2.

⁶² “Choices”, 4.

⁶³ “The Sun and the Shadow”, Newman, 1993, 1.

⁶⁴ “Shaft”, 4.

⁶⁵ “Power/Wisdom/ Love”, Newman, 1995, 1.

⁶⁶ “Major Key”, Melbourne, 1993, 1.

⁶⁷ “Snowman”, 7.

⁶⁸ “Eagle”, 25.

⁶⁹ “Snowman”, 12. q.v. “Steerage”, 18: “The Bible is a lot of words to bring one to the point of being wordless...”.

⁷⁰ “Compline”, circa 1970, AJAF viii.

⁷¹ “Compline”.

⁷² Steele paradoxically claims: “And naming, yes, naming God. Who does not produce and leave his work around, but who creates, and so, himself, is around.” [And later in the same reflection.] “Time to learn ... that the world is not deserted, the Glory has not departed. Time to be quiet and wait for the only God we have ...”. (“Compline”). See also “Singing”, 1-2: “We utter ourselves in our words, and in the silences which are a kind of tacit language”; “God mutes our clamour; but he does so in order to turn it into communion. For it is as the speaking ones that we are silent, not as beings with no pressure towards the word.”

⁷³ “Poems and Prayers”, 3.

The Lord we call Silence is not vacuity but power in vacuity: is not at odds with utterance, but is that potency which makes utterance more than gratuitous clamour. “Meaning”, said R. P. Blackmur, in one of his more riddling moments, “is what silence does when it gets into words.” And meaning is what God does when he gets into silence.⁷⁴)

Steele’s view of the Scriptures as reflecting the communicatory character and action of God and Christ:

Steele reflects upon the Scriptures (which, he says, are not to report on the past but “to throw a shaft of light down the avenues of the present”⁷⁵), with respect to the three entities language (utterance, telling, speech); meaning; and witnessing. First, God’s and Christ’s language, meaning and witnessing: “one has to pray constantly that God will speak *his* word in [the Gospels]”;⁷⁶ “Christ had to live with the consequences - for himself as well as for the others - of his being so singular and persistent a story-teller”;⁷⁷ “As man’s meanings constellate in the great dictionary, God’s meanings constellate in the bible”;⁷⁸ “Christ knows from early on that he is going to have to be ‘consumed’ if his uniquely strange words are to be grasped”;⁷⁹ “with the sole exception of the Father’s witness ([John] V: 30-47), all of the other witnesses of Christ are beset with limitations”.⁸⁰

Steele also specifically treats John’s language, meaning and witness: John is “the word-bearer”;⁸¹ “In John’s account, the visionary intensity, and the passion of utterance, are at their peak precisely as Christ steps towards death”;⁸² “John ...must have remembered how clogged and muffled the word had seemed to be amongst the

⁷⁴ “The Names of God: VII: Silence”, *Madonna*, March, 1984, 25.

⁷⁵ “5th Sunday”, Newman, 1993, 1.

⁷⁶ “Steerage”, 12.

⁷⁷ “Hopeful”, 14.

⁷⁸ “Shaft”, 1.

⁷⁹ “Hopeful”, 13.

⁸⁰ “Eagle”, 12.

⁸¹ “Eagle”, 1.

⁸² “Hopeful”, 15.

other disciples, let alone those who, called to hear, would not stay to listen”;⁸³ “John ...speaks in the Prologue of God’s self-utterance”;⁸⁴ “John... preoccupied with the display and attestation of the Father’s glory... has shown the preoccupied Jesus saying, ‘When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself’”.⁸⁵

Steele also reflects on the gospels in terms of language, meaning and witness pertaining to others in the gospel narratives: to the Samaritan woman “there came the word about a presence which was simple, elemental, and immediate”;⁸⁶ “The long-suffering disciples... cannot make enough of our Lord’s talk of presences and absences, exits and entrances”;⁸⁷ “Who, seeking to elicit adequate testimony to the divine, humane and leonine figure of Christ, would choose (in order of appearance) the following? Peter; ...the money changers in the Temple; ...the mob; the pharisees; the woman caught in adultery...? [And later in the paragraph] ...the bowed Lord... embraces whatever witness is going, heartens... those ready to stammer out their witness”.⁸⁸

Additionally Steele reflects in terms of language, meaning, and witness, on the gospels’ relevance to people who read or hear them: “the gospels exist only because a story *can* be told, a pattern discerned in the apparent idiocy of event: and they *are* told only because they are supposed to speak to the lives of their readers”;⁸⁹ “we have been folded into the text, been made sacred by the holy tale of Jesus’ fortunes”;⁹⁰ “Now that we have listened to the Gospel... how can we read a meaning out of it for ourselves?”⁹¹ “We are all bidden... to become word-passers, rumour-mongers, of God’s love and mercy to the very men, women and children whom we meet every

⁸³ “Eagle”, 7.

⁸⁴ “Eagle”, 4.

⁸⁵ “Eagle”, 24.

⁸⁶ “Homily (John 4: 5-14)”, circa 1970, AJAF vii.

⁸⁷ “The Names of God: VIII: Home”, *Madonna*, September, 1987, 29.

⁸⁸ “Eagle”, 12.

⁸⁹ “Hopeful”, 15.

⁹⁰ “On Not Being An Ape”, 1989, AJAF *Supplement*, 2.

⁹¹ “Where Am I Going and Why?”, 1.

day”.⁹² The relevance of the Scriptures today, Steele says, is comparable to Hopkins’ “hidden agenda” which Steele also says was “to find... the names of the God for whom deeds are his self-articulation”. Steele writes that

our tracing through of the bible is always a quest for Him who is being outspoken in this or that way. We do not look to the Wisdom books, for instance, for the greatest possible human sapience: ... We look rather for the indices of the Lord in whose name they have been inscribed for us: and we may, in faith, find those indices not least in his readiness to let us hear him through the halting words of halting man. Or again, I suppose that nobody has ever been entirely satisfied with Paul’s words... - least of all Paul. In him we find... the *vestigia* of the Lord who make[s] his way through Paul’s physical and mental life, now disconcerting him, now delighting him, but always directing him.⁹³

In this passage Steele plies the imagery of the Word - “outspoken”, “name”, “inscribed”, “hear”, “halting words”, “words”, so that the tracing of, or looking for, indices or *vestigia* of God are spelled out within the motif of the Word.

Steele’s treatment of God’s and Christ’s communicatory attribute as imparted to Edmund Campion, Jesuit saint and martyr:

In speaking about Campion on various occasions Steele is never far removed from the motif of “the Word or Witness”. Addressing a congregation on the subject of an historical figure given to teaching Rhetoric (in the University of Oxford and later in Europe) and to preaching the Word necessarily implicates Steele as the speaker in the milieu of the written and spoken word. In “Edmund Campion”⁹⁴ Steele plays on this environment with his selection of phrases. He says, for example, that he “was invited to say something”; he refers to “the prospect of speaking of him”; he alludes to “Campion’s own writings”; Waugh’s “life” and Richard Simpson’s “life”. He cites Campion: “to use his own words”; he says he is “not just talking about the cut of his beard or the cut of his prose...”; he admits that if Campion, the exquisite martyr, were his topic “He [Campion] would have the seductiveness of an angel of light speaking

⁹² “The Outburst of Christianity”, 1989, AJAF vi, 2.

⁹³ “Shaft”, 2.

good English”; he refers to “the trial records”; he declares “Campion must be said to have died on behalf of men whose opinions he would abhor”; some saints, he says, have “thematic importance”; they provide for the church a “leit-motif”. It is only in the final paragraph that all these references to the written or spoken word become harnessed to achieve the final impact of the homily, namely that Campion over and above all else that he was, said or wrote, was and is a martyr - and this is the point to which Steele has been building his assemblage of references to the Word: “A martyr is a witness, a witness for those who come after him as well as for his contemporaries. [And later in the paragraph.] And I think that Campion is a witness for us... inasmuch as he continues to challenge and ruffle us too”.⁹⁵

Steele achieves a similar effect in another homily on Campion⁹⁶ where he again uses a montage of references to the spoken or written word: “prayers”; “asking”; “the gospel and the epistle” for the day; (what St Paul “says”; what Christ “commanded in the words of the gospel”); and where Steele concludes with references to what is said: people “speak” in a certain manner of Campion’s predicament; “It is like saying that...”; Campion “could have said” certain things of fellow Jesuits; Campion “could have said” of contemporary Jesuits; von Moltke “said in his last letter”. Here the cumulative effect is achieved as Campion, Steele maintains, “could have said of us [twentieth century Jesuits] ... ‘You are not an instrument of God for making me what I am; rather, you are myself. You are my thirteenth chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians’”. Whatever the significance of von Moltke’s comparison of his wife to the thirteenth chapter (elsewhere Steele says von Moltke says “in effect that she was a sacred text to him”,⁹⁷) the contemporary Jesuits are also identified with that word (about the nature of love and hope) and with the witnessing to that word by a twentieth century martyr.

⁹⁴ AJAF viii.

⁹⁵ “Edmund Campion”, AJAF viii, 3.

⁹⁶ “Campion”, AJAF vii.

⁹⁷ “Sonnets for Strangers: Shakespeare and Others”, *Quadrant*, 41, 3 (March, 1997), 69. See also above p.183.

In a third piece, in which Steele delineates the choices of Campion,⁹⁸ each of Campion's decisions or choices are treated with respect to the verbal characteristics or manifestations of either that which is chosen or that which is rejected. Apropos Campion's "Choosing the mind": "Campion... went on to hone his wits... so as to lodge as thoroughly as he might in the Lord of all Truth, the Word who was made Flesh; regarding "Choosing to leave" [the Church of England Established and England itself]: Campion is described as a chauvinistic Englishman who "wrote among other things a triumphalistic 'History of Ireland'"; with respect to "Choosing the Society": "'Jesuit' was a name to conjure with. But Campion did not join only some legend"; concerning "Choosing priesthood": the task of Jesuits as priests is "not, as the Letter to the Hebrews reminds us, a pursuit of angels"; with respect to "Choosing apostolate": "Campion got that [the conviction of being called] under his skin, and as he put it expressly in his public writings... they would have to take his life away from him before he would stop following that vocation"; and finally on the matter of "Choosing martyrdom": the tools of execution are "devices through which the world deals with the stubborn articulators of loves and values which refuse to be measured by the pragmatic measures of the common day". Again the ultimate crescendo of 'word' or 'naming' images is achieved in those of witnessing: "To choose martyrdom is to choose... to be made God's theme. It is to choose, as the word itself implies, to be someone testifying to God, and to be someone testified through by God"; "we linger on the names of certain representative martyrs [in the Mass]"; "we do all that we do... in the name of the primal Martyr or Witness, Jesus himself".

Steele's treatment of God's and Christ's communicatory attribute as it informs the *Spiritual Exercises*:

Steele sees the *Spiritual Exercises* as the *raison d'être* of all Jesuit articulation. This is his argument:

⁹⁸ "Choices", AJAF viii.

To be a Jesuit is, among other things, to belong to a sub-culture of articulacy. Where the Leninist asks instinctively, “what is to be done?”, the Jesuit asks instinctively, “what is to be said?” He asks this... in an enormous array of contexts; but he knows that he has an interlocutor in himself, he imagines that he has one in the world, and he believes that he has one in God. The wellspring of all Jesuit spirituality, the *Spiritual Exercises*, whether as manual, as style, or as activity, is a matter of saying. Responsive saying, to God: and saying which is meant to precipitate action, insight, new states of affairs. But saying nonetheless - that is, verbal emerging from indefinite possibilities into definite actualities. The contemplative in action is, in origin at least, the one finding words for himself vis-a-vis God, and for God vis-a-vis himself.

It is a dramatic predicament, and it has issued in dramatic elaborations. We have lived by the word all along, in the hope that this was an authentic way of living by the Word. The torrents of articulacy in the Counter-Reformation were partly pragmatic, of course: but they were also partly the overflow of a spirituality which is dialectical and dialogic. The habits of exposition and exhortation so deep-seated in Jesuit practice in every age and at every level of training and of apostolate are energized powerfully by the most elemental features of Jesuit spirituality. We speak because we have something to say, but also, even more primally, because we believe ourselves to be addressed, and thereupon seek the adequate words for response.⁹⁹

At this point it is increasingly difficult to investigate the Word or Witness without regarding the significance of the emergent radiant pattern sustained by all the “rayings” together with that of the Word. In the first paragraph of the citation above, for example, one could say that “Responsive saying”, which, Steele says, precipitates “insight”, is the result of introspection attributable to the Jester. “Responsive saying” which precipitates “action” could, for example, be regarded as the following of a path of action in the way of the Pilgrim; and the precipitation of “new states of being” can be seen to be heralded by the Celebrant who proclaims that they are attained by a process of coming through from old states of affairs. There are, however, two prior matters to be noted with respect to Steele’s work and the special relationship of the exercitant with the Word or Witness. The first concerns the exercitant who as a Celebrant was left at the *Contemplatio ad Amorem* observing the gifts of the radiant

⁹⁹ “Singing”, 1.

glory of God; the second concerns the exercitant's appropriate response to that munificence which response Ignatius directs as

to reflect on myself, considering with much reason and justice, what I ought on my side to offer and give to His Divine Majesty, that is to say, everything that is mine, and myself with it, as one who makes an offering with much feeling....¹⁰⁰

At which point Ignatius writes for the exercitant's use the prayer "Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my intellect, and all my will...". What is required is that the exercitant render to God all that he or she has received from God seen as the fountaining provider of all benefits.¹⁰¹

Ignatius is quite specific about the nature of this rendering of self in the *Constitutions* of the Society. Introducing the *Constitutions*, Ganss observes that:

Glory or praise given by men to God because of His radiant and saving power was a pivotal point in Ignatius' thought.... He habitually made all his decisions, great or small, by applying his one norm: Which procedure is in the long run likely to issue in greater praise to God? Two other concepts closely related to that of glory to God are also pivotal points: the service to God and the service to one's fellowmen by which glorification of God is furthered.¹⁰²

Ganss finds (in the *Constitutions* and *General Examen*) 133 directives from Ignatius to his men to work for the *glory, praise* and *honour* of God, and claims that research has found that Ignatius uses these terms synonymously, that the terms are used closely with some 140 references to "the service of God" and that it was Ignatius' purpose (and it is something of a refrain in the *Constitutions*) that the members of the Society live and die within the Society and work only for what will "issue in greater praise to God".¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *FlemingSpEx*, 140.

¹⁰¹ "Poemind", 17.

¹⁰² *Constitutions*, 8.

¹⁰³ *Constitutions*, 8. q.v. "Silences", 13: "One tries again and again, diverted by welcomed distractions, and sapped or provoked by shifting moods, to honour what is, in its firmness and in its flux. It seems to me, for

Directed by the second requirement of the *Contemplatio* [that the exercitant respond with a gift of self] and the suggested prayer “Take and receive...”, the exercitant seeks to glorify God by service. And this is where the Word or Witness is particularly involved. Steele’s wry comment about the clergy that “We are schooled in [language], paid for it, sometimes taxed with it”,¹⁰⁴ and his caricature of himself as “a word-laden, word-defined, word-bent creature”¹⁰⁵ are therefore not only indications (comic or otherwise) of the medium in which service is done, but references to the medium through which (in the case of both the talkative clergy and Steele’s own literary work) God is glorified.

Addressing the matter of glorifying God, (and this is the second matter to note pertaining to the *Exercises* and the Word or Witness), Steele writes:

That the Lord be praised, that he be glorified ‘more’, is most of the rationale of christianity, and the whole rationale of the Society of Jesus; it is the ‘more’ that is the crunch. The work of attestation requires by definition that one discerns, for without that there could not be offered to God the tribute of *his* possessing the ways in which we are self-possessed - crucially, the mind and the will. And when that does take place, one is seeking to let the Lord be discriminating among the potential goods.¹⁰⁶

What Steele is stressing here is that the Witness (whose “work” is “attestation”) follows Ignatius’ process of discernment before any offering of self or service can proceed to glorify God. Hence for Steele the roles of the Celebrant and of the Witness with respect to the *Exercises* are as follows: the Celebrant who reflected upon the death of Jesus in Week Three, and who in Week Four proclaims that Christ has risen, also proclaims, in the first part of the *Contemplatio*, the continuing presence of the glory of God. It is the Word or Witness entering the second stage of the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*, who will set out to glorify, praise and serve God. Additionally, just as it was the Celebrant who, beset with negative and positive radiation, proclaims (as Steele says John does) “that this death-wish, this black

reasons I no longer need to speculate about, to be identical with being conscious *ad maiorem Tui gloriam*. It feels like celebration, and it is.”

¹⁰⁴ “Singing”, 1.

¹⁰⁵ “Singing”, 1.

tropism, [the “circumambient” darkness] has been thrown over after all by the Lord”,¹⁰⁷ it is the task of the Witness, who, seeking to persevere in the glorying of God, adheres to the technique of the *Exercises* and employs Ignatius’ “rules for perceiving and knowing in some manner the different movements which are caused in the soul, the good, to receive them, and the bad to reject them”.¹⁰⁸ The Witness, in other words, discerns the will of God as to the practical details and circumstances, the externals, of his or her witnessing. Ignatius, for example, Steele says, had to bow to God’s choice of Rome rather than Jerusalem as his centre of operations: “in Rome and from Rome it had to be that Ignatius and his companions would testify”.¹⁰⁹

When Steele comes to consider (in reply to the questioning title “Why Stay?”) why he stays a Jesuit and a writer, he refers, by way of preface to his answer, to Ignatius’ concept of ‘everyday’ as

a plenum of Presence, of divinity consented to or backed away from in the midst of everything that happens - the shower taken, the path walked to work, the casual conversations, the reading and writing and teaching, the meals, the lot.¹¹⁰

Only then, and with that awareness explained, does Steele state his belief in the confirmation of his vocational path:

When one feels things of this order strongly enough, and if one has that ancient malady, ‘scribbler’s itch’, writing will come to be something more than a running-report on experience thus far, and will itself be a form of experience... [And later in the paragraph, speaking of Augustine and Donne he says] ...these men were twinning that way of the world, writing, with the Way of the world. It seemed, as it still does, a good pursuit.¹¹¹

Just as the Word or Witness “raying” with its required response of service exhibits a practical application in Steele’s account of his own work, so there is evidence in those accounts of the other “rayings” having similar practical ramifications. The Jester,

¹⁰⁶ “Eagle”, 11.

¹⁰⁷ “Eagle”, 23.

¹⁰⁸ *FlemingSpEx*, 204, [313].

¹⁰⁹ “Eagle”, 11.

¹¹⁰ “Stay”, MS 11.

¹¹¹ “Stay”, MS 10-11.

sponsor of the tensional and the dialectical, is represented in Steele's reply to the question "why remain a Jesuit teacher?":

the answer, so far as I am concerned [is] because that is where the drama of a graced and grace-resisting world is best played out, given my competencies.

[And in the next paragraph he adds:] For Ignatius, every mission unfolded out of mysticism: it was the God in the heart who sent one out to meet the God in the world. This dialectic of the divine being becomes, ideally, a dialectic in the being of a Jesuit.¹¹²

The Pilgrim / Expatriate is represented in Steele's rhetorical "How could anyone who has spent the whole of adult life learning or teaching about literature at its most vital ignore the magisterial authority of *patria*, *Heimat*, *rodina*, the remembered and envisaged destination?"¹¹³ And the Celebrant together with the Witness are most apparent in one of Steele's more definitive statements concerning his professional work. He says in "Why Stay?":

While trying to avoid the bullying of the guilt-monger, I have often tried, sometimes officially but more often as a private citizen, to pitch high the aspirations of celebration and service amongst those who have some reason to listen. One's first auditor in these matters should be oneself, but not one's last.¹¹⁴

In stating that he welcomes jesterly tensions and drama, remembers the Expatriate's *patria*, and "pitch[es] high" celebration and service in his own involvement with other lives, Steele not only appropriates a maxim he recommends in his writings on the *Spiritual Exercises* - namely that it is possible to find God "radiating simply through the people he loves"¹¹⁵ - but patterns in his structure of thought the radiant character of the jesterly, expatriated, celebrating and witnessing God. On the other hand, (to let the Jester have, for the moment, the last say on the *Exercises*) it should be noted that, in the process of referring to the meditations prescribed in the *Exercises*, Steele stresses that

¹¹² "Stay", MS 10.

¹¹³ "SpChange", 48.

¹¹⁴ "Stay", MS 17.

¹¹⁵ "Poemind", 7.

A disposition of the mind and emotions which cannot confront the *Wall Street Journal*, *Pravda*, and *The Australian* is not worth the paper the nearest bible is printed on. Nor, of course, would the bible be, if it were so helpless in confrontation, as its writers would have been the first to admit. An ecstatic is not an escapist only if he loves the ground on which he has stood, and to which he returns.¹¹⁶

Steele's treatment of God's communicatory attribute as it informs poets as derived from his article "Haunting Presences: Four Gestures of the Imagination":

When in his prose tribute to the late Joseph Brodsky Steele asks about the poet, "What did he think he was up to?" Steele answers his own question by saying:

In the first place, he thought, rather, that something was up to itself in him.¹¹⁷ On trial for 'social parasitism', and asked who, if not the omni-authoritative State, had authorized his being a poet, he said that God had - a claim whose reverberations were no doubt lost on his blinking judge. Much later, he made the point constantly that language itself, 'The Word', was playing itself out through its agent or vector, the poet - though he was never inclined to suppose that this meant that he was a pawn.¹¹⁸

Brodsky's "way", Steele says, was "Waiting to be magicked, and then, the magic lasting, saying that one has been...".¹¹⁹ This is essentially what "Haunting Presences" has, at some length, to say.

Poetry for Steele "voices" the way "The world impinges upon us". This is how he describes it:

The world impinges upon us, fiercely, gently, or indifferently, and we register its imminence in brain and gut, as did, I suppose, our inarticulate ancestors. We register it too as that which casts us down or raises us up, quickens our alertness or suffuses our sleep with

¹¹⁶ "Poemind", 7.

¹¹⁷ cf. "God is not only the one who looks to us for something: he is the one who looks the something into us...". ("28th October", 6.)

¹¹⁸ "Brodsky", 17.

dreams, colours consciousness and darkens our counsel. The world, that is to say, the world of intimacy or of public being, the world of solitude or of sharing - that world *presents* itself to us, is a presence to us. It haunts us whether we will or no.¹²⁰

Haunting, in this sense of something or someone being present to someone else, is frequently mentioned in Steele's work. It is fundamental to his concept of the presence of God, to word and witness, which is the task of poetry, and therefore will be considered in some detail.

The use of "haunted" can have overtones of the dead speaking to the living as in Steele's reflection on W. S. Merwin's "Sire", where he comments that "The figure speaking... is, almost literally, haunted".¹²¹ Elsewhere, in a homily,¹²² Steele plays with the concept of "haunting" to serve all of ghostly connotation, psychological explanation, and scriptural interpretation. Suggesting to an American student congregation the "Ghostbuster" image and mentioning "other movies about figures from the dead who come back to spy, or to give a hand", Steele proceeds from this popular understanding of "haunting" or "haunted" to speak both of "bad-news hauntings", "ghosts of events" that return to make people "the haunted hag-ridden victims of the past", and of "good-news hauntings", "some stretch of childhood (as we say) hauntingly beautiful and meaningful" such as "[Thomas Traherne's] mature nostalgia for a time that continues to haunt him". Having thus established his terms Steele proceeds to attend to the death of Christ which he says left the disciples in trauma: "The trauma came both from the haunting mercilessness of his destruction, and from their own guilty knowledge of their desertion". Turning to the resurrection of Christ and returning to literal ghosts Steele cites, "In a state of alarm and fright, they thought they were seeing a ghost" but hastens to say "Jesus was no ghost: ...he had arrived to stop his friends from being hag-ridden by things ill done and done to others' harm". Ultimately Steele refers to Luke's reporting of the promise to send "the power from on high" which "power" Steele names as "the Holy Spirit, the Holy

¹¹⁹ "Brodsky", 17.

¹²⁰ "Presences", 47.

¹²¹ "Reveries", 1.

¹²² "Good Enough to be True", Dahlgren, 1994, 1-3.

Ghost, the good-news haunter”. Any or all of these meanings can apply when Steele briefly refers to something’s or someone’s being “haunted”.

Frequently, however, Steele limits his use of “haunting” or “haunted” to imply a strong and influential presence of aspiration, conviction, inspiration, or predominance. Christ, for instance, Steele says, “will not conform [to the world], not out of stubbornness, but because he is haunted by other dreams, and has the vocation so to be haunted...”;¹²³ individuals are haunted by the Scriptures: Steele refers to “the sort of thing haunting Chesterton”, and cites him referring to the bible and saying that he is “again haunted by a kind of confirmation [about the mirth of Jesus]”;¹²⁴ “The *Spiritual Exercises*”, Steele says, are “designed, like the Gospels, to haunt people irretrievably with a sense of God’s presence...”;¹²⁵ people are haunted by God: “You must at least consent to be haunted by Him. And perhaps, in the end, at most”;¹²⁶ “A christian is someone who is haunted, night and day, by the presence of the Lord”;¹²⁷ “If there is somebody who is haunting you while you think about it, perhaps it is God who is the haunter”.¹²⁸

More importantly for present purposes, Steele claims that writers “have been haunted by the figure of Christ, who is called the Word made flesh: haunted by him in his humanity and in his offering the radiations of divinity”.¹²⁹ Increasingly it is the case, however, Steele says, (or said, in 1975) that “Not many of them have been so interested lately”.¹³⁰ And yet Steele will refer to a poet’s or to poets’ being haunted without attributing the haunting to God: Yeats and Dawe “are men consenting to be haunted, and seeing it as a chief business (perhaps for them *the* chief business) of life

¹²³ “Steerage”, 14.

¹²⁴ “Hopeful”, 18.

¹²⁵ “Steerage”, 4.

¹²⁶ “Snowman”, 4.

¹²⁷ “Steerage”, 17.

¹²⁸ “The Run”, Newman, 1995, AJAF viii, 3. cf “The only reason for Jesuits to try to, as they say, ‘find God everywhere’ is because they are persuaded that they have themselves been found, everywhere, by God.” (“One Line at a Time”, 1987, AJAF ii.)

¹²⁹ “Singing”, 2.

¹³⁰ “Singing”, 2.

to be so haunted”;¹³¹ “In prose and in poetry [Merwin] is a haunted man...”.¹³² Conversely poets haunt their readers: “Merwin... is trying to haunt the morally or spiritually dead into life”.¹³³ Or as Steele says to God in some early writing:

I don't know what Merwin's religious beliefs are if any, though I'd be surprised to find out that he was a christian. But any reading of his last few books has left me with a sense of the mysterious - not the odd, not the awesome necessarily, but something which exacts a change in me if I am to come to terms with it. He haunts me more than almost any poet I can think of, stops me in my tracks¹³⁴

Nearly twenty years later, in “Haunting Presences: Four Gestures of the Imagination” Steele is at pains to show how such hauntings attend poets, and how poetry, in turn, is so haunting. He begins: “My theme is the way the poetic imagination shows its hauntings” and later in the article interprets his theme as meaning both the way poetry is haunted and the way poetry haunts: “thereupon the haunted becomes the haunter”.¹³⁵ And this he discerns as occurring irrespective of the type of religious belief (or absence of it) in the poet. In “Haunting Presences” he examines Merwin's poem “Gift” to instance an example of God as the haunter (as opposed to the world, the self and the others, all of which are also considered as haunting presences) and explains:

I choose this poem rather than one by, say, George Herbert, because Merwin is not as Herbert manifestly is a poet of traditional devotion.¹³⁶

Elsewhere, apropos Peter Porter, Steele quips with respect to “the gods” - “He may absolutely disbelieve in them, but they surely do bring him metaphors for poetry”.¹³⁷ Steele also says with respect to Porter that if, for some reason, he, Steele “was in need of a spiritual director and was forbidden to have a ‘believer’ as one, [he] would start looking for Peter Porter”.¹³⁸

¹³¹ “Poemind”, 3.

¹³² *Expatriates*, 11.

¹³³ “Passages”, 33.

¹³⁴ “Silences”, 10.

¹³⁵ “Presences”, 47

¹³⁶ “Presences”, 54.

¹³⁷ *Porter*, 87.

¹³⁸ “The muses’ gatekeeper”, *Eureka Street*, 1, 8, (October, 1991), 38.

In “Haunting Presences” Steele selects four poems for interpretation since he believes that for each poem there is “a yield from anatomising its radiant body”. And since he also believes that “Poetry is haunted speech, explicitly haunted, where other speech is implicitly haunted”, he sets about to argue that “The hauntings we have from language are not esoteric: they are precisely the hauntings of its *presence*.”¹³⁹

While part of Steele’s concern in this article is a derogation of “the view that literature exists merely as the fine spectacle of otherwise abashed humanity”, its principal objective is a feting of presence (which elsewhere Steele calls “that entity so scandalous to Derrida, the gallic Mephistopheles of absence”.¹⁴⁰) Steele attests to “the presence of haunting, and the haunting of presence” in the selected poems “each of them an address to the ‘haunting presence’ of a world or a self”. Respectively they “speak of” four haunters - the globe - “It”; the self - “Me”; the needed other person, that is, “the needed, desired, and unassailed other, who has for so long and for so many reasons been called ‘She’”; and “the haunter of all the haunters, the object, eliciter and eluder of all divinations, the divine one, He”. To substantiate how the poems set about “re-presenting, the haunting of presence and the presence of haunting”, Steele reflects on them and shows each of the poem’s attempts to word their particular longed for or sought, world or self.

In Howard Nemerov’s “The Backward Glance” the astronaut longs for the globe of earth; in Bruce Dawe’s “A Week’s Grace” the speaker seeks to know the self; in Anthony Hecht’s “A Letter” the speaker yearns for a loved woman; and in Merwin’s “Gift” the speaker “wants to pray, knowing all the while that prayer is immensely more a matter of being attained than of attaining”.¹⁴¹ The fact that Steele discerns immense yearning in all the speakers of the poems is matter for the Pilgrim / Expatriate. But since the speakers’ yearning - for the globe, the self, the woman, for

¹³⁹ “Presences”, 47.

¹⁴⁰ *Autopassion*, 84. This is an argument which Steele takes up in *Porter*, 23: “It is of course possible so to design poetry as to tend to abolish personal presence from it, or to seem to do so. This may be attempted because a critical theory requires it, as would seem to be necessary for any orthodox deconstructionist, or as a kind of *acte gratuit*, like writing a novel without the letter ‘e’ in it. But the idea has not taken with Porter: he is still, as one of his lines goes, ‘Keeping ahead of death and Deconstruction’ (*The Automatic Oracle*, 6).”

¹⁴¹ “Presences”, 54.

God - attests to the presence of haunting and the haunting of presence of that object or self (while Hecht, for instance, is “the canny craftsman of his own yearnings”¹⁴² it is also the case, Steele argues, that “What is lettered is lettered by the desired one as certainly as by the desirer”¹⁴³), and since “Haunting Presences” attests not only to the world’s, the self’s, the woman’s, and God’s haunting of the respective speakers, but also to the poems’ haunting of their readers, it is within the province of the “raying” of the Word: “Something of us hungers as surely, and as securely, for the naming of bread as something else of us hungers for the eating of bread.”¹⁴⁴

There are three major levels of communication occurring in “Haunting Presences: Four Gestures of the Imagination”. First there is the basic argument that poetry evidences “Haunting Presences”; secondly this argument is substantiated, like all of Steele’s work, by a structural unity of thought in which the argument of the article is couched, and which operates to form an image of a radiant Presence, jesterly, expatriated, celebrating and wording, which image underscores the argument; and thirdly this radiant arrangement of motifs is further endorsed by specific images, principally metaphors, of radiant entities which work as symbolic reinforcements of the radiant presence and the entire project.

First, the argument of the article, as we have seen, does two things - it claims that poetry attests (“I am interested”, Steele writes, “not only in art’s theme but in art’s attestation as well...”¹⁴⁵) to a haunting presence and to the presence of haunting (“My theme is the way the poetic imagination shows its hauntings. I have in mind both those experiences to which the poet addresses himself or herself...”¹⁴⁶); and the article reflects on the way the poems attest to presence namely by wording or naming it (“and the essays of language in which those addressings are vindicated”.¹⁴⁷) Poetry for Steele attests to the haunting presence of world, self, others, and God - God being the “haunter” of all these haunters.

¹⁴² “Presences”, 52.

¹⁴³ “Presences”, 52.

¹⁴⁴ “Presences”, 47.

¹⁴⁵ “Presences”, 49.

¹⁴⁶ “Presences”, 47.

¹⁴⁷ “Presences”, 47.

Secondly, the article is conceptualised in accordance with Steele's structural unity of thought which provides avenues of understanding by which the presence of the haunter of haunters (either directly or via a world, self or others), is discernible as present in poetry. In studying how the poems word the presence of their hauntings Steele proceeds by observing the longings, yearnings, seekings of the speakers for that which haunts them. Apropos Nemerov's poem: "we are indeed in an alien land. Expatriate, we wheel in space, victims of our own unloving imperium. The prospect of that condition must include just such fierce longing as Nemerov embodies in the poem".¹⁴⁸ Apropos Dawe's poem: "It is a wanderer's and an exile's manoeuvre, the heart itself having that combination of the domestic and the self-propelling which we find in beasts, our alien fellows".¹⁴⁹ Apropos Hecht's poem: "Hearing this, one hears the note of a hundred essays in yearning, the prosed ones and the versed ones".¹⁵⁰ And apropos Merwin's poem: "He is indeed most characteristically a poet of the evanescence of things, the fugitivity of being. He favours, intellectually and emotionally, trajectory and asymptote".¹⁵¹ This is the Pilgrim / Expatriate's contribution to the process of naming those characteristics of individuals who are haunted, indirectly or directly, by the presence of a God who is for Steele, as we have seen (in Chapter Three) "a nomad whose home is the earth";¹⁵² who "is a vagrant, 'unappeased and peregrine'";¹⁵³ who is "the horizon of all our journeyings, the climax of our yearnings";¹⁵⁴ who is a "yearning Creator";¹⁵⁵ who "sings the world forth in all its... yearning";¹⁵⁶ and who "yearns towards us... and prompts a yearning in reply".¹⁵⁷

¹⁴⁸ "Presences", 48

¹⁴⁹ "Presences", 50.

¹⁵⁰ "Presences", 51

¹⁵¹ q.v. "Radiations", 66, where Steele, refers to Porter's comments in an interview regarding the "'permanently upright city' to which [Porter] refers in the poem 'On First Looking into Chapman's Hesiod'" and claims: "It is only one step, and that a short one, from seeing the 'permanently upright city' as tantalizingly unavailable, to seeing the poem itself, and all its procedures, as asymptote."

¹⁵² "Snowman", 11.

¹⁵³ "Pen", 6.

¹⁵⁴ "28th October", 5.

¹⁵⁵ "Birds", 3.

¹⁵⁶ "Stills. 5: A Song of Blessings: Matt.V:1-12", *Madonna*, April, 1987, 6.

¹⁵⁷ "Singing", 4.

Steele also notes that for the speakers and (therefore, for) the readers of these poems there is always a residue of “divined discontent”, some satisfaction and some dissatisfaction, in the apprehension of the one longed for. Concerning Nemerov: “It is the curious business of the poet to heighten both the satisfaction we do have and the dissatisfaction which we also have - to keep alive in his poem, as it were, both the earthling and the astronaut which each of us is...”.¹⁵⁸ Concerning Dawe: “And so the heart - the self, under some description - goes on, ‘travelling, despairing, singing’”;¹⁵⁹ “‘Human language is like a cracked kettle on which we beat out tunes for bears to dance to, when all the time we are longing to move the stars to pity.’ The tunes and the longing are alike and at once the deeds of the self”.¹⁶⁰ Concerning Hecht: “Its givings are redoubled and qualified by its misgivings, which is why one is so taken with its conclusion”.¹⁶¹ And with Merwin’s poem in mind, Steele says: “even while it [Language] tests the awesomeness of what is experienced, it particularises, temporalises, places. It is not at war with the infinite but it is not quite at peace with it either”.¹⁶² These duplex conditions of the poems’ themes and resolutions are the work of the Jester whose panache for antithesis and provocation also sponsor the following: “[the globe’s] round which sustains us can also in season be the round that infuriates us”;¹⁶³ “the one we all know, or don’t, the one called ‘Me’”;¹⁶⁴ “The wit of the very title... consoles the restiveness which it also articulates”;¹⁶⁵ “We want the shock or stir of protest from within the work: what Montaigne calls the ‘art that wrestles against the art’”;¹⁶⁶ [A gift] “may show itself, if it comes, in the mode of question and of challenge”.¹⁶⁷ In this case it is the presence of the jesterly God who “prompts”,¹⁶⁸ and provokes;¹⁶⁹ he is “the God of ironists”.¹⁷⁰

¹⁵⁸ “Presences”, 49-50.

¹⁵⁹ “Presences”, 50.

¹⁶⁰ “Presences”, 50.

¹⁶¹ “Presences”, 52.

¹⁶² “Presences”, 54.

¹⁶³ “Presences”, 48.

¹⁶⁴ “Presences”, 50.

¹⁶⁵ “Presences”, 51.

¹⁶⁶ “Presences”, 52.

¹⁶⁷ “Presences”, 54.

¹⁶⁸ “Snowman”, 5.

¹⁶⁹ “[Jesus is] provoked by the Spirit, as... his prophetic forebears had also been.” (“Lake/El”, 1.)

Additionally, there is some evidence of the Celebrant's activities in the body of Steele's argument. For instance he claims that poetry's "voicing, in a fashion something like music's fashion, both confirms and transforms that to which it refers";¹⁷¹ and that "poems have their authority for us partly in virtue of their ability to transmute truisms into truths". Here transformation and transmutation represent the Celebrant's long-term "coming through" into a new state of being. Lest the evincing of poetry's longings, and poetry's equipoise between its partial satisfactions and "divined discontent[s]" be regarded as the dominating story of the art, Steele hastens to re-alert the reader to the celebratory nature of poetry (which he appears to sense is not issuing intrinsically or strongly from the discussion of "Haunting Presences", which state of affairs he is anxious to redress.) Speaking of Jarrell's and Dawe's poetry as "enjoin[ing] a new alertness to the gestures whereby, tellingly, we signal our searching", Steele adds a disclaimer:

But I would not mislead, nor be misled. This is not the only office of poetry. We look to it often for its proclamatory, even its formulaic, force. Think of the conclusiveness of many of Shakespeare's sonnets; think of Blake's readiness, in "Auguries of Innocence" to give us asseveration after asseveration; think of the bone-hard declarations which underlie the suppleness of Auden's poetry.¹⁷²

What Steele is speaking about in this almost encoded reference to poetry's "proclamatory" and "formulaic" potency and in his subsequent examples of famous poetry of "asseveration" and "declaration" is the function of the Celebrant whose proclamation is - that something can be salvaged or retrieved, and whose formula is Heaney's own - that something can "come through constraint into felicity".¹⁷³ Writing elsewhere of Auden, in particular of "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten", Steele has this to say, about the poet's perception of a new state of being-at-one:

To have an emigré Englishman, long resident in America, meditating as an Anglican on a Catholic Mass in an Austrian village on the feast of Pentecost is to provide the occasion for much, even bewildering, variety. But it is also to open the possibility of just that at-one-ment

¹⁷⁰ "Hopeful", 4.

¹⁷¹ "Presences", 47.

¹⁷² "Presences", 51.

¹⁷³ "Strain", 61-62.

of which the first Christian Pentecost was the endorsement. Auden's poem negotiates its way towards just such an achievement, just such a recognition.¹⁷⁴

Steele says that this "juxtaposition of many varieties of allegiance", ("of the East against the West, of the old against the new") this "prodigality in creation" of God is "outstripped, by his prodigality in redemption. To endorse all that he has done, he retrieves them into solidarity". He continues:

Pentecost can be said to be the real confirmation of Easter, in the sense that it is only when we are radically turned towards one another, "convert-ed", that we can be quite certain that the dying and rising of Christ was not, after all, something peculiar to God... It is when God, as transforming and endorsing presence, is there right in the thick of those estrangements which had previously brought about the death of Christ, that we can be assured that he is where we are. ... [Pentecost] is a feast of God's powerful and realistic proximity: it is a time when we acknowledge that he is too momentous to need to be esoteric.

Auden's poem deliberately attempts to "map" much of the world: Kirchstetten, Rome, Canterbury, Loipersbach to the Bering Sea, Africa. ... The Spirit being invoked will have to be faithful, and powerful, over the whole span of human affairs, dauntless when we are timid, witty when we are stupefied. And in its small way the poem tries to recapitulate what happens at the first Pentecost, namely a re-assignment of the world to man by God, and a re-celebration of the world before God by man. These both take place via the word.¹⁷⁵ We consent to what we acknowledge as it is named, and we commit ourselves to what we applaud in voicing it. A poem like this one manages, in its comic air, to concede that we hardly know how to do either thing - to receive, or to give.¹⁷⁶

Such, at length, is what Steele means when in "Haunting Presences" he speaks of "the bone-hard declarations which underlie the suppleness of Auden's poetry", namely that poetry celebrates the negotiation of new states of being: the transforming presence of the risen Christ, the reception of the world from God ("a re-assignment of the world to man by God" - the first process of the *Contemplatio*) and the "re-celebration of the world before God by man" (a glorifying of, a praising of God for the world - not only

¹⁷⁴ "Singing", 22.

¹⁷⁵ In the strictest sense, and where writing or speaking about the glory of God is concerned, the Celebrant's act of *proclaiming* (in addition to the Word's act of naming) takes place via the word.

for a world created, but for a world retrieved¹⁷⁷ - the second process of the *Contemplatio*.)

In terms of the argument of “Haunting Presences” Steele allows himself this digression into the celebratory capacities of poetry because, in arguing for the presence of God in the world, there can be no thought for Steele of the presence of God without there being a reading off, a receiving, of that Presence, or without there also being a responsive praising or glorifying of that Presence. Or to be more accurate with respect to “Haunting Presences” there can be no acknowledgement of the presence of haunting in the poems without a reading off of the haunting of that presence. At another level, however, the discussion of the celebratory nature of poetry has not been a digression at all. It constitutes the needed third “raying” of the sunburst image which radiant image is partially delineated by the discussion of exile, yearning, discontent from the Pilgrim / Expatriate’s “raying”; by that of dichotomies, provocations, shock, and wrestle from the Jester’s; and by that of “what is said”, language, voice, and word from the “raying” of the Word: “enlivened language becomes the enlivener: the world’s presence to the word generates the word’s presence to the mind”. Without the disclaimer, “I would not mislead, nor be misled” and the discussion that ensues, the radiant image underwriting the whole discussion of the presence of God in poetry would lack the Celebrant’s vital contribution to its shape or pattern. As it is, the attempt to name the haunting presence in poetry by employing the four motifs establishes a sustained imaging of the radiant sunburst. This patterning is endorsed by what Steele has to say later in the article about efforts in naming God. Before this is discussed, however, it is necessary to raise the third level on which the article operates.

That Steele has an image of the radiant “sunburst” in mind, in “Haunting Presences”, as he discusses poetry’s voicing of the presence of God through its voicing of the world, is hinted in the metaphorical language of his opening defence of an analytical

¹⁷⁶ “Singing”, 23.

¹⁷⁷ “God’s prodigality in creation is matched, indeed in a sense outstripped, by his prodigality in redemption. To endorse all that he has done, he retrieves them into solidarity.” (“Singing”, 23.)

approach to poetry: “there is a use in distinguishing within the complex phenomenon of a poem”, he says, “a yield from anatomising its radiant body”.¹⁷⁸ It is only a hint not to be echoed or, least of all, developed, until after the entire argument about presence is completed. When the “anatomising” of three of the poems is done and after the fourth poem is cited, Steele uses Merwin’s poem (“I call to it Nameless One O Invisible / Untouchable Free”) to springboard into the discussion of the necessarily metaphorical nature of essays in naming God and the ultimate merging of such names. The passage in which Steele sets out his views on this matter deserves citation at length. He says

communities of believers are likely sooner or later to find ways of voicing what they identify as the variety of God’s presences. The same broad community will want to speak now in mystical terms, now in fraternal terms, now with moral passion, now with institutional enthusiasms... because religious communities discern that they are addressed - providentially, as they suppose - in multiple fashion. When the author of the *Letter to the Hebrews* says that “God in the past spoke at various times and in different fashions to the fathers through the prophets”, this is also a synoptic reminder of the historians’ narratives, the psalmists’ cries, the lawyers’ codifications, the tragedians’ jobations, the ironists’ tales. These are effectively the masks, or the modalities, of God, as the believer receives them.

And yet, if that believer is secured or at least solaced by one or another of these divine self-tellings, he cannot long ignore the fact that each of them melts into another. God guises himself variously, but moves in all his guises, and is contained by none of them. Whenever a religious community sets about reforming its ways, it claims not only that better courses are open to it and enjoined upon it, but also that that opening, that injunction, come from a Lord who has been allowed to ossify in the imaginations of his votaries. It is an unbound, an unbounded, God who is appealed to in order that the unbound followers may step in his new ways. The giving of many titles to him, every last one of them necessarily metaphorical, is a reminder of the sovereign being of the one who exacts not only allegiance but outright worship. He is called “many” insofar as he shows Himself in manifold ways: he is called “one” insofar as he alone does this.

As I have implied, the Presence of presences has been seized in myriad ways. Within Christianity, God may be spoken of in Hopkinsian fashion as the animator, and the agitator, of the natural world, or in Donnean fashion as the swayer of human hearts. Once again though, the experience of the one melds with the experience of the other, and perhaps in

¹⁷⁸ “Presences”, 47.

principle it must be so. To use my earlier terms, the presence of “It”, the presence of “Me”, and the presence of “She” are all intensified and transmuted when the divine presence is apprehended. The autobiographical accounts of the mystics are among other things a tracing through of that development. They attest a wholly new but unalienated relationship with physical being, with their selves, and with the loved others, and an astonishing interrelation between those realities, precisely in virtue of their being drawn by God.¹⁷⁹

When Steele says that religious communities “find ways of voicing what they identify as the variety of God’s presences”, he can be seen to be setting up another version of the radiant emanations from the theocentre: God, (whom one can image in the centre of the structure) addresses (rays out to) the community “in multiple fashion” as mystic (“mystical terms”); brother (“fraternal terms”); moralist/teacher (“now with moral passion”); administrator (“with institutional enthusiasms”). As Steele looks to the God of the *Letter to the Hebrews* he can be said to be establishing another archetype for “the masks, or the modalities, of God, as the believer receives them”: God (who can again be imagined in the centre of the pattern) speaks to (rays out to) the “‘fathers through the prophets’” and he does this through “the historians’ narratives”; “the psalmists’ cries”; “the lawyers’ codifications”; “the tragedians’ jobations”; “the ironists’ tales”. In a similar manner Steele can be seen to be showing how a third possible prototype might be conceptualised for naming God “in myriad ways” - this time it is the poets who are doing the naming. God is “spoken of” (can be seen to ray out) as “the animator”, “the agitator”, (“in Hopkinsian fashion”) and as “the swayer of human hearts”, (“in Donnean fashion”). Steele claims that within these models, each of the names for God “melds into another”: (“the experience of the one melds with the experience of the other”); since God “guises himself variously, but moves in all his guises, and is contained by none of them”.

Returning to the terms, “It”; “Me”; “She”; Steele can be said to be proffering a fourth possible model for naming God, this time utilising the above terms with which he has been considering the haunting presences of the four selected poems: God presences himself (rays out) in this model as “the presence of ‘It’”; “the presence of ‘Me’”; “the

¹⁷⁹ “Presences”, 53.

presence of ‘She’”. Again the terms meld: “the presence of ‘It’, the presence of ‘Me’, and the presence of ‘She’ are all intensified and transmuted”. Steele might well use some such dictum as Underhill’s “Multiplicity is resolved into Unity: a unity with which the perceiving self is merged”;¹⁸⁰ but instead expounds in detail:

The autobiographical accounts of the mystics are among other things a tracing through of that development. [ie the intensification and transmutation of the presence of “It”, “Me”, “She” etc.] They attest a wholly new but unalienated relationship with physical being, with their selves, and with the loved others, and an astonishing interrelation between those realities, precisely in virtue of their being drawn by God.¹⁸¹

In expounding the melding process of the terms of the last model, Steele is explicating the process of the mystics’ apprehension of the world. A classical, mystical perception of God in all persons and things, Steele well knows defies the capacity of language. He says:

It may be though that this very compounding of experiences makes for a major difficulty in the writing of religious poetry.... If you ask language to do too much, it will not do anything. It is well enough to write in a highly, even densely, metaphorical way.¹⁸²

As Kevin Hart observes “The mystic’s vision finds expression in metaphors, hyperboles, oxymorons, prosopopoeia - in tropes of every kind-”.¹⁸³ And Evelyn Underhill in her study of *Mysticism* stresses that the literary forms used to convey the experience of the mystics include a heavy reliance on symbol and allegory: and by way of corollary, she complains that Pascal, the great aphorist and ironist, who recorded an ecstatic experience as “depuis environ dix heures et demie du soir jusques [sic] environ minuit et demie, Feu” is reduced to “little broken phrases... child-like stammering speech” such as she finds commonplace when “a supreme master of language has tried to tell his wonder and his delight”.¹⁸⁴ As Steele says in the continuation of his argument about language and mystical apprehensions of the world,

¹⁸⁰ *Mysticism*, 338.

¹⁸¹ “Presences”, 53.

¹⁸² “Presences”, 53.

¹⁸³ Kevin Hart, *The Trespass of the Sign: Deconstruction, theology and philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 211.

¹⁸⁴ *Mysticism*, 189

and as he is quite aware in writing of the *Commedia*'s "crossing of ecstasy and expediency",¹⁸⁵ "language can never be sheerly 'ecstatic', sheerly beside itself".¹⁸⁶

When Steele comes to devote his last two to three paragraphs of "Haunting Presences" to Merwin's poem, he raises the question of the immanence or transcendence of God, (saying that Christianity would have it both ways, but that even that tradition is "on a lifelong quest for a liberation from its own diminishings of God"); and ventures to suggest how the haunting presence of God in poetry can be both immanent and transcendent. It can be so, he says, because

the poetry which evinces a sense of what lies beyond poetry, as beyond humanity, precisely when it intimates what is present to it, as present to him, hangs in our minds and our mouths like air. It is not *vox et praeterea nihil*, voice and nothing besides, but it is assuredly voice.¹⁸⁷

Having said so much, that poetry as voice manifests what lies beyond poetry precisely when it shows what is present to it, it appears to be the case that Steele has reached the limits of his prose presentation of the haunting of poetry. After some comments on Merwin (his preference for "asymptote" and naming Merwin's "presiding progenitor" as Emily Dickinson) Steele does what he observes Dante doing in the entire *Commedia* and what he (Steele) says language, attempting the description of the rapturous or the ecstatic, should do - he turns to metaphor. The metaphorical process that has already begun with "hangs in our minds and mouths" assists with the conceptualising of poetry as "voice". But the metaphor to fulfil the unrealised promise of the introductory reference to poetry criticism as "anatomising its radiant body", (and the intervening and tantalising reference to Kafka's "Our art is dazzled blindness before the truth"), is reserved to the penultimate place:

Not for him [Merwin] the Dantesque blaze of the divine: his is the radiance of a distant, and perhaps a dwindling, star. Yet the haunting of that presence can be, as it is in "Giff", as apparently unquenchable as that of the "love that moves the sun and the other stars".

¹⁸⁵ "Love/death", 65, (MS 32)

¹⁸⁶ "Presences", 53.

The references to *radiance*: (poetry as a “radiant body”), to *dazzlement*: (“Our art is dazzled blindness before the truth”), to *blazing* and to *sun* and *star* (Dante’s “blaze of the divine”), (“[Merwin’s] is the radiance of a distant... star”), (the “love that moves the sun and the other stars”); these insist that the metaphorical representation of the divine presence in poetry is as some form of radiance. This, as we shall see in detail in the final sections of this chapter, occurs frequently in Steele’s work, but never so pertinently with respect to presence and poetry as when Steele discovers that Auden’s “Whitsunday in Kirchstetten”

ventures... to instance some of the ways in which God invests the commonplace with uncommon significance, and irradiates the unremarkable flesh with the singular word.¹⁸⁸

But the wording of the Presence, Steele knows, must not become esoteric: “Ignatius is concerned that the visions¹⁸⁹ be earthed as visions should always be”. “An ecstatic is not an escapist only if he loves the ground on which he has stood, and to which he returns”.¹⁹⁰ Speaking elsewhere and generally about the “harmonies of the living”, “the serenity and joy proper to us”, Steele says that

all that comes to us comes *as gift*: in God’s New World there are no *conquistadores*. What is at issue, though, is the way the gift must come. The mode of life is always parturition. And to seek the true God anew is to seek the one who has nothing but the potency of his own life to offer. When you hit the dirt, you are always going back to the first day of creation, at dawn.¹⁹¹

Returning to “Haunting Presences”, Merwin’s “Gift” with its final invocation “come and be given” is, Steele says, the speaker’s expression of his desire to pray. Prayer being “more a matter of being attained than of attaining”, but which in its inconclusiveness, Steele says “may be apt to return us to Nemerov’s [earth]. It may fit us a little more to inhabit that world which so decisively inhabits us.” Hence Steele

¹⁸⁷ “Presences”, 54.

¹⁸⁸ “Singing”, 23.

¹⁸⁹ Probably “visions” of how one’s life can be in harmony with the ideal situations of “the Standards, the Classes of Men, the Degrees of Humility” of the *Exercises*; but Steele has a propensity to speak metaphorically yet with overtones of the literal, as in “If one denies what one has seen, one sins against the light ...”. (“Poemind”, 7.)

¹⁹⁰ “Poemind”, 7.

¹⁹¹ “Steerage”, 2.

concludes his discussion of “Haunting Presences” by anchoring the metaphors of radiance to the earth, to diurnal living and to mortality. And ultimately the troping of the presence of God as radiance is simultaneously endorsed and earthed, as Steele concludes that “Gift” will

haunt us as we need to be haunted, we who wake daily to our brilliant, mortal sun.¹⁹²

Conclusion to the Word as the fourth (and concluding) “raying”:

“Haunting Presences” serves to demonstrate not only the way in which Steele’s structural unity of thought figures the radiant presence of the glory of God in the world but how that figuring both enhances his subject, (in this case the wish to attest to the haunting of presence), and how that figuring is itself enhanced by the supportive metaphors of radiance in the piece. “Haunting Presences” reverses the process at work in the passage from “Starburst” in “The Poem of the Mind”. There Steele’s image of the “radiant Lord” is not an endorsing image to support the radiant structure of thought, but is itself substantiated by the radiant configuring established by the structural unity of thought based on the four motifs of Jester, Pilgrim, Celebrant, and Word.

It has been mentioned how, in “Starburst”, and with respect to the Celebrant, the relationship between Christ’s resurrection and the *Contemplatio ad Amorem* is delineated; how the image of the radiant fountain is invoked to connote the radiant Lord of the New Testament; and how there is a sense in which the Celebrant propels the discussion of Steele’s structure of thought into a discussion of the symbolic implications of that structure. Here again is the last section of “Starburst”:

Each of the resurrection narratives in the gospels offers him as in some sense the radiant one. Sometimes this is imaged graphically by the angels, sometimes in the “burning hearts” of Emmaus, sometimes in the impulse which evokes worship and provokes mission. In all cases, the emblem of the sun, which became so important in christian art, is to the point: “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” is a testimony at once to [sic] splendour of the giver and to the abundance of the gift. “We saw his glory” is a claim about

the *humanity* of God, and also about the humanity of *God*. The dream of God is one not of wistful solidarity or of bloody fraternity but of liberation and beauty. Paul's injunction is to "celebrate the death of the *Lord* until he comes": hence the appropriateness of the eastern sense of liturgy as inception of heaven, however steadily the shedding of the blood is remembered.

But, as is plain from the letters, Paul's sense of that celebration is far from being confined to ritual occasions, which can all too easily fall from their splendid estate into being conservatories of growth which is otherwise too frail: the celebration of the dying and the rising is to take place in the penumbra of the everyday. At this point one can see the natural fusion between the resurrection narratives and the rest of the new testament emphasis on the one hand, and the Contemplation for obtaining Love on the other. I said earlier that the Ignatian pragmatism is mystical in impulse: it is and must be so because this is the situation with the new testament. The offering of all activity and all dispositions to God is one evoked by the lingering memory of God's historic generosity, whether in my own lifetime, or at any earlier point, before, during or after his special action in Christ. The image of the radiant fountain in the Contemplation is one which has, as it were, been evolving throughout all the earlier courses of the exercises, just as the images of the radiant Lord have been evolving all throughout the earlier courses of the gospels. *Transfiguration is not translation*: the hope of the church consists largely in its being won back repeatedly to that conviction, by the Lord in whose name it is called together and according to whose commands it moves. The community at every point, like the individual at every point, has to be drawn into discovery of how it can be that God, in being himself for us, neither indulges us nor competes with us, but makes his life our own.¹⁹³

The passage serves to imply the inseparability of the radiant structure of Steele's thought and his work's theme. To name the glory of God and the radiance of that glory and to emblemize it symbolically, Steele invokes the services of all of the figures who are constantly at work in his oeuvre. The Jester is here in this passage when Steele speaks of "the impulse which... provokes mission". Additionally outreach for Steele, as his many addresses to his brothers indicate,¹⁹⁴ is a matter that arises from the individual's or community's being provoked into action. The Pilgrim is there in the insistence on being "won back repeatedly", and in the concept of the individual being

¹⁹² "Presences", 54.

¹⁹³ "Poemind", 17.

¹⁹⁴ q.v. "Choices", 3.

drawn, despite his objections, to the divine mastering, and in the mentioning of the Eastern understanding of the liturgy “as inception of heaven”, heaven being the constant goal of the Pilgrim. The Celebrant, whose task is to mark the death and resurrection, has already been seen at work in the passage in “Paul’s injunction... to celebrate the death of the Lord”; in Steele’s interpretation of Paul’s injunction as one requiring that “celebration is far from being confined to ritual occasions” and that the “celebration of the dying and rising is to take place... everyday”. The Word is also present in the passage in the form of the scriptural texts invoked: Steele in this passage refers frequently to the New Testament, to the gospels in particular, and to the resurrection narratives of those gospels. He cites John’s gospel and refers to Paul’s letters. And the Witness is also here as Steele finds that Paul’s “‘from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace’ is a testimony at once to [sic] splendour of the giver and to the abundance of the gift”. Steele is sustaining his depiction of the radiant glory of God, its emission into the ages and its perception by the contemplative mind from whichever of those ages, by employing a radiant structure for the thinking behind that depiction. This thinking sees the glorious, radiant, God as Christ and uses the functions of Jester, Pilgrim, Celebrant and Word to explain how that radiance shines out towards the communities and peoples of the always unfolding future, inviting their co-operation also as jesters (who are provoked into mission); pilgrims (who are mastered by the divine and transfigured *en route* to heaven); celebrants (marking the dying and rising of every day); and, being all three, as witnesses sent to testify to the Word.

In using his unified structure of thought to figure the radiant presence of God in the world, Steele is not only wording the presence of God as the radiant one who provokes, yearns, celebrates and so on, he is fulfilling the requirement of the second part of the *Contemplatio ad Amorem*, namely that having perceived the radiant glory of God in the world the individual responds by rendering that glory back to God.

In a very limited sense a discussion of the Word seems to complete the picture of Steele’s radiant structure of thought in his oeuvre. But this seeming is due only to the fact that it has been the plan of this thesis from the outset to treat only four “rayings”

of a large number of them in Steele's conception of a radiant God. As is clear from "Haunting Presences" Steele recognises that there are any number of modules or prototypes to be essayed in the continuing attempt to name God's presence in the world in any one of contemporary, historical, or artistic fashions. And there are any number of titles to radiate from any of those models. To return to the model under discussion in this thesis where Steele deals consistently with the Jester, the Pilgrim / Expatriate, the Celebrant and the Word and therefore with divinity as provocative and seemingly foolish; itinerant and yearning; dying and rising; wording and witnessing; there could be added additional names - all culled from Steele's work - for God and Christ.

Earlier in "The Poem of the Mind", to take a particular instance, Steele delineates Matthew's "great variety of enterprises and emphases"¹⁹⁵ in the life of Christ and includes among these motifs more titles than there is capacity to treat here.¹⁹⁶ Steele also traces qualities of God from his knowledge of Christ so that pairings can be made from Steele's statements, about God and Christ with respect to teaching ("God is committed to teaching us", and Christ is teacher, "one of the most sacred enterprises in the Jewish... tradition); healing ("the expansive healing of God" is seen in Christ's healing the Centurion's servant; and "Christ's acting as healer is a divine enterprise"); sending ("The sent one is the one who sends: 'as the Father has sent me, so I send you'"); judging ("There is no way in which God can be faithful to his people without judging them"; "The verdict of Christ on the Pharisees and on his own city, and the verdicts given in the portrayal of the last judgement, are ways of telling the truth about the consonance or dissonance between God and certain people".¹⁹⁷) For Steele each of these "rayings" are qualities of God, roles of Christ, and additionally, (with the exception of "judging") requests for response from individuals. As Steele says

¹⁹⁵ "Poemind", 11.

¹⁹⁶ Elsewhere, for instance, God and Christ are figured as shepherd: "God gives things an incessant service - else they could not be at all. He is the great, the greatly good, shepherd of their being"; ("Shaft", 13); "that shepherding for which we most remember and celebrate Christ himself ..."; ("Shaft", 13); and as servant: ("It is when we see the astonishing *servitium Dei* to which we owe origin, perduring, forgiveness, and destiny emblemized millions of times over throughout the world daily that we begin to see aright"; ("Shaft", 9); "There is no greater aspiration for anyone who has put on some of the mind of Christ than to find himself placed as the Lord chose to find himself placed, and *was chosen* to find himself placed, as servant"; ("Shaft", 9).

¹⁹⁷ "Poemind", 12-14.

with respect to “teaching” - “each of these emphases... is a way of elucidating God’s gifts as well as of giving injunctions.... What is done... in the Beatitudes - the fusion of blessing and of task - is being done... in each of the other teachings”. (From this it can be seen that “judging” will require the response of mercy as indeed judgement and mercy go hand in hand in the case of God and of Christ.) And it can be said that each of the motifs selected for study - provoking, journeying, celebrating and naming/witnessing under consideration in these chapters (2-5), is also a “way of elucidating God’s gifts as well as of giving instructions”.

Having considered the Word or Witness as the fourth “raying” of any possible number of such rayings in the radiant imaging of the presence of the glory of God, it is now necessary to consider the Word as a particularly unique means of empowering all the other three selected “rayings” which are seen to be “elucidating God’s gifts as well as giving instructions”. How this empowering works is matter for Part II of this chapter.

PART II: THE WORD AS RADIATION

Steele’s work generally can be seen to utilise three levels of communication to word, and to attest to, the presence of the glory of God in the world. The first level which concerns the individual “raying” of the Word or Witness, and which, like the other three “rayings” emanates from the Theocentre to Christ, the Scriptures, *Campion*, the *Exercises*, and to poetry, has been examined in Part I of this Chapter. The third, that which pertains to the specific use of metaphor, is reserved to Part III of this Chapter. The second, to which we now turn, pertains to the way the Word itself, is a vehicle for, a means of transmission for, the other three “rayings”. Obviously it would be impossible to speak of the Jester’s provocations, the Expatriate’s longing, the Celebrant’s proclamations if these were not worded¹⁹⁸ in the first place. And each of

¹⁹⁸ Steele’s reflections on the influence of paintings on literature, such as Durer’s “The Prodigal Son” on Elizabeth Bishop’s poem, “The Prodigal”, avouch the need to word the effects of the visual: “the peremptory energies of Durer drive at the reader through the engraving. More than one kind of artistic urgency is plain here - the urgency to compact feature upon feature of the world, and the urgency to make associations between the ‘is’ and the ‘ought’, to bring the watcher to say that it is intolerable that things should be so.” (*Expatriates*, 47.) Or in the case of a talk given to the University of Georgetown, which reflects on a van Eyck painting (known as the Washington Annunciation) and which regards the painting as emblematic of a needed preparedness for

them has been shown to have specific roles to play, functions to perform, in poetry or literature, generally. Hence in each of the “rayings” there has been a need for a discussion of the specific figure with respect to literature or poetry.

When the nature of the Word as the means of empowering the other “rayings” is considered as a whole, it is best examined by recourse to Steele’s article, “The Radiations of Peter Porter”. In this article Steele interprets some of Porter’s poetry according to four abstract categories which he finds animated by “the distinction and the vindicated ambition” of the poetry. These categories he names as *expatriation*, *negotiation*, *intervention*, and *radiation*.¹⁹⁹ In so treating Porter’s poetry by naming its four active qualities, Steele alludes to the title of the article “The Radiations of...” and fulfils the promise of the opening statement: “To speak of radiation may be, as in early uses of the word, to indicate that which goes out as radius, spoke-wise. What I have to say of Porter’s poetry will, I hope, instance that in his regard”.²⁰⁰ But (since his “title is designedly ambiguous”), it is clear that he has a second function in mind for the quality of *radiation*: “whatever radiates bears in it the potency of its source and the promise or menace of its identity.” As Steele says towards the end of the article: “‘radiation’... is simply the animating element of all the others”,²⁰¹ that is, of all the other characteristics.

While Steele explains this function of *radiation* - to animate all of *expatriation*, *negotiation*, *intervention* - what is discernible is that these qualities of *expatriation*, *negotiation*, and *intervention* correspond respectively to the functions of the Pilgrim / Expatriate; the Celebrant; and the Jester. And the animating factor, *radiation*, is itself equivalent to the Word or language itself. So that what the article claims is that the language of poetry (“contriving a dialect to meet other such minds and hearts”²⁰²) is the potency, the means of transmitting, all of the celebratory, expatriate and jesterly

change, in this case the whole process of speaking to the impact of the painting begins with a prior acknowledgement of the practicality of Shakespeare’s recommendation of “giving our thoughts ‘a local habitation and a name’”. (“Two Images of a Woman in the Middle”, 1.)

¹⁹⁹ “Radiations”, 66.

²⁰⁰ “Radiations”, 65.

²⁰¹ “Radiations”, 73.

²⁰² “Radiations”, 73.

qualities which Steele identifies in Porter's poetry. That these correspondences prevail will be shown forthwith.

Expatriation, (to take the qualities of Porter's poetry in the order in which Steele treats them in the article), immediately connotes the dissatisfaction, dislodgement and yearning of the Pilgrim / Expatriate; that these connotations are apt is substantiated by Steele's own explanation of this quality of Porter's work. Porter is not given a chapter in *Expatriates: Reflections on Modern Poetry*. But, if he had been, this, said of Porter in the article "Radiations of Peter Porter", and analysed in Chapter Three, could well have been Steele's opening paragraph:

What I do *not* have chiefly in mind here is the fact of Porter's having long lived outside Australia, or the question of what effect his visits over recent years may have had upon his writing. These are sizeable questions, as that poetry acknowledges in passing. What I do have in mind, though, is a quality which shows itself in a very large range of poets, ancient and modern, namely the sentiment of incomplete lodgement in any particular psychic zone, and incomplete satisfaction with any formulation, however eloquent. Such is the poetry of expatriation, of deflection from an enduring *patria*. The emotions it manifests may be very various, ranging from those of Homer's expatriate Odysseus or Milton's expatriate Adam to those of a Jarrell, a Mandelstam, or a Kinsella. Perhaps, it is true that the seedbed of all poetry is a divined [sic] discontent: certainly, poetry such as Porter's constantly alludes to, and displays, the mind's and the heart's imperfect fit in any milieu in which it finds itself.²⁰³

Steele's second observed quality in Porter's poetry is that of *negotiation*, which suggests the "coming through" so often proclaimed by Steele's Celebrant. Auden's "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten" (which, as we have seen, Steele finds moving from the observation of a "bewildering variety" of people and circumstances to a sense of Pentecostal "at-one-ment"), Steele says "negotiates its way towards just such an achievement, just such a recognition."²⁰⁴ In his comments on Porter's "An American Military Cemetery in Tuscany" in "The Radiations of Peter Porter" Steele again uses the metaphorical verb, "negotiates" to comment on the achievement of the technicalities of the poem. He says

²⁰³ "Radiations", 66.

²⁰⁴ "Singing", 22.

A man who can orchestrate stanzas as Porter does knows how to negotiate among the steadinesses and the surprises of meaning.²⁰⁵

This concept of negotiating among opposites within the poem will be returned to below.²⁰⁶

Steele also pursues another celebratory trait of the poem, namely its perception of, and achievement of, form and unity from turbulence and inconclusiveness. He observes the “formality of the verse”, (“The firmly-rhymed, seven-line stanzas”), and declares that

they signal that however inconclusive and occasionally turbulent, the experience being educated may be, a gestalt is possible, and has in fact been discerned.²⁰⁷

Steele enumerates the effects of rhyme, finds the poem saluting poetic practice of the past and declares the poem “tantamount to a polemic against meaninglessness”. This is, in effect, Steele’s declaration that Porter’s poem is (like others as stylistically competent) celebratory, since meaning, Steele proclaims, is retrieved from turbulent and inconclusive experience. Nevertheless, Steele insists that the poem is *not only* celebratory. He cautions “Were it only that [‘a polemic against meaninglessness’] - as in effect it is in many less perturbed, and less ironic, poets - then verse as such would have things all its own way in the poetry: the road to banality is paved with merely skilful poems”. To show that Porter’s is not such poetry, Steele digresses and in doing so, names other qualities of the verse. (Even before the digression is begun, Steele refers to “less perturbed, and less ironic, poets”.) Steele observes that Porter’s poetry “may be said to embody a tension between the microcosmic ambitions of verse and the macrocosmic ambitions of prose” and pronounces that Porter “wants to have things both ways, wants the assuagements that come from marching in step and the exuberances that come from loping at one’s own rate”. “An American Military Cemetery in Tuscany” in particular, Steele says,

²⁰⁵ “Radiations”, 71.

²⁰⁶ See below pp.288-289.

²⁰⁷ “Radiations”, 71.

shows both of these impulses - so much so that one is strongly aware of the pacing and poising of a mind rather than of the leashing and unleashing of stanzaic forms. That the mind twists about the rigidities of a prototypical stanza, so that one is struck by their configuration - much as one is struck by the twinning serpents on the wand of the caduceus. A man who can orchestrate stanzas as Porter does knows how to negotiate among the steadinesses and the surprises of meaning.

If Steele's observations of the tensional aspects of Porter's technique were not sufficiently suggestive of the Jester at play there would be no mistaking Steele's invocation of the twinned serpents on the caduceus, the image he proffers as similar to the fool's wand held aloft as the fool attempts the tight-rope in his own poem "Fool". In addition to that clue there is the culminating conclusion of the paragraph that informs us that it is exactly a set of jesterly (antithetical) circumstances, "the steadinesses and the surprises of meaning", that Porter's poem must *negotiate* - "Negotiate" carrying, as Steele says earlier in the piece, the double meanings of "coming to terms" and "manoeuvring through".²⁰⁸

While frequently Steele proffers two states of affairs and shows the Celebrant coming through from the one to the other, here with respect to Porter he shows the Celebrant not only negotiating between the tensional elements set up by the Jester but also newly and finally confronted by him in the last resort. Steele refers to Porter's last stanza in "An American Military Cemetery in Tuscany":

As the bus passes this geometric field
A shiver runs from it to the sun:
Each of these innocent worlds is sealed
Under pressure of love and hate,
Each named soul is a precise no-one
Discovering the mystery too late,
It is not fulfilled, it is only done.²⁰⁹

and says that "Porter does what he does so often elsewhere - issue a sardonic jobation against the God offered as progenitor and retriever of meaning. [He]... turns the

²⁰⁸ "Radiations", 69.

²⁰⁹ Steele cites from Porter's *Collected Poems*, Oxford University Press, 1983, 213.

evangelist John's *consummatum est* bleakly against itself...".²¹⁰ Porter, Steele says, can be imaged "in his poetry" as one "who always walks away from the collision of forces, be they pointed or pointless. He walks away, shocked, lacerated, affronted, instructed, but never jaded".²¹¹ Despite Porter's crying out against a retrieving God: ("issu[ing] a sardonic jobation against the God offered as progenitor and retriever of meaning") he is, Steele says, "Never jaded" or as Steele also says earlier in the article of both Porter and Bishop King (of "An Exequy"), "stricken but undestroyed".²¹² This is in itself, however, a celebratory stance, and the key to Steele's understanding of celebratory poetry, wherein the speaker, acutely aware of what there is to shock and affront, remains "never jaded". Steele goes so far as to call Porter's "Seaside Resort", "warriorly poetry" since he says "Porter, with death rarely out of his mind, makes as few concessions as possible to death, and calls it out as often as possible."²¹³

This poetic invincibility is something indicated elsewhere in Steele's juxtaposed comments on both Vincent Buckley's and Peter Porter's respective treatment of death. Speaking about Buckley's "Ghosts, Places, Stories, Questions" and his use of "body" which Steele finds "shimmering between the alternative possibilities" [of "heightened life or outright death"], Steele says:

Taking lessons about mortality from the dead is a funerary commonplace: taking lessons about vitality from the same source is a subtler business, and it is a large part of Buckley's affair.²¹⁴

And of Porter in the same paper, Steele says:

A great deal of Porter's business can be summed up (but only summed up) by saying that he wants to give this worst of dogs, top dog though he may be, a bad name: Death, the vile surd, is never to be noticed without having a 'J'accuse' flung at it. At the same time, just as Porter has often insisted that music's path is music's alone, he is intent upon poetry's taking its own unique way... 'Unfinished Requiems' itself finishes with 'Predecessors / Enjoying

²¹⁰ "Radiations", 71.

²¹¹ "Radiations", 72.

²¹² "Radiations", 69.

²¹³ *Porter*, 52

²¹⁴ "Death Masques and Deathmares: Peter Porter and Vincent Buckley", 1996, MS 6.

eternal rest will tell you / The unfinished theme is always bitterness.' Perhaps the theme; but not the poetry.²¹⁵

Steele's third quality, which has been partly examined as it intertwines with *negotiation* in his interpretation of Porter's poetry, is that of *intervention*. While Steele's analogy for *intervention* - "to make a song and dance" about an issue - may be seen to connote variously, the outcry of the Pilgrim / Expatriate, or the denunciations of the Celebrant, it seems more accurately to connote all that is jesterly in Porter's poetry and this if only because Steele images this quality in terms of the performing artist, which the Jester can also be. Steele sees *intervention* in poetry to be tantamount to making "a song and dance about an issue". The "most-prized" poems, Steele says, are those that have "impinged, intervened, counter-vailed, against the functional concessiveness of everyday living" and sustaining and extending the "song and dance" criteria he says:

The song, after all, holds with the edged exactitude of good Lieder understandings and passions which, ordinarily, we burr: the dance, after all, puts into the lifts and falls of the body whose elations and dismayings at which, ordinarily, we demur.

When Steele claims that Porter's poetry "makes a song and dance, not only about the matter of satire, but about the matter of complaint", that Porter is "a cross-grained poet", that "The music and the paintings" in his poems are like "the palm prints and voiceprints of pricked and self-piercing man", and that to write this "appraisal of life" is "to write as intervener", Steele is isolating the jesterly - the satiric, the opposed and opposing, ruffling, self-analytical and scrutinising traits of Porter's poetry. Elsewhere Steele endorses the jesterly nature of Porter's scorn for self-aggrandisement by claiming that Porter's poetry exhibits "a Swiftian enthusiasm for getting his readers to think again, and feel again".²¹⁶

"The Radiations of Peter Porter" finds that the function of writing, of *radiation*, is to animate (or as Steele says with respect to *expatriation* "to ray out from his current

²¹⁵ "Death Masques and Deathmares: Peter Porter and Vincent Buckley", 13-14.

²¹⁶ *Porter*, 10.

centre”) *expatriation*, *negotiation* and *intervention*, that is, the written word is seen to empower the other qualities of Porter’s verse. Steele’s book, *Peter Porter*, however, seems to suggest otherwise. Turning to *Peter Porter*, there appears at first sight to be a contradictory approach to language. Rather than empowering the other “rayings”, language in *Peter Porter* is feted as being for Porter “more important than anything that he can say in it.”²¹⁷ The concept of language as having a transmitting role, as radiation empowering other themes; or conversely the concept of language as having more importance than its subject matter can, however, be seen to amount to the same thing. It is clear that for Steele, language, however it is troped spatially - imaged as set below, (subservient to), other concerns; or imaged as set above, (dominating) other concerns, is something to be invariably set aside, from other concerns. Introducing *Peter Porter* Steele claims that “the poet’s discernible conviction” is “that poetry is not at the service of other ways of speaking, nor even an alternative to them, but is a primary articulation of whatever it is that we are all trying to mouth during our lifetime.” What Steele is suggesting, not only in *Peter Porter* but in “The Radiations of Peter Porter”, as well, is that what Porter is “trying to mouth”, word, witnesses to, whether Porter would acknowledge it or not (and Steele is often at pains to state that Porter would not), is the glory of God in the world. Why this can be claimed as Steele’s interpretation of Porter is largely due to Steele’s identifying in Porter’s poetry the qualities that he finds in God, in Christ, radiating out into the gospels, to Ignatius’ life and into his writings and teachings, - irony; yearning; celebration (to name only the three, and these without their associate qualities, within the ambit of this thesis).

In *Peter Porter* the question of presence is approached by reference to Porter’s love of music:

The relevance of that here [that Porter’s first love is music] is that music not only provides him with a frequent subject, but is an implicit hovering metaphor, a sponsoring presence, in much of what he writes.²¹⁸

²¹⁷ *Porter*, 9.

²¹⁸ *Porter*, 5.

It is no coincidence that in testifying to music as Porter's "hovering metaphor", "sponsoring presence", Steele proceeds to define music in terms which, like the qualities in "The Radiations of Peter Porter", align themselves with those of three of the "rayings" of the radiant pattern which underlies Steele's structural unity of thought. "Music", Steele says in *Peter Porter*, "has four roles: it is disturber, mentor, palliative, and transfigurer."²¹⁹ Three of these as Steele delineates them can be seen to have a correspondence with, respectively, the Jester ("disturber"); the Pilgrim ("mentor"); the Celebrant ("transfigurer"). The matter of the Word and its complex relationship with the fourth of Steele's perceived roles of music, "palliative", will be deferred to the end of this discussion.²²⁰

The function of music as "disturber" is established as jesterly by Steele's claim that "Music disturbs in Porter's poetry because, while it is 'of us', it rebukes us for all we are not".

Music as "mentor" (adviser, counsellor), does not so much correspond to the figure of the Pilgrim as to someone or something to lead the pilgrim on his or her conversational way to a particular destination. Steele writes:

Porter reports that he always listens to music for a couple of hours before sleeping... it sounds like the action of a man who is, however congenially, being re-schooled constantly. In literature as in opera there abound figures who are manuductors...; these charm or sing their way into the confidence of the one who needs new directions or a new destination. For Porter, music is the great manuductor, and it maintains its own nature and character, unamenable to being rendered into other terms, and yet at least as 'relevant' to human policies or purposes as any other mode of communication or communion.²²¹

²¹⁹ *Porter*, 5.

²²⁰ See below pp.281-283.

²²¹ *Porter*, 5-6.

Music as “transfigurer” functions, for Steele, as does the Celebrant in life or literature. One task of the Celebrant is to proclaim that something is transfigured or transformed and this is what Steele claims music does for Porter. Steele writes:

although [Porter] is firmly not a believer in any version of Christianity, the imaginative apprehensions which Christianity has often mediated are powerfully at work in him. Music plays some of the imaginative and emotional role for him that sacrament and miracle play within the Christian sensibility.²²²

Steele says that “Good poetry is... a new way of being”,²²³ and similarly he says elsewhere that the sacraments induct individuals into new states. (“Baptism, like all the sacraments-to-be, begins with our frailties... we would have no use for baptism if God had not put in our frail hearts aspirations towards a mind-bending destiny.... Baptism takes us, in sacrament, into the zone of unstinting life”.²²⁴) Considering Porter’s “At Schubert’s Grave” Steele finds it “a particular case of poetry’s constant attempt to transform, transmute, translate: it is what might be called the ‘real-ising’ of the given.”²²⁵

The correspondence between music as “palliative” and the Word is a much more complicated matter pertaining to both Steele’s concept of music as being for Porter a “sponsoring presence” and his (Steele’s) frequently stated belief that poetry is a healing medium. The matter relies on some implications within this passage from *Peter Porter*. Steele says:

the mentor also has his or her mercies, one of which is to palliate daily or lifelong distresses. As, in Christian theology, the Creator Spirit or Holy Breath can be stimulus or solace, so for Porter music is, for all its stringencies, ‘on our side’, a mode of grace. It is in a spirit of gratitude, as well as admiration, that he alludes so often to the makers of music and to the music made. It is hard, off hand, to think of a single poem of Porter’s which is not somehow about our woundedness, but music is the reliable physician of our ills - even though, no more than literal doctors, it cannot obviate our mortality.²²⁶

²²² *Porter*, 6.

²²³ *Porter*, 1.

²²⁴ “Stills. 1: The Man at the River: Matt 3:1-17”, *Madonna*, March 1988, 10-11.

²²⁵ *Porter*, 7.

²²⁶ *Porter*, 6.

The first thing to note is that palliation (of daily or lifelong distresses) is said to be a mercy of the mentor and is comparable to the stimulus or the solace of the Spirit; and the second, is that Porter's poetry is about humanity's woundedness. As to the first, in John's gospel, Jesus, having named himself a kind of mentor, (even "manuductor"), "the Way",²²⁷ promises that, against the time when he will no longer be present, he will

ask the Father,
and he will give you another Paraclete
to be with you for ever,
the Spirit of truth
whom the world can never accept
since it neither sees nor knows him....²²⁸

The New Jerusalem Bible²²⁹ notes that "The title 'Paraclete' used in our translation is a transliteration of the Greek word *parakletos*; in English it is difficult to choose between the various meanings: 'advocate', 'intercessor', 'counsellor', 'protector', 'support'. The parallel between the Spirit's work for the disciples and Jesus' brings out powerfully the personal character of the Spirit".²³⁰ Given this and remembering that Steele is writing about Porter's poetry with a view to considering the palliative mercies of music in the face of humanity's woundedness, the implication is that the Spirit (whom Jesus, "the Way" asks the Father to send, and whose personal character is so close to that of Jesus) is also for Steele, the comforter. Elsewhere preaching on this scene from the gospel, Steele says, "Our Lord says... 'Anyone who loves me will be true to my word, and my Father will love him: we will come to him and make our home with him': and then he promises to send us the Holy Spirit, who might be called the Heartener of the Disheartened, to live with us as well".²³¹

²²⁷ John: 14: 6.

²²⁸ John: 14: 16-18.

²²⁹ Doubleday, 1985.

²³⁰ Note "i" to John 14: 17.

²³¹ "The Mind's Guests", Newman, 1995, 2.

As to the second matter, that Porter's poetry is about humanity's woundedness, such woundedness is for Steele, the almost necessary pre-condition in which the artist functions:

It seems to me improbable that many of the great works of art of the world would have come about if they had not been prompted by one kind of human distress or another.²³²

There is also in Steele's work the conviction that the palliation or alleviation of hurt comes with the naming of the hurt. As we have seen Steele says as much with respect to Walcott: "We want to hear his hurt said in such a way that we know in it something of our own: and, in the good saying of that hurt, something of our healing."²³³

This, one might argue, is the Celebrant's transforming business; but this argument must be rejoined by saying that the transformation from hurt to healing, the healing of the hurt, proceeds by the very process of wording it. In a brief and enigmatic article for *Eureka Street* "Star and Labyrinth", Steele contemplates the phenomenon that "a hundred thousand tons of stardust is collected daily by our little planet" and reasons from scientific data to an endorsement of the power of the Word to solace and comfort:

The daily garnering of cosmic dust is a vivid instance of inevitabilities, of givens - of 'the way things are' made palpable. This can engross the least-scientific of people: much art, much of social transaction, is given to the iterative and the reiterative: often, we are solaced by seeing, and by saying, that things *are* so. Irish has no word for either 'yes' or 'no', but even the most hibernian of personalities can warm to the factual, uttered for its own sweet or sour sake.²³⁴

Word as warming, solacing; poetry's wording a hurt amounting to the healing of hurt; art instigated by woundedness; the Holy Spirit as Heartener, Encourager (as well as all that *Paracletos* will stand for); Steele's naming the Spirit as Heartener in commenting upon the gospel in which Jesus calls himself "the Way"; music as mentor

²³² "Praying Against the Grain", 2.

²³³ "The contours of exile", 36.

and the mentor having the merciful quality of palliation - all these associations point to a parallelism between Steele's thinking on the relationship of the Spirit to music, to healing, and that of the Spirit to word, to healing. Music is palliative and so is the Word and for the reason that the Spirit is present to them both. (And by extension, prior to the Spirit's arrival the Word was himself the healer.) What Steele is claiming is that Porter's work, attended as it is by the sponsoring presence of music, is evidence of its general inspiritedness. As Steele says ever so cryptically about Porter, but with respect to Walter Bagehot:

like many before him, [Bagehot] saw the intrinsic oddity of flesh and blood being inspirited. Odd though it is, so it goes, and any poem of Porter's is the trace of its going, the trace of how it goes. Auden's choral figures in *For the Time Being* say, 'There's a Way. There's a Voice': in Porter, the voice is the way.²³⁵

Steele draws attention to music's palliative quality to suggest not only its comparability to the Word's healing function, but to the Word's capacity to name and testify to the presence of God. All of which he has hinted at by saying music is a "sponsoring presence" in Porter's poetry. What Steele declares as his aim in *Peter Porter* is to "leave the reader both more at home and more alert in the presence of Porter's poetry." What he does not say in words, but in the configuration of his structural unity of thought, is that his analysis of Porter's poetry so explores the disturbing, manufecting and transfiguring qualities of Porter's work that the reader is left to perceive the radiant emblem (like music, also "an implicit hovering metaphor") of the haunting presence of Porter's poetry, or to be more accurate, of the haunting presence of music which is the haunting presence of Porter's poetry. This is substantiated throughout the body of *Peter Porter* where if music is palliative so also is the word: "Almost any poem of Porter's is likely to announce or insinuate an element of problem... and then play physician to its own distress...";²³⁶ and if music

²³⁴ "Star and Labyrinth", *Eureka Street*, 6, 1 (January-February, 1996), 4-5.

²³⁵ *Porter*, 26. Steele cites from Auden's "For the Time Being", *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson, Faber, London, 1976, 279.

²³⁶ *Porter*, 78.

haunts Porter, so also does the word haunt him. Speaking of Porter's language Steele refers to him as "the gifted recipient of felicities."²³⁷

It is possible to find in *Peter Porter* both Steele's observations of all of the jesterly, peregrinatory and celebratory aspects of Porter's poetry and Steele's appraisal of that work in those terms. Porter, for instance is observed as writing in the jesterly vein, as Steele notes Porter's possessing "a plentiful capacity for self-mockery";²³⁸ and as he sees that Porter is challenging: "We miss much in Porter's poetry unless we notice the extent to which it is a mustering and a deployment of challenge."²³⁹ Steele also interprets Porter in his (Steele's) own jesterly fashion: Steele emphasises - Porter's facility with opposites: "he is trying to engage with some of the deepest, most disturbing, but also most consoling features of our common predicament";²⁴⁰ his capacity to censure: "his eminently Australian scorn for self-aggrandisement has great play in his books";²⁴¹ his ability to jest;²⁴² talent for "tart jest";²⁴³ and for "jests, some of them on himself";²⁴⁴ his propensity for using the dialectic. Steele writes:

I now come to... the 'thickening' of the poetry - what I call its 'synthesising vigour'. Poems, like novels, essays, short stories, plays, are 'thickened' by the wedding and diverging powers within them. Porter's poetry does this with uncommon, and sometimes unremitting, force. All of us are the product of meiotic and mitotic powers, biologically speaking; things diverge and converge, whence our being, and whence, later, our style. In medieval western philosophy, it was said that estimation takes place *componendo et dividendo*, which has sometimes been taken to mean 'by the conflating of this element with that', but has also been understood as meaning, 'by saying yes, or no'. Both stresses are appropriate when we are trying to understand Porter's poetry.²⁴⁵

²³⁷ *Porter*, 43.

²³⁸ *Porter*, 94.

²³⁹ *Porter*, 102.

²⁴⁰ *Porter*, 8.

²⁴¹ *Porter*, 10.

²⁴² *Porter*, 23.

²⁴³ *Porter*, 21.

²⁴⁴ *Porter*, 53.

²⁴⁵ *Porter*, 28. q.v. "A dialectic between self and world is not only the milieu of Porter's imagination, but a large part of his theme." (*Porter*, 31).

In a similar way Steele observes elements of Porter's verse that invite his appraisal in terms of the Pilgrim / Expatriate. Appraising Porter's "The Rest on the Flight" which he identifies as deriving "from a standard *topos* in painting - the Holy Family's rest in their flight from Herod into Egypt" and which concerns the thoughts and emotions of the traveller in "The painted pale projectile", Steele speaks in terms of individuals' finding life tedious and fearing death. Steele also claims that any seasoned traveller will find in the combination of these - tediousness and fear - "An emblem of much of adult life".²⁴⁶ This writing and speaking of travel troped as life pervades *Peter Porter*.

In the chapter entitled "The Province of Peter Porter" Steele merges a jesterly perception of Porter's poetry with an exploration of the poetry from within the sustained metaphor of *Expatriates*. Steele's jesterly observation is that of finding the poetry's speaker puzzled:

For the moment I note that he himself, the "I" of the poetry, is often registered as puzzled or disconcerted at finding himself in the country whose language the poems speak.

And the commentary on the question is explored in the metaphoric terms of physical milieu, at-home-ness and alienation:

'What am I doing here?' is a question asked by millions of people throughout the centuries, about their dwelling for a little while on Earth; good writers, or some of them, ask themselves, 'what am I doing here?' about the country of the creative imagination in which they feel both at home and at best resident aliens. This, strikingly, is Porter's demeanour.²⁴⁷

Steele continues the interpretation of Porter's peregrinatory (seeking, yearning, changing, returning) imagination in terms of the metaphors of *Expatriates*:

Porter country... is the milieu of a mind. Whether the writer has been consigned there, like Ovid in exile by the Black Sea, or has made it his own and reworked it, like Crusoe, it is now his true *topos* - it gives his poetry its essential topicality.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁶ *Porter*, 74-75.

²⁴⁷ *Porter*, 13.

²⁴⁸ *Porter*, 15. Again the Pilgrim motif relates closely to that of the Jester. Steele continues his consideration of Porter's "terrains" of imagination by noting that "the notion of a province implies alternative terrains. One may not, again like Ovid or Crusoe, be able to visit those terrains, but word of them gets through, memories endure, aspirations provoke."

Additionally within the chapter Steele speaks of Porter with respect to - travelling: “[Porter] has an incorrigibly peregrine or exploratorial imagination”;²⁴⁹ repatriation: “Many of his poems are about coming back - the poet’s returning to a geographical or an intellectual or emotional topos”;²⁵⁰ starting points and destinations: “There is the interest in aetiology... and in destination”;²⁵¹ exile or expatriation: “Porter’s great cloud of references to dislodgement or homelessness”.²⁵² This interpretation of Porter’s work via the motif of the Pilgrim / Expatriate continues to the end of the book. Porter, like the Pilgrim, longs for the paradisaic: “Porter’s waking nightmare is that the dream world has been taken away from him; the Eden that never was ought to have been, and he ought to have had access to it”; “The ‘horizon’ under which Porter writes is the horizon of an unavailable paradise, and domesticate it as he may... it will not let him alone”.²⁵³ In addition to these, Porter uses metaphoric titles for his poems as a vehicle for his dealing with change: “They are often taking him into or out of scenes, predicaments, contexts: making camp anywhere, he is already thinking about breaking camp.”²⁵⁴ As for the Pilgrim, so in Porter’s work, hope is of the essence - noting Porter’s “Doll’s House” to use “similar axes” to classic pastoral, Steele comments on Porter’s phrase in the poem “Bereaved again / Of esperance” and suggests that the second pair of words in the phrase echoes “the unavailability of hope” and comments generally “It would be careless, too, not to make the point that the attraction of pastoral is usually bound up with its ability to lyricise the unattainable - in which lies its pang.”²⁵⁵ And speaking in his last chapter in *Peter Porter* about Porter’s “Talking to Lizards”, Steele claims “It may be that the most interesting thing about the poem is its sharing in the long tradition of the poetry of retirement or exile”.²⁵⁶

²⁴⁹ Porter, 14.

²⁵⁰ Porter, 14.

²⁵¹ Porter, 22.

²⁵² Porter, 22.

²⁵³ Porter, 50.

²⁵⁴ Porter, 82.

²⁵⁵ Porter, 65.

²⁵⁶ Porter, 108.

In addition to these specific references to the poetry of exile it can be seen that one of Steele's observed dichotomies in Porter's poetry pertains not only to the Jester in its poisoning of opposites, (between the "most disturbing", and "the most consoling features of our common predicament") but to the Pilgrim / Expatriate, (who is both content and discontent, who would be both home-body and venturer abroad). Steele says:

Amongst these [features] can be numbered, on the one hand, our proneness to habituation and predictability, and on the other, our gift for novelty and creativity. Porter's poetry tries to give its due to each of these. There is a side of [Porter] which welcomes, and rests in, an eighteenth-century love of formal bearing: there is another which yearns for plenitude and upsurge, and relishes these wherever they are to be found.²⁵⁷

As discussed in Chapter Four, Steele finds Porter's poetry, among other qualities, "warily celebratory",²⁵⁸ and this Steele evidences by citing the first stanzas of Porter's "The Camera Loves Us", the first lines of which are:

This is a lucky century, we have more
To leave behind than just our bones.²⁵⁹

Elsewhere in the book Steele notes Porter's general interest in what can be salvaged: "Among the tropes which occur with some frequency in his poetry and his prose is that of saving things, or finding them saved, from the wreck."²⁶⁰ As part of this process of retrieving and saving, the poetry is seen not only as "a kind of charm against time";²⁶¹ but as (in the case of elements in "A Brahms Intermezzo") a "calling into the circle of the poem those other 'creatures' which may help to make a stand against the absurdity of death";²⁶² and "an intellectual and emotional resource against the undefeatable enemy".²⁶³ Porter himself (as mentioned with reference to the Celebrant) is seen as "the herald of a residual joy in the midst of disaster."²⁶⁴ As for Auden's celebratory thematic concerns in "Whitsunday in Kirchstetten", and for

²⁵⁷ Porter, 8.

²⁵⁸ See above p.187.

²⁵⁹ Porter, 29. (*Possible Worlds*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, 34)

²⁶⁰ Porter, 13.

²⁶¹ Porter, 47.

²⁶² Porter, 41.

²⁶³ Porter, 41

²⁶⁴ Porter, 48.

Porter's method in "An American Military Cemetery in Tuscany", Steele uses in *Peter Porter* the concept of "negotiating" to speak about technique, "The problem... of tone or pitch, imaginative dexterity, the timbre of intelligence" in Porter's poetry: "Porter's sensibility is that of someone negotiating a way through immensely various imaginative possibilities, certain that there is far more than enough to be said at any moment, but picking his way through obstacles, seductions, mazes, dead ends."²⁶⁵

By far the greatest evidence for Steele's finding Porter's work celebratory, however, is his attention to the process of transformation as he finds it occurring in Porter's poetry and prose. Steele claims that Porter in his music journalism is "on the alert to the possibilities of transformation". He cites Porter on Mahler's "Miracles of Metamorphosis: Gustav Mahler";²⁶⁶ and claims that in Porter's reviewing a collection of Auden's writing his seeing in Auden's "Happy New Year" the origins of "The Shield of Achilles" indicates "someone fascinated by the possibilities of transformation".²⁶⁷ With respect to the poetry Steele takes pains to explain what it is he means by Porter's passion for transformation. Steele cites A. D. Nuttall's comment that Shakespeare, unlike Racine ("the master of the single, perfectly encapsulating, closed phrase"), and unlike Erasmus (whose variations of an expression are such that "Their sole interest lies in the ingenious manner in which they differ from one another as forms"), offers instead "a series of alternative phrases" which "we sense" are "alternative 'essays', shots at a target, nets cast out to catch some ulterior reality which is at once elusive and excitingly important."²⁶⁸ Nuttall's conclusion (which Steele cites) is that

Thus at once, at the level of mere style, although we find convention and selection, the mode of that convention is one which *obtrudes its own incompleteness*, and so quickens our sense of transformatal possibilities.

Steele grasps this evocation of Shakespeare's style to evince something that he feels is vital to an understanding of Porter. Steele says:

²⁶⁵ *Porter*, 43.

²⁶⁶ *Porter*, 90. "Miracles of Metamorphosis: Gustav Mahler", *Encounter*, (August 1976), 56, 60.

²⁶⁷ *Porter*, 91.

²⁶⁸ Steele cites from A. D. Nuttall, *The Stoic in Love: Selected Essays in Literature and Ideas*, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London, 1989, 188.

Those alternative essays, shots, and nets are the kind of thing that is his staple; and ‘the obtrusion of its own incompleteness’, not for its own self-afflicting sake, but to ‘quicken our sense of transformatal possibilities’, is one of the major attractions of his poetry.

It is evident from this discussion of Steele’s that whatever Porter has to say thematically about things or persons being transformed, (and Steele says that Porter addresses the effects of Time,²⁶⁹ and the progression of history,²⁷⁰ for example), it is impossible to address the question of Steele’s appraisal of Porter’s fascination with transformation without also addressing Steele’s appraisal of the technicalities of Porter’s style. This is unsurprising not only because in Porter’s poetry style is inseparable from content (as Steele says “Entities in [Porter’s] poetry are like the poles around which the slalom skier moves: take them away, and you take away most of the point of the exercise”²⁷¹); but because for Steele the technicalities of making a poem themselves amount to an act of transformation. For Steele Porter’s poems are his “own exercises in the ‘translation’ of world to word”;²⁷² more importantly “Porter’s poetry is a remarkably ambitious way of finding and showing how it [English] may be kept up in one of its transformations”.²⁷³ And (assessing the “whole performance” of Porter’s “Dejection: An Ode”) Steele recalls:

It emulates all that process of transmutation on whose behalf Coleridge may still be our best spokesman so far, the process whereby the ‘shaping spirit’ transforms event into symbolic registration...”.²⁷⁴

Steele places great emphasis on the dominance of metaphor in Porter’s poetry. For Porter, Steele claims, “to be alive is to be in a state of metaphor”²⁷⁵; and that “all of the metaphor work is at the service of metamorphosis, which is both Porter’s

²⁶⁹ “Porter, unquenchably curious about temporalities, has few illusions about what the years, the decades, or the centuries may bring.” (*Porter*, 85)

²⁷⁰ “There is in Porter’s work no such thing as a poem which offers, purely, a vista of retrospect or prospect. The historical gaze is a gaze into entities and energies which offer to transform the attention they require.” (*Porter*, 89)

²⁷¹ *Porter*, 28

²⁷² *Porter*, 90.

²⁷³ *Porter*, 17.

²⁷⁴ *Porter*, 28.

²⁷⁵ *Porter*, 84.

compulsion and his game”;²⁷⁶ “Nature’s own bricolage is metamorphosis, and poetry’s is above all metaphor. Both are central to Porter’s work”;²⁷⁷ “metaphor is his staple”.²⁷⁸ Most significantly for Steele, Porter’s use of metaphor (and this is said with respect to Porter’s titles) reveals “its refusal to let being hold priority over becoming” which quality of metaphor Steele himself resorts to in order to describe the figure (metaphor) as “This scanning attribute of metaphor”²⁷⁹ and which not only refers forwards to Porter’s titles but backwards to Porter’s propensity to have “dealings” with his “own countries”²⁸⁰ - “Be they Australia, England, Italy, or elsewhere on the map, or be they realms of the imagination ...”.

Whatever pertinence Porter’s interest in transformation has for Steele’s Celebrant it is clear that Porter and Steele are both dependent on metaphor. Porter uses metaphor to render his perceptions of a transforming reality. Steele refers, for example, to Porter’s “His pre-shrunk paradise is metaphor / A crossword puzzle running out of clues / Till even death-beds start to stink of skill”.²⁸¹ Steele names, by means of several metaphors, the capabilities of metaphor: “This scanning attribute of metaphor, its refusal to let being hold priority over becoming, is often rehearsed in Porter’s titles”.²⁸² About all of which Steele is anxious to admit:

beyond metaphor we have nothing. The very word ‘literal’ is a metaphor: the very word ‘metaphor’ is a metaphor: expand the hermeneutical circle as we may, a circle it remains. The poet, like his batman the critic, may at any moment regard this as blessing or as curse....²⁸³

The Celebrant’s sponsorship of transformation (or of the proclamation that something/someone is being transformed) is manifest in Porter’s work, in his perception of reality as something always in flux, in his perceptions which are

²⁷⁶ Porter, 84.

²⁷⁷ Porter, 76.

²⁷⁸ Porter, 76.

²⁷⁹ Porter, 82.

²⁸⁰ Porter, 82. Steele refers to Heaney’s “own country”, Porter, 81.

²⁸¹ Porter, 80. Steele cites Porter’s “The Rival Poet” (*The Chair of Babel*, Oxford University Press, 1992, 45.)

²⁸² Porter, 82.

²⁸³ Porter, 80-81.

themselves always in flux. If it is true to say that in observing these elements in Porter's work Steele is as dependent on metaphor in interpreting them as Porter is in creating them, it is also true that Steele's observations of Porter's ironic (and scorning, mocking, provoking, dialectical, tensional) elements, and his yearning (and exilic, change-inducing, hoping or all-but-despairing) qualities, in other words the jesterly and expatriate aspects of his poetry, are also dependent on metaphor not only for their creation but for their interpretation.

Analysing Porter's "Alcestis and the Poet" Steele investigates Porter's jesterly activity, namely his "plentiful capacity for self-mockery" sustained even, he stresses, in the role of a poet. In the poem Steele identifies "the creator" being "turned upon, or at least... called to account, by his creation".²⁸⁴ Steele's reader images Alcestis challenging Porter. In suggesting what he calls the "bonding between the two figures", however, Steele lists the sentences in the poem, like the first, ("I have / Risen from beds of my own melancholy to grant / Your distress an audience..."), which, he says, "could as appropriately come from the poet's mouth as from Alcestis's." Steele's ambiguity in not naming either "the two figures" or the owner of "the poet's mouth" serves to suggest that for him, while the lines are Alcestis's, they could be said to have been uttered by the poet Admetus, or by the poet, Porter; and the "two figures" who are bonded implies, if the lines are Alcestis's and Admetus's, the mythical couple; if they are Alcestis's and Porter's, Alcestis and Porter, (the creator and the creation); or perhaps the bonded couple is Porter and the late Jannice Porter. Granted that the last possibility might have caused Steele to seek, with some delicacy of touch, the least presumptuous way of referring to Porter's bereavement, it seems also to be the case that, given the additional complication that Steele regards the "service" spoken of in "We are ready to do each other service" as the Muse's as well as "personal", he is demonstrating that:

One feature of Porter's poetry is that any element of experience, particularly elements of the imagination or of personal relationships, is open to being redefined.

and that:

²⁸⁴ *Porter*, 94.

To think of this poem as simply a way of ‘getting over’ the death of his wife would be as imaginatively unalert as it would be impertinent; we are looking instead at an engagement in the relationship between memory, metaphor, and metamorphosis.

In which claim Steele’s use of “the relationship” goes both ways - that between each of the factors “memory, metaphor, and metamorphosis” and that between the Porters. Porter’s and Steele’s jesterly *sleight of hand* depends on their preparedness to allow, time and time again, the one name to stand for another. Steele says that Porter in this poem “beats the bounds of meaning”²⁸⁵ but in saying so, he too is doing so.

Earlier in *Peter Porter*, Steele resorts to metaphor in the vein of the traveller, pilgrim (or it could be imagined) the exile, to demonstrate the nature of Porter’s titles. It has been noted that Steele refers to them with his own soteriologically-minded metaphor: “This scanning attribute of metaphor, its refusal to let being hold priority over becoming, is often rehearsed in Porter’s titles”. Where this “scanning attitude” endorses *becoming* rather than *being*, Steele’s perception of the titles can be thought of as itself endorsing transformation, what is “coming into being” rather than “being”. As Steele’s discussion of the titles develops, however, he resorts to metaphors of travel, connoting ingress and egress into landscapes; regular if not frequent stopping; restarting; and overall a permanent temporality of milieu:

[Porter’s titles] are often taking him into or out of scenes, predicaments, contexts: making camp anywhere, he is already thinking about breaking camp. [Steele lists some twelve titles including “Walking Home on St Cecilia’s Day”;²⁸⁶ “Steps on the Way”;²⁸⁷ “Tending towards the Condition”;²⁸⁸] and so on: they signpost territories for which new signposts will be needed by the time Porter has finished with them.²⁸⁹

Where Steele recognises Porter’s poetic project as celebratory, as having, like music, a “transfiguring role”, these metaphors reveal him observing Porter ‘on the road’ as it were - painstakingly “signposting” the “scenes, predicaments, contexts” on the way to

²⁸⁵ *Porter*, 94-95.

²⁸⁶ Peter Porter, *Peter Porter: Collected Poems*, Oxford University Press, 1984, 13. [*Porter Collected*]

²⁸⁷ *Porter Collected*, 91.

²⁸⁸ *Porter Collected*, 188-189.

²⁸⁹ *Porter*, 82.

transfiguration or at least on the way, if one pursues the promise of “St Cecilia’s Day”, to “living in the reins / Of music’s huge light irresponsibility”.²⁹⁰

In his article “The Radiations of Peter Porter”, therefore, Steele employs the concept of radiation to explain the manner in which the Word empowers the Jester, (*intervention*), the Pilgrim / Expatriate, (*expatriation*), and the Celebrant, (*negotiation*); in *Peter Porter* the three “rayings”, the Jester, music as *disturber*, the Pilgrim / Expatriate, music as *mentor*, the Celebrant, music as *transfigurer*, are all empowered by metaphor, which after all, is what Steele calls the music in the first place, “an implicit hovering metaphor, a sponsoring presence”.²⁹¹

PART III: “IRRIDESCENT WITH METAPHOR”²⁹²

If you ask language to do too much, it will not do anything. It is well enough to write in a highly, even densely, metaphorical way.²⁹³

The “raying” of the Word in Steele’s oeuvre names and witnesses to the presence of the glory of God in the world. How this naming and witnessing occurs is, as we have seen, first, by means of the direct wording of and attesting to that presence in terms of the Word (God is a speaker; Christ is what the Father has to say for himself...). This is to contribute a fourth (and for purposes of this study, a final) spoke to the wheel of unitive thought and in doing so “completing” the sustained symbolic configuring of God’s glory as a shining and directional emanation from the theocentre into the world; and secondly, by underwriting, empowering or radiating the other three rayings in the sense that the naming of the other attributes of that presence cannot occur without the *wording* of them. Should there be any doubt that the sustained delineation of “the shapeliness of the Shekinah” (in New Testament terms, the *ó*), the presence of the

²⁹⁰ Peter Porter, “Walking Home on St. Cecilia’s Day”, *Porter Collected*, 13.

²⁹¹ *Porter*, 5.

²⁹² “Silences”, 3.

²⁹³ “Presences”, 53.

glory of God in the world is Steele's constant theme, there is the further evidence of his third technique, the use of recurring images of radiance, to be taken into account. These metaphors (occasionally, they are similes or symbols) endorse Steele's reader's understanding that his dominating theme is inseparable from his predominating structure of thought; that his thematic preoccupation, to witness to the presence of the glory (the known character and power) of God in the world is inseparable from his emblematising the radiance of God (as Fool, Pilgrim / Expatriate, Celebrant, Word) permeating the person of Christ, the Scriptures, Ignatius' *Exercises*, literature (especially poetry) and those who read it; that, in other words, his theme is troped by his unified structure of thought.

Steele endorses his sustained troping of the glory of God by means of his structural unity of thought which in turn is further sustained by a series upon series of images, mainly metaphors, (but some symbols, and rarely, a simile), all of which pertain to *radiance*. There are three categories of metaphors to be considered - those in Steele's work that directly name *radiance* or something that is *radiant* and their associated images such as the sun, stars, light etc.; those that in a scientific or sometimes a quasi-scientific way, utilise radiant phenomena; and those uses of radiance (or its associated images) that in the poetry of others engage Steele's critical and interpretative attention. Before these are examined it is useful to note some of the things Steele has to say about metaphor and the reasons for his regarding it with esteem.

Most of what Steele says about metaphor he says in metaphorical language: "To be the Descartes of metaphor would be to be a thinker and writer whose language was always outflung, bridging chasms between different dimensions of reality";²⁹⁴ "One reason why living metaphor is so prizeworthy is that, in its arcing flight, it not only denominates those things which it bonds, but also brings home to us that these parities need *not* have been noticed: and that the realities might easily, and sheerly, have gone

²⁹⁴ "Love/death", 58, (MS 11-12.) Steele notes and draws upon Mandelstam's observation of Dante that "He was the Descartes of metaphor." (Osip Mandelstam, Addenda to "Conversation about Dante", *The Collected Critical Prose and Letters*, ed. Jane Gary Harris, Collins Harvill, London, 1991, 451.)

their disparate ways”;²⁹⁵ “Happily associating myself with Aristotle’s view on the excellence of metaphor, that deeply relational device, I also notice how rapidly metaphor cuts deals with metamorphosis, that destabilizing device”.²⁹⁶ Extrapolating from these and other expressions of commitment to metaphor disbursed throughout Steele’s work, it is possible to isolate three major reasons why metaphor is the appropriate device with which Steele witnesses to the presence of the glory of God in the world. These are, first, the fact that Steele is acutely aware of Jesus’s metaphorical way of speaking about himself with respect to humanity; second, the capacity of metaphor to “make strange” or “defamiliarize” and therefore give prominence to something; and third, the facility of metaphorical language to figure metamorphosis. Christ’s precedent for the use of metaphor for specifically relational ends and the two attributes of metaphor (to “make strange” and to figure the process of metamorphosis) will be discussed in conjunction with the three classes of radiant imagery identifiable in Steele’s work.

Steele places great store on the fact that Jesus uses metaphor to state his claims about his relationship with humanity. Referring to Paul’s claim that “nothing... will be able to separate us from the love of God which comes to us in... Jesus”, Steele says that “[Paul] is merely echoing our Lord’s claims about himself, which are mediated through different metaphors - about the vine, about the shepherd, about the path, about bread and the wine”.²⁹⁷ Elsewhere Steele refers to “the Lord’s repeated metaphors of our intimate bonding with him, his drawing us all into the oceanic being of his Fathering God, his patterning our responsibility on his responsibility”.²⁹⁸

Following such precedent in troping the relationship between the divine and the human, Steele employs metaphors of radiance, and also of sun, star or light to speak of God or Christ. Frequently he combines their use within contexts of explanatory text such as are to be found in the homilies. Hence Steele proclaims that “God is our

²⁹⁵ “Voice and Chorus”, *Whole Voice Conference*, University of Sydney, 1995, AJAF viii.

²⁹⁶ “Measures”, MS 10.

²⁹⁷ “The Lord Within and Without”, Newman, 1996, 2.

²⁹⁸ “SpChange”, 49.

sun”,²⁹⁹ that God is both transcendent and immanent in the sense that the sun is both “out there” and also internal to individuals, causing the efficiency of breathing and heart beat.³⁰⁰ He argues

If God is our sun, those who commit themselves to his care are our moon: we catch his light at one remove.... ...the motto of this College is, ‘Let your light shine,’ and this is no recommendation of narcissism or arrogance. It is an echo of our Lord’s appeal to us that we may live in such a way that others, brightened by our company, may find God’s trace.³⁰¹

Christ, Steele figures as “God’s Sun, the blazing Sun of God”³⁰² which image he develops more fully elsewhere:

Earlier in the history of Christianity, when spelling was more flexible than it is nowadays, there was a standard way of talking in which Jesus the Son of God - ‘S-o-n’ - was regarded as the ‘Sun’ of God....³⁰³

Given the troping of God and Christ as the sun, it is not surprising to find that Steele figures God as “the God of sun and stars”;³⁰⁴ and Christ as “the Father’s Shining One”;³⁰⁵ or that he can ask “how Jesus the Risen Lord is to be radiant for the so-many millions who have not heard of him”;³⁰⁶ and that he can refer to “the radiant and receptive heart of Christ” in the context of “his unfaltering presence among us”;³⁰⁷ to “God’s radiant presence”;³⁰⁸ and to “the radiance or glory of God”.³⁰⁹

Steele says that God is “as intimately radiant through all existence as radioactive material is through some small part of existence”;³¹⁰ that the disciples “find to their astonishment that he is radiant all about them”;³¹¹ that people experience “the love of

²⁹⁹ “So It Goes”, 2.

³⁰⁰ “The Lord Within and Without”, 1.

³⁰¹ “So It Goes”, 2.

³⁰² “Easter”, Perth, 1996, 2.

³⁰³ “The Lord Within and Without”, 1.

³⁰⁴ “Burning Bush”, Newman, 1995, 1.

³⁰⁵ “The Lord Within and Without”, 1.

³⁰⁶ “The Lord Within and Without”, 2.

³⁰⁷ “Coming”, Newman, 1993, 2.

³⁰⁸ “Angels and Others”, Newman, 1996, 1.

³⁰⁹ “Fr. John Casey S.J., R.I.P.”, 1.

³¹⁰ “Steerage”, 16.

³¹¹ “Steerage”, 18.

God radiated into [their] own hearts” which “prompts [their] own radiating of it abroad”;³¹² that writers are “haunted by [Christ] in his humanity and in his offering the radiations of divinity”;³¹³ that Vincent Buckley devotes “a partly-awed, partly interrogating attention to radiant imagery”;³¹⁴ that “McAuley prized lucidity, brilliancy, the radiance of mind: but... knew that radiance is commonly profiled against a darkness”;³¹⁵ that “good things and good people, radiate themselves”;³¹⁶ that a city can be photographed with “the beginnings of pavement radiating out into the city as a whole” which for Steele can be “evocative of the spirit of the book” featuring that city;³¹⁷ that a poem has a “radiant body”;³¹⁸ that icons such as the peacocks in a particular poem “seem to have been that radiant presence” and “as such, they were enduringly what they had been taken iconographically to be by earlier Christian writers and painters - emblems of God in his glory”;³¹⁹ that Seamus Heaney has been “much irradiated [by Dante]”;³²⁰ while W.S. Merwin is said to be lacking “the Dantesque blaze of the divine” and instead to be emanating “the radiance of a distant, and perhaps a dwindling, star”.³²¹

These instances of radiance, metaphoric though most of them are, do not need any explanation from Steele as he utilizes them. They are self-explanatory. Speaking of Loren Eiseley, Steele claims that he has “a peculiarly unitive mind, in which governing and embracing metaphors preside to a quite uncommon degree”³²² and with Seamus Heaney in mind Steele says “Sometimes, when a poet repeats certain metaphors, we find that this illuminates not only the poems in which they occur, but the writer’s whole project. ... And when... poets also do telling work in prose, there is often a similar effect. A recurring trope may carry the trace of the mind’s whole

³¹² “Stills. 11: Bread and Prayers: Matt. XIV: 13-23”, AJAF iv, 2.

³¹³ “Singing”, 2.

³¹⁴ “Death-Masques and Deathmares: Peter Porter and Vincent Buckley”, MS 5.

³¹⁵ “James McAuley”, 1976, 2.

³¹⁶ “5th Sunday, Year B”, 1994, 2.

³¹⁷ “Ports of entry”, *Eureka Street*, 2, 6 (July, 1992), 31.

³¹⁸ “Presences”, 47.

³¹⁹ “Singing”, 17.

³²⁰ “Tenderness”, 7.

³²¹ “Presences”, 54.

³²² *Autopassion*, 47.

movement”.³²³ Both these claims are also true of Steele to such an extent that the recurring metaphors of radiance (and their associated images of light, fire, etc.) which are frequently not explained to any great extent within their contexts can be seen to endorse Steele’s *whole project* - the observation of the presence of the glory of God in the world.

Hence one interpolates from these recurring tropes that Steele finds God in the radial design of Paris: “The way of the world, / ...is best drafted / by the spirit’s geometricians, .../ .../ ... whose glory / radiates in the avenues / devised for expert cannonade”;³²⁴ in the city of Chicago: “ominous, pluriform, seething with chance, / tilting the face of America over the water -- / it goes on urging its claim, / darkened a little by distance, radiant still”;³²⁵ in the longing of Faust who wants “radiance about him”;³²⁶ in writers like Dr Johnson who has, Steele says, a “potential for either benign or dangerous radiation”;³²⁷ in autobiographers when, for example, they are represented by da Vinci’s “straddling renaissance figure who radiates within his... globe”;³²⁸ in the human mind: “that equivocally radiant entity, the mind”,³²⁹ and in resurrection: “Resurrection is irradiation”.³³⁰

These radiant images can be seen as Steele’s statements that, to his mind, there is in the apprehension of the radiant entity (whether a person, a writer, a city, a poem, an autobiography, a fictional character, a painting, or an event) the perception of the presence of the glory of God, and this despite the possible threat from negative radiation which might be represented by anything from Johnson’s temperament to the fact that the radial avenues of Paris, (as Steele’s poem notes), were built with cannon fire in mind. Frequently Steele gives no detailed explanation for what he is stating in his metaphors. It is often a case of Steele’s abiding by Canetti’s advice, which advice

³²³ “Strain”, 58.

³²⁴ “Puny Dragons”, poem 51, *Potomac*.

³²⁵ “The Organ of Nostalgia”, *Retrievals*.

³²⁶ *Expatriates*, 134.

³²⁷ *Autopassion*, 60.

³²⁸ *Autopassion*, 72.

³²⁹ *Expatriates*, 133.

³³⁰ “Pen”, 16.

Steele follows as he concludes his tribute to Brodsky: “‘Explain nothing. Put it there. Say it. Leave’”.³³¹ He merely insinuates a radiant image within the context of his treatment of person, writer, city, poem etc. Occasionally he goes so far as to say that he cannot prove how or why he perceives what he does; but that that is the nature of the perception. Speaking about Sinyavesky’s “metaphoric starbursts, of shared meaning” an image pertaining to the Romantic perception of things, Steele admits:

One cannot argue these things into a camp, any more than into a seminar-room, a lawcourt, or a church. No humanly devised zone appeals for such apprehensions, but no more can it fend them off indefinitely, once they are alleged.³³²

For which inability to prove anything Steele finds good precedent. Speaking about Jesus and then about John the evangelist, Steele says

[Jesus] stubbornly refused to leave any man or woman thunderstruck; he offered signifiers and significances, vestiges and portents. In the same way, John cannot table a paper which discloses the form and character of the Light’s ungrasped presence.³³³

Related to this series of radiant images are Steele’s associated images, symbols and metaphors. Some of them pertain to *fountains*: “the self-acclaiming plummet and embrace / Of a fountain reconciled to its restlessness / As it spills light into a darkened piazza”;³³⁴ “There is a glory and a gift in the way a man can give himself verbally for twenty-six lines to this self-flaunting fountain [in the poem ‘A Baroque Wall-Fountain in the Villa Sciarra’]”; “It is like Yeats, talking in one of his most famous poems about the ‘abounding glittering jet’ at once of water and of words”.³³⁵ Other associated images pertain to *light*: “the real ‘perpetual light’ radiating into the days”;³³⁶ “when your radiance becomes a light”;³³⁷ “the Father’s glory - the outflash of love”;³³⁸ “the... El Greco’ can be received either as a prototypical El Greco painting or as the man Domenikos Theotokopoulos carried as it were in spirit into the pigment, with either

³³¹ “Brodsky”, 17.

³³² *Autopassion*, 116.

³³³ “Eagle”, 6.

³³⁴ “A Drink”, poem 71, *Potomac*.

³³⁵ “Reveries”, 6.

³³⁶ “Eagle”, 5.

³³⁷ “Reveries”, 3.

³³⁸ “Eagle”, 24.

or both of them brimming with inner light”.³³⁹ Others still pertain to *sun* or *stars*: “the sun / A star as if immortal”;³⁴⁰ “When sunrise comes to bless us”;³⁴¹ or to *fire*: “We swallow the sun like fire / and flaunt it”;³⁴² “A blessed fireball / Mounts from its chasm, making a gift of shadows”.³⁴³ Additionally other images pertain to *luminosity*: “to turn to him for luminousness, to know him as the Shining One”;³⁴⁴ “radiantly luminous”;³⁴⁵ “a deep constantly-converted, passion for the Luminous Presence”;³⁴⁶ “The Lord spells out in deed what the Father is indeed: and that spelling out cannot but, to eyes opened by the Spirit, be luminous”;³⁴⁷ “I do remember, / Late in the piece, a man who made some toasts / And drank as if he meant them, and then left, / His mother looking thoughtful: that and the jars / For water, and the way they seemed to glow”;³⁴⁸ “In Deane’s poem the [goldfinch]... is also implicitly the custodian of the word - the unlying, luminous word”.³⁴⁹ And others pertain to *illumination*: “[Keats’] example can be illuminating for anyone whose passion is for Christ”;³⁵⁰ “The knowing ones... will have to learn immensely more than they have learned so far, and they will have, not to resort to illusions, but to allow illuminations”;³⁵¹ or *phosphorescence*: “the whole poetic pursuit, even when serving other ends as well - magic, seduction, celebration, denunciation, elegy and the rest - is through and through a venture into these darkly phosphorescent waters”;³⁵² or to *blazing*: “to heighten momentary epiphanic force, to blaze”,³⁵³ “a blazing God”.³⁵⁴

³³⁹ q.v. “the startling El Greco / brimming with inner light” of Marianne Moore’s “The Hero” which is treated by Steele in *Expatriates*, 50-60.

³⁴⁰ “Exeunt Omnes”, *Retrievals*.

³⁴¹ “The Looking Glass Suite IV”, *Retrievals*.

³⁴² “Season”, poem 13, *Potomac*.

³⁴³ “Playwright”, *Retrievals*.

³⁴⁴ “Eagle”, 8.

³⁴⁵ “Blinding Lights”, 11.

³⁴⁶ “Eagle”, 8.

³⁴⁷ “Eagle”, 25.

³⁴⁸ “A Season in Retreat: Cana”, *Paradise*, 37

³⁴⁹ “Hurt into Poetry in Contemporary Ireland”, MS 12.

³⁵⁰ “Eagle”, 10.

³⁵¹ “Steerage”, 17.

³⁵² *Expatriates*, 29.

³⁵³ “Hurt into Poetry in Contemporary Ireland”, MS 12.

³⁵⁴ “The Sun and the Shadow”, 1993, 1.

The value of these images can be explained by recourse to Steele's comments on what he calls the "uncovenanted lucidities" of Randal Jarrell's poetry:

[‘Our art is a way of being dazzled, by the truth’] ... And what gives the dazzle is the series - often not easily perceived as series - of luminous instances which, in shorthand, are often spoken of as images, or as conceits, or as Augustan congruences, which hold us back from the vagaries of inattention, but which in so doing jar us clear of the agreeable imprecision of diurnal practice.³⁵⁵

This capacity of metaphor to “jar us clear of the agreeable imprecision of diurnal practice” raises a second major reason for Steele's cherishing the device - the capacity of metaphor to “make strange” or to “defamiliarize”:

To a degree, every original metaphor does just this, [making strange or defamiliarizing] which may be the reason that for thousands of years the metaphor has had such high praise as a device or resource in literature, especially in poetry.³⁵⁶

This capacity of metaphor cannot be overestimated for a writer seeking to trace the presence of God in a world and a world's literature where cliché, staleness of imagination, and cant are what has been frequently brought to bear in pulpit and in spiritual and literary journal. Steele was once interested in the work of Sebastian Moore who made bitter complaint about religious cant and called for a new language³⁵⁷ for speaking about God. While Steele has never followed Moore in exasperated complaint about what others are doing in this matter, he is alert to the dangers of stultifying concepts of God when harboured by any individual or community. This, as has been seen, is what Steele has in mind in “Haunting Presences” when he refers to a

Lord who has been allowed to ossify in the imagination of his votaries.³⁵⁸

To endorse his own unified structure of thought and the radiant glory of God troped by that structure Steele utilises a second series of metaphors which seem custom-made to guard against such ossification of the imagination. Steele's facility to think in

³⁵⁵ *Expatriates*, 76.

³⁵⁶ “Hunger”, MS 8.

³⁵⁷ “God is a new language // Otherwise / God is a dead word.” (“Sebastian Moore, *God is a New Language*, London, Darton, Longman and Todd, 1967, 13.)

scientific terms and to use those terms to trope intellectual, literary or spiritual processes was mentioned earlier.³⁵⁹ It is this talent that he brings to bear in fashioning a further set of radiant images to endorse his major theme of the identification of presence of the glory of God in the world. In *The Autobiographical Passion* Steele devotes a chapter to Loren Eiseley's *All the Strange Hours*. Steele turns momentarily to an aspect of Augustine's *Confessions* to preface something that he has yet to say about Eiseley. For Augustine, Steele says:

the self's fortunes in time are memorable insofar as they mediate God in the present. What is so often referred to, casually, in Christian spirituality as the 'presence of God' has in fact to be presented, to be realized: and memory is Augustine's prized mode for this development. It is not just that he is a pilgrim with a memory: memory is the pilgrim. And the self remembering is understood as itself a form of God's self-presentation in time.³⁶⁰

Alongside this concept of the self remembering as a form of God's presence, Steele places his impression of Eiseley whom he dubs "filamental man". It is useful to cite Steele at length as he identifies in Eiseley a humane and anthropological sensibility, because the observation has important ramifications in the image that follows it. Eiseley, Steele says,

writes as someone for whom pre-historic evolutionary continuities are not only matters of professional, or even of passionate, interest, but are axioms of the sensibility. One may read, as for instance in Richard E. Leakey's *The Making of Mankind*, of ape-like ancestors, of the early hominids, of Neanderthal Man and of Ice Age art: one may read that 'the oldest engraved object so far discovered and dated takes us back an incredible 300,000 years, to the site of Pech de l'Aze in France'.³⁶¹ These things mobilize the imagination. But Eiseley's claim is to have such kinship with humanoid and pre-humanoid beings as a constant feature of his sensibility. It is as if, for him, his own personality and the personality of any and all men is a kind of filament in the natural world, as an organic filament is in its milieu, or as an electrical filament may be, alive in its gases.

³⁵⁸ "Presences", 53.

³⁵⁹ See above p.295.

³⁶⁰ *Autopassion*, 45.

³⁶¹ *Autopassion*, 46 Steele cites from Richard E. Leakey, *The Making of Mankind*, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1981, 137.

Steele, who says “I have never come across anything quite like this”, is quick to add that coupled with this sensibility of kin with pre-historical man is Eiseley’s erudition, scholarship, and astute appraisal of developments in intellectual history. “It is”, Steele says, “as if a shaman’s soul were speaking through Goethe’s mouth”. All of which becomes pertinent the moment Steele continues to embroider what he has in mind by his coinage of “filamental man”:

Filamental man: it is my term, not his, [Eiseley’s], but I doubt whether he would have rejected it. Perhaps it does have this advantage, that it can suggest both immense energies - as in those ‘filaments’, flames of gas in the sun’s chromosphere, which can flare out to 400 000 kilometres from the surface - and an essential fragility - as in the series of cells in some algae. Eiseley sees man, and in season sees himself, as having a part in both conditions: he always sees man, and himself, as being profiled against the gigantic body of the earth, and as having his tenuous but stubborn reality in the long, the immensely long, coursing of time.³⁶²

In Steele’s consideration of Eiseley, what is taking place is discourse via association. Augustine and Eiseley have something in common but differ in other respects; Augustine’s attitude to the self in time predicates his view of the presence of God, Eiseley’s does not. Eiseley, however, has an astonishing sensitivity for pre-historical man. Eiseley is described in terms of the flaring radiance of the sun and the continuum of fragile cellular algae threaded together. Steele is saying strictly by means of these images that Eiseley’s existence is [has been] lived out in time not only with feeling for the human continuum from pre-history but profiled against that earth under that sun. The metaphors do not afford the reader of Steele’s prose evidence that Eiseley believed or performed this or that; but they allow instead the reader to momentarily share pockets of the perception that is Steele’s when he is reading Eiseley. The detail of the flaring gas on the surface of the sun signals that Steele is perceiving a man to be the way he is, to write the way he does, to have his extraordinary feeling for 300,000 years of humanity, because he is, and they have been, within the ambit and the influence of the radiant presence of God.

³⁶² *Autopassion*, 46.

Within this “scientific” series of images come more of Steele’s *stellar* metaphors. He reports in “Star and labyrinth” that “the International Geophysical Year, 1957-58, disclosed that possibly a hundred thousand tons of stardust is collected daily by our little planet”,³⁶³ a phenomenon which he could be said to have in mind when earlier in the article he speculates that “it is likely that they [the stars] irradiate part of your consciousness”.³⁶⁴ One point of these remarks is to be found in Steele’s comment that “I suppose that part of the imaginative vitality of the star of Bethlehem, or of the star of David, or even of communism’s red star, lies in our latent conviction that we are drawn and swayed by focused forces”.³⁶⁵

Another reference is to be found separately in a related poem. In Steele’s poem “Stardust”,³⁶⁶ the phenomenon of falling stardust is treated with whimsy, almost flippancy:

That millions of tons of stardust are falling towards
our curious planet momentarily
sticks to the mind like velcro - a tug, and it’s off
with the Gross National Product of
Liberia, the melting point of copper,
the Finno-Ungaritic words
for ‘pear-shaped’....

The whimsy gives way as the insistent nature of the phenomenon thrusts itself upon the speaker like a spiritual force “obtrusive, demanding to be dealt with”. There is no explanation interpreting or translating the falling stardust as anything so grand as the radiating glory of God, as there is in the homily in which Steele says “whether it is a mote of dust or a galaxy, one of the electrical discharges in your brain at the moment or the electronic network that webs the world - if it is real, it comes from him...” [“the reality-giver and the life-bringer”].³⁶⁷ That this is the insinuation in the poem, however,

³⁶³ “Star and labyrinth”, 4.

³⁶⁴ “Star and labyrinth”, 4.

³⁶⁵ “Star and labyrinth”, 4.

³⁶⁶ “Stardust”, poem 27, *Potomac*.

³⁶⁷ “Ways of Living: Trinity Sunday, 1994”, Georgetown for Newman, 1-2.

can be garnered from the ironic comment of the last lines which are written in a way to countervail all that the poet knows to be true.

Thank God for night,
when as we know the universe is stilled,
all motion under prohibition,
no least particle dancing in our minds.

Not only is the universe not stilled simply because it is night as, and from where the poet writes, but also the very writing of the poem proves the falsity of the last claim that there is “no least particle dancing in our minds”.

Returning to *The Autobiographical Passion*, there is another quasi scientific image of radiance to be noted. In the section treating Andrei Sinyavsky’s work from a Soviet prison, *A Voice from the Chorus*, Steele selects from and cites Sinyavsky’s work:

I always have the feeling that nature - the air, leaves, rain - sees and understands everything, and wants to help - wants to help very much indeed, but cannot.

I resemble a cockroach - not when it runs, but when it sits, rooted motionless to one spot, vacant and aloof, staring fixedly at one inscrutable point.

Cats, for some reason, give the impression that their blood is blue - in the literal sense that it would stain things this colour.³⁶⁸

Commenting upon these and other citations Steele states:

Nature said none of these things, nor could it, except insofar as one thinks of man as nature’s spokesman, its heralding presence. But man says none of these things either, except insofar as nature plays sounding-board to his voice. Wits and tongue cast around and find nothing to do unless nature has become his interior sponsor. What happens to Sinyavsky, eyes roving, thoughts tumbling, is that here, assaulted and insulted by much of man’s doing, he still finds that the Romanticism which is also man’s doing gives point to eye and tongue alike. Patched in upon his solitude is the vindication of his mental exertions in the depths. I cannot suppose that there was any way in which he could have tongued his living unless he could have felt himself in collaboration with air, cockroach, cat... in that riddling endeavour.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ *Autopassion*, 115. Steele cites from *A Voice from the Chorus*, pp. 29, 76, 85.

³⁶⁹ *Autopassion*, 115-116.

In *Expatriates* Steele says:

Romantic art seems *conscientiously* Faustian, almost pathetically aspirant. To find one's satisfaction only in seeking to compass what resists compassing is nearly all it has to do - with ever-greater subtlety and intensity and self-awareness.³⁷⁰

Elsewhere Steele speaks of "The Romantic hope that one may be played-upon or played-through by a universe which figures itself as meaning".³⁷¹ While this is not the place to argue for the Romantics' perception of the self with respect to the infinite, it should be said that earlier in this lecture Steele has borne in mind this and similar matters.³⁷² Once again there is a yield from Steele's metaphoric description of what he perceives in Sinyavsky's work particularly if it is recalled that the final section from "The Poem of the Mind", in which Steele considers the Ignatian "radiant fountain" of the *Contemplatio*, is entitled "Starburst", and that to describe the relationship between humanity and the universe evident in Sinyavsky's work, Steele says:

They [Marvell and Yeats in particular works of theirs] were also doing what the instances quoted from Sinyavsky show: they were putting in front of us the *gestalten*, the metaphoric starbursts, of shared meaning between ourselves and dirt, atmosphere, and stars.³⁷³

Ossified metaphors for God could also, of course, be said to take the form of sunbursts or starbursts of radiant light or radiant love emanating into the universe. There is plentiful warning, after all, in Fowler's statement that the rare form "radiancy" is "kept in being as metrically useful or rhetorically effective".³⁷⁴ One cannot but notice that even in the face of Ramsey's scholarly approach to all of the *Shekinah*, *kabod* and *ó*, Ramsey's reference to "the radiance of the glory" and to

³⁷⁰ *Expatriates*, 22.

³⁷¹ "Strain", 59.

³⁷² Reading another passage from Sinyavsky's *A Voice from the Chorus*, Steele "is struck by several associations" among them "by that of the Romantic hope that the germinal word may be bodied out first in the individual, then in the people; by the equally Romantic affirmation that the sweetness and power of the word may become consonant with the Adamic authority of the man for whom it is more than signal and is in principle communion; by the Miltonic prayer that the *spiritus* of the word, participating in the transcendent authority of the *Santus Spiritus*, may inflame, invigorate and articulate otherwise dumb and benumbed man; and by the ancient sense that the word strikes to the 'inscrutable' but not vacuous point from which the soul unfurls itself." (*Autopassion*, 114)

³⁷³ *Autopassion*, 116.

“the radiant light of heavenly glory”³⁷⁵ appear to be metrically and rhetorically effective but also to be somewhat redundant.

In Steele’s metaphoric treatment of the presence of the glory of God, however, there prevail strong intrinsic antidotes to any possible ossification of the images. This is so both in the case of the sustained structural troping of the glory throughout his works and in the series of supporting images. The cause of this lack of staleness is that whether the glory is troped by the four motifs or by the endorsing *sun, fountain, light, illumination*, images, the tropes are all images of fluidity. Where the troping of the glory occurs in the sustained manner the fluidity is intrinsic to the four figures: The Pilgrim, bound on his/her journey of individual growth by daily reconversion and growth, is no static recipient of that glory, since the condition for participation in the glory is the requirement of daily and lifelong change. The Celebrant beholds the glory of God as his glory emanates despite the ever changing condition of individual lives. And should there be any risk that either of these processes could engender complacency the Jester by his vigilant devotion to self-examination, irony, satire, oppositional and tensional discourse is poised to challenge any form of triumphalism including and especially, any triumphalism pertaining to the imaging and wording of the glory of God. Above all of these is the intrinsic nature of the Word, in particular the nature of metaphor in the hands of a poet, which guards against the ossification of images of God since it is a specific agent for speaking about metamorphosis.

To return to the image of Steele’s “Zodiacal” man, Steele argues for the usefulness of his radiant metaphor of astrological man to indicate the extent and variety of autobiography by arguing for the metaphor’s fluid nature. He says

the real intellectual interest of astrology in its developed forms is in the shifts or shimmers from one fixity of delineation to another: its wavelike character, rather than its particle-like character, to put it so.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁴ Fowler’s *Modern English Usage*, revised Ernest Gowers, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1965.

³⁷⁵ *Glorygod*, 31.

³⁷⁶ *Autopassion*, 72.

And it is for this reason that in the poetry of Porter Steele finds both “the gods” and dreams of value. They give Porter, Steele says, “metaphors for metamorphosis”:³⁷⁷

all of the metaphor work is at the service of metamorphosis, which is both Porter’s compulsion and his game. If dreams fascinate him, it is because they are both such shape-shifters themselves, and such apt emblems for much else in life. Dreams remind us of films and paintings, which recapitulate drama, which enacts personal volatility, which echoes the mutation of the seasons, which instances the blend of stability and mutability on the whole world....³⁷⁸

This capacity of metaphor to trope metamorphosis, the third attribute of significant value to Steele, becomes indispensable when Steele figures the radiating glory of God by means of both the four sustained motifs of his work and by means of the supporting series of images. It is useful to see in what way the sustained troping of the glory of God is facilitated by this capacity of metaphor before continuing to look at the imagery supporting the sustained metaphor.

In Steele’s consideration of Porter’s “The Rival Poet” he cites Porter’s “Till even death-beds start to stink of skill”³⁷⁹ and his “Erecting trellises of words to keep / The world suspended in the winds of time” and claims:

one is haunted by senses at once of beauty and of fragility, of cables of gossamer. I think that Porter is astonishing in the full-heartedness with which he has staked his life-long venture as a poet on the centrality of metaphor. He is not bewitched by metaphor, nor flirtatious with it: he simply lives in it, is indebted to it, is quizzical of it, and bears it, as we all do these things in our own body. Metaphor is to Porter what the sea is to the Homer of the *Odyssey*: the milieu in which all that can happen for good or ill will happen.³⁸⁰

Even if Steele had not, immediately prior to this, described Porter’s project by recourse to “*inventio*” - the finding of the sources of imagination, as people tried to

³⁷⁷ Porter, 77. q.v. 87: “[Porter] may absolutely disbelieve in them, [‘gods of many shapes and sizes’] but they surely do bring him metaphors for poetry.”

³⁷⁸ Porter, 84.

³⁷⁹ Porter, 81.

³⁸⁰ Porter, 81

find the source of the Nile”³⁸¹ - his statement that Porter’s verses *haunt* him signals that his preoccupation is with the source of inspired or inspirited verse. Steele’s admission to his being so haunted sets up an expectation (that he will allude in some manner to the presence of God with respect to Porter’s verse) which promise is fulfilled in the troping of the glory by means of the four motifs. Steele finds metaphors for Porter’s use of metaphor: not only does Porter “live” in metaphor, he is “quizzical of it”, “bears it” in his “own body”, and is seen to make it his milieu (as Homer does the sea) “in which all that can happen for good or ill will happen”. Steele establishes in other words, the jesterly, peregrinatory, celebratory, (and obviously the word-laden) nature of Porter’s metaphors by resorting, respectively, to the Jester’s *quizzical* mind, to the *bearing* body (connoting the long-term haul of the Pilgrim), to the environment of contrasts in which the Celebrant brings to bear his steady rejoicing, the *milieu in which* [happens] *all that can happen for good or ill*, and by way of providing the fourth raying of the Word, Porter, it is said, “lives in [metaphor]”. What is of interest here is not merely another instance of the four motifs at work, but the individual facility of each of the four motifs and the collective capability of the four to trope the work, even the technique, of a poet given to observing metamorphosis in the world at large. (Steele, as we have seen, claims that with Porter “all of the metaphor work is at the service of metamorphosis”.³⁸²) Each of the four metaphors used to invoke the Jester, the Pilgrim, the Celebrant, and the Word (and therefore connoting the sourcing God) are themselves metaphors of metamorphosis in progress:³⁸³ the quizzical mind, the body bearing something within it (itself a metaphor of a metaphor) and the final image, nothing less static than the sea and the archetype of metamorphosis, are separately all entities of mobility, fluidity; in concert they trope not only the always emanating nature of the glory of God, in Steele’s view, the haunting source of Porter’s imagination, but Porter’s responses to that haunting, namely his quizzical, burdened, benign and malign, metaphorical wording of the world, the self and others. For Steele whose claim in *Expatriates* is that “we are one-and-many people lifelong

³⁸¹ *Porter*, 81.

³⁸² *Porter*, 84.

³⁸³ In “Death-Masques and Deathmares: Peter Porter and Vincent Buckley”, (MS 10), Steele speaks of the reader’s need to heed “the voice” in the verse. He explains: “In the Butterfly House at the Perth Zoo there is a notice which says, ‘Quiet please: metamorphosis is taking place,’ and even when Porter looks as if he is doing things in rough-cast, much of the poem will slip away unless clamorous agreement or disagreement is quietened and the precise manner -- itself usually metamorphic -- listened for.”

and perhaps longer: metaphor enunciates this to us and about us”,³⁸⁴ this facility of metaphor is one that makes it, for the poet, indispensable.

A third class of images endorsing Steele’s project is that comprised of images from other poets’ work which Steele cites, sometimes with an explanation, most often without, to endorse their support for his perception that the poetry is sourced by divinity. Occasionally Steele cites other poets using *radiant* or *radiance* in contexts sympathetic to his project as when he cites David Jones, (whom he regards as “a poet... with one eye on the palpable world and another on a heavenly”) claiming that “We... presume to other and more radiant affinities”;³⁸⁵ when in James McAuley’s panegyric he cites McAuley’s “Radiant Muse, my childhood’s nurse, / Who gave my wondering mouth to taste / The fragrant honeycomb of verse”³⁸⁶ or when, claiming that a “crucial element in [a poem of Hecht’s] is the omnipresence of light, or at least the hunger for it” and that “There are, literally, dozens of Hecht’s poems in which the hankering for, or the rejoicing at, illumination has an intensity which one might associate either with Plato or with the writer of the first few verses of Genesis”,³⁸⁷ he cites Hecht’s “A Cast of Light” which begins:

A maple bough of web-foot, golden greens,
Found by an angled shaft
Of late sunshine, disposed within that shed
Radiance, with brilliant, hoisted baldachins,
Pup tents and canopies by some underdraft
Flung up to scattered perches overhead,

These daubs of sourball lime, at floating rest,
Present to the loose wattage
Of heaven their limelit flukes, an artifice
of archipelagian Islands of the Blessed,
And in all innocence pursue their cottage
Industry of photosynthesis.

³⁸⁴ *Expatriates*, 13.

³⁸⁵ *Expatriates*, 120.

³⁸⁶ James McAuley, “Invocation”, cited by Steele in “James McAuley”, 3.

Conversely, Steele sometimes cites poets' figuring "negative radiation" as when for example he discusses Zbigniew Herbert's "Elegy of Fortinbras" with its opening lines

Now that we're alone we can talk Prince man to man
though you lie on the stairs and see no more than
a dead ant
nothing but black sun with broken rays....³⁸⁸

or when instancing Porter's "self-preserving wit in the midst of nature's or culture's shifts and excesses" Steele refers to Porter's "The Irradiated Poem" a piece of witty satire³⁸⁹ working against the grain of any possible notion of a divine radiation of poetry and claiming in its opening lines that

It has been exposed to safe bombardment
Of formalistic and idealistic rays,
Holderlin's mad Hellenism and Dante's
Tuscan spite....

Steele notes in the work of others images associated with radiance and he cites them in their contexts pertaining to all of God, Christ, the gospels, the world, humanity, and poetry itself. Some of these include - instances of sunlight: Dawe's "my map-of-Australia profile / raised to the reddening sun";³⁹⁰ Donne's "But the Meridionall brightnesse, the glorious noon, and heighth, is to be a Christian, to pretend to no spirituall, no temporall blessing, but for, and by, and through, and in our Lord and Saviour Christ Jesus";³⁹¹ instances of luminosity: Hecht's "the Nazarite's / Luminous sermon that reduced to awe / And silence a vast crowd near Galilee";³⁹² instances of shining: Vincent Buckley's "shining world";³⁹³ Steele's reference to [Heaney's citing] Derek Mahon's "The ideal future / Shines out of our better nature";³⁹⁴ instances of light: Nemerov's "So there he was, this forty-year old teenager / Dreaming

³⁸⁷ "Lyrical", 39.

³⁸⁸ Steele treats this poem in *Expatriates*, 156-174.

³⁸⁹ Porter, 86. Elsewhere Steele tropes satiric verse as a *caltrop* "an iron ball with four protruding spikes so arranged that when the ball is on the ground one of them always points upwards." ("Passages of arms", 30.)

³⁹⁰ "Poemind", 3.

³⁹¹ Steele, "For Whom the Bell Sings", 1992, 2.

³⁹² "Silences", 15.

³⁹³ From "one of Buckley's 'Eleven Political Poems'". q.v. "Strain", 65.

³⁹⁴ Heaney in his "The Redress of Poetry: 1989", Clarendon, 1990, cites from Derek Mahon, "The Sea in Winter".

preposterous mergers and divisions / Of vowels like water, consonants like rock... / ...
for words that would / Enter the silence and be there as a light”³⁹⁵.

Porter’s “The Poem to End Poems” ends as follows:

Thus while each word remains I will discover
The source from which the magic rays are sent
And publish it this once, the world at play,
Our single sphere which purrs with measurement.³⁹⁶

Having cited this conclusion to Porter’s poem in *Peter Porter* and having briefly examined another poem along the way, Steele says that he finds in Porter’s poems “a wield of wit, a hunger for delineation, a plea for the truth. ...Porter... is engaged constantly in the search for exacting illumination”³⁹⁷. Dante, of course, whose “Love that moves the sun and the other stars”³⁹⁸ Steele cites again and again,³⁹⁹ engages Steele’s attention for the same reason. Steele writes:

it is easy to sense that the ‘long journey’ being undertaken by Dante is not only towards his celestial destination, but towards psychological, moral and imaginative destinations, and, even in translation, via exacting verbal paths. When Mandelstam, thinking of Dante, says that ‘in pronouncing the word “sun”, we are, as it were, undertaking an enormous journey to which we are so accustomed that we travel in our sleep’, and when he contrasts this somnambulance with poetry’s vigilance and says that ‘it rouses us and shakes us into wakefulness in the middle of a word’, so that ‘it turns out that the word is much longer than we thought, and we remember that to speak means to be forever on the road’, he is, as elsewhere, making a declaration about the ontological distinctiveness of poetry....⁴⁰⁰

Introducing “The Radiations of Peter Porter” Steele asks if all poetry may be betokened by such concepts as that of radiance, to which he replies:

Its apologists have commonly thought so, though their metaphors have necessarily been different from mine. From Sir Philip Sidney to Harold Bloom they have taken it to be

³⁹⁵ Howard Nemerov, “Lion and Honeycomb”, cited in Steele’s “Singing”, 3.

³⁹⁶ *Porter*, 69. Steele cites from Porter’s *Possible Worlds*, 37.

³⁹⁷ *Porter*, 71.

³⁹⁸ “Power/Wisdom/Love”, Newman, 1995, 2.

³⁹⁹ See, for example, “The Names of God: VI: Light”, *Madonna*, October, 1983, 28.

⁴⁰⁰ “Love/death”, 58, (MS 11.)

radiant in character - gathering, bearing, and discharging its energies, in ways hard enough to name with precision, but dead easy to sense in their force.⁴⁰¹

Just as Steele, and, as he says, other apologists for poetry take to metaphor to name with difficulty what is “dead easy to sense”, Steele sees John in the fourth gospel resorting to the same solution to testify to the presence in the world of the glory of God: “John cannot table a paper which discloses the form and character of the Light’s ungrasped presence”.⁴⁰² Steele also knows that the contemplative apprehension of things and the wording of that apprehension, something analogous to his “soliciting language out of silence”, and something he is reminded of by Heaney’s ““I thought of walking round and round a space / Utterly empty, utterly a source””,⁴⁰³ while it is a unique wording of a special apprehension, cannot, at the same time, be substantiated with proof. Speaking again about St John’s gospel this time with the reader’s reaction to it in mind, Steele says:

In the Prologue, John, having acknowledged how circumambient the darkness can be, and how stubbornly we can head for it, proclaims that this death-wish, this black tropism, has been thrown over after all by the Lord whose patience was more potent than our headstrong plungings. And as ever, he places this before us not in any bedazzling way - no mere words, however gifted, can stay one round with the experience of life itself - but as an appeal to us to find it so in our most comprehensive experience. It *is* there to be found, he knows: but like the Lord interpreting things for the two on the way, he must wait upon our assent. For John, as for Jesus, there was a “Grammar of Assent” long before there was one for Newman, and it involves, very largely, a stilling of oneself to allow the Spirit to articulate himself in us in all simplicity. One may not get treatises out of this, or arguments: merely a Francis of Assisi or a Francis Xavier.⁴⁰⁴

In the series of reflections entitled “The Names of God” Steele concurs with the rhetoric of Ecclesiasticus: ““who could ever be sated with gazing at his glory?”” by saying

So it seems, at privileged moments, usually when we are very still.⁴⁰⁵

⁴⁰¹ “Radiations”, 65.

⁴⁰² “Eagle”, 6.

⁴⁰³ “Tenderness”, 7. (The MS has “soliciting language out of silence” whereas *The Age* has “soliciting of language out of silence”.)

⁴⁰⁴ “Eagle”, 3.

⁴⁰⁵ “The Names of God: VI: Light”, *Madonna*, October, 1983, 27.

Elsewhere in the series, although Steele “cannot table a paper which discloses the form and character of the Light’s ungrasped presence”, nor produce “treatises... or arguments”, Steele names, it seems, with some difficulty, and in multiple metaphorical terms, the apprehended experience of the presence of the glory of God:

The shafts of the Spirit run through and through us, finding their way to whatever is esoteric about us, but also ramifying in the commonplace. The Spirit is the one who cares enough about the flesh to glorify it, is creator Spirit. Daily, if we will, we wake up to God, eat God, walk in God.⁴⁰⁶

Whether Hopkins as a contemplative and a poet was in Steele’s view Ignatian, and unable to ‘say’ God, therefore unable to ‘say’ himself;⁴⁰⁷ or in the view of Balthasar un-Ignatian, and following Duns Scotus, attempting, and sometimes failing, to find language for “the irreducibly unique”;⁴⁰⁸ there is a concurrence of views about what Hopkins manifests. Steele, for whom the Hopkins who could write “That Nature is a Heraclitean Fire and of the Comfort of the Resurrection” is “a Promethean poet”, calls Hopkins’ project “the rendering of the literally visible into the papered ‘unseen’”; “the fire he has stolen, those pentecostal tongues”. Balthasar speaks of Hopkins being robbed of “the capacity to understand nature as it reveals itself: as the glory of God”.⁴⁰⁹ Steele could well say of Hopkins what he says of George Herbert (and of Anthony Hecht as well) that “he is ... a continuator of those glories to which he attests”.⁴¹⁰

Writing of George Herbert (once more in the context of Hecht’s “Gladness of the Best”) in *The Autobiographical Passion* Steele says:

⁴⁰⁶ “The Names of God: III: Spirit”, *Madonna*, May, 1983, 12.

⁴⁰⁷ “Gerard Manley Hopkins: The Case of the Trumpery Priest”, 171. (“If one believes that each human being has the creative power of the personality of God deployed upon it to originate it and to sustain it in being, and if this is seen... as having a biblical and mystical internality, then the self can no more be comprehended than God can: apprehended, yes, but comprehended, no. ... That was what the whole Jesuit tradition of spirituality encouraged Hopkins to believe, and what he did believe. He could not ‘say’ himself, however eager he might be to do so, unless he could ‘say’ God: and both elementary Christian theology and very bitter experience told him that he could not do that.”)

⁴⁰⁸ *Glorylord*, III, 374.

⁴⁰⁹ *Glorylord*, III, 362.

⁴¹⁰ “Silences”, 16.

To some there is something tiresome about the cutting of a certain physical figure in ‘Easter-wings’, but Herbert did not find it so. He thought like many before him and some after him that thus he was betokening what might be called the shapeliness of the *shekinah*, the hard-edged glory of a luminous God encountering shadowy man.⁴¹¹

Steele is one who finds valid the patterning of the poet’s desired wings in the print layout of Herbert’s altar piece. Needless to say Steele does not trouble his publishers with such designs of his own, but in the manner of Michael Ramsey, who, in the context of an envisioned eschatological “state of light and radiance”⁴¹² claims that “Creation, redemption, eschatology form a single pattern”,⁴¹³ designs his own version of how that patterning arranges itself. The medium for Steele’s design is not like Herbert’s, type-setting, nor like the architects and artisans of great cathedrals, marble or pigment. In his naming “the shafts of the spirit” it can be said that metaphor is his medium, but this is true not only with respect to the thousands of metaphors he makes with words, but to that consistently present, sustained metaphor, also made with words, but fashioned in the medium of his unitive structure of thought. This sustained metaphor configures, throughout the oeuvre, the “shafts of the Spirit”, the radiant sunburst by means of the (four) “rayings” emanating from the theocentre and radiating into the Incarnate, to the Gospels, to people throughout the ages, and to the literature of the ages. The sunburst tropes the presence of the glory of God in the world and answers Steele’s preoccupying question “how and where are we to know God among us...?”⁴¹⁴ The function of the “raying” of the Word completes the sunburst by naming and testifying to that presence; the function of the “raying” of the Celebrant is to declare that that presence is a sustaining and transforming presence; the function of the “raying” of the Pilgrim / Expatriate is to identify humanity’s alienated condition, its yearning, its continual needs to change, and to hope; and due to the state of affairs that we have seen Ramsey observing, that is, that “virtue, Israel, the sanctuary and the Law, all bring down God or the Shekinah from heaven to earth, while sin and idolatry

⁴¹¹ *Autopassion*, 75-76.

⁴¹² *Glorygod*, 28.

⁴¹³ *Glorygod*, 28.

⁴¹⁴ “Shaft”, 6.

remove him”,⁴¹⁵ the function of the Jester is to initiate an awareness of personal and communal sinfulness.

Such is the structure of Steele’s thought, as it persistently rays out into the jesterly, pergrinatory, celebratory and communicating motifs by which, whether in homily, criticism, paper or talk, he can be seen answering his own question as to how and where the presence of God is to be found in the world. When Steele is observed perceiving any of the elements of irony, criticism, dialectic, and tension, emotions of exiled, yearning, changing, hoping humanity, proclamations of retrieval or salvage, the naming of and testimonies to presence, he is observed apprehending the presence of the glory of a God who himself is provocative, exiled, redeeming, and communicating.

In an early poem Steele leaves off thinking of the sleazy side of Amsterdam, and turns his mind instead to Rembrandt’s “delicate lines that compass Christ in glory - / ...His arms already cruciform to hold / The castoff and the crushed”.⁴¹⁶ By way of allowing the Jester to have the last contrary word, it should be said that while Steele can refer in this way to the observation of the presence of the glory of God, he is also able to remark:

And yet there is a complementary kind of seeing... It is to see and sponsor the thing with no nimbus - most things most of the time, in other words.⁴¹⁷

Towards the end of the same piece, he confirms what he means by this by recourse to one of the paradoxes he finds in Matthew’s gospel:

that we shall often not find a specifically divine configuration in any act of love: God, after all, is beyond all figures while being innate in all loving deeds.⁴¹⁸

Some of this jesterly stripping of illusions about love is also reflected in Steele’s liturgical writings. In the heady days of Vatican II when liturgical creativity was

⁴¹⁵ *Glorygod*, 20.

⁴¹⁶ “A Season in Retreat: Beatitudes”, *Paradise*, 37.

⁴¹⁷ “Shaft”, 11.

⁴¹⁸ “Shaft”, 13.

encouraged, Steele prepared and prayed his “Liturgy for a Strange God”⁴¹⁹ for which he wrote not only the homily but the Preface and Eucharistic Prayer as well. In the homily Steele declares that Paul’s “hymn to love from the [first] letter to the Corinthians” can be dangerously interpreted so that its “familiarity and suavity can simply compound our illusions”. He prefers, he says, to see the passage as informing the hearer that “what love brings is death, ...the pierced heart, the drained face, the empty hands”, that love “ought to be the first thing to go in those emergencies which all of us meet...”, that “Love is for the impudent, the un-knowing, the mugs”; but at the same time he concludes that “The real point of Paul’s words is that love, the most improbable, ...vulnerable, ...ludicrous thing of all, is the thing on which everything has to be staked”. For the *Preface* (always addressed to the Father) of the same “Liturgy” Steele writes the prayer: “by your power the Lord Jesus destroys our illusions and offers true hope. ...And each day... we seek in you the name of love. May we know you in the seeking, and praise you in the finding”; for the *thanksgiving*: “We thank you for your presence, within and beyond the names we give”; for the *anamnesis*: “We remember in joy the best gift of all, the figure of your splendour, your Son Jesus Christ”; and for the *epiclesis*: “And we pray that you will so bless this bread and wine with your Spirit that it may become for us the new presence of that same Lord, still your Son”. From this it is clear that for Steele the “celebration” of the “presence of God” is the Eucharist - “God alive, God in his passion, God transfigured and transfiguring from that passion”,⁴²⁰ and “the nerve-centre of the universe, the thing around which those long-dead stars revolve, the authentication of every fumbling attempt to receive love or give love or make love. ... It says to us, as the tiny fragment of bread dissolves on our tongues, ‘Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est’”.⁴²¹

⁴¹⁹ “Liturgy for a Strange God”, AJAF vii, 3.

⁴²⁰ “Eucharist: The Word of God as Word of Man”, n.d., AJAF ii, 1.

⁴²¹ “Commonplace”, 2.

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- “Faith in the Living Christ”, for the Conference, *The Meaning of Faith*, Anglesea, 1965, AJAF iii.
- “The University Catholic Community”, 1965, AJAF iii.
- “A Word of Eloquence”, 1966, [archival note, “Newman Society”], AJAF iii.
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“The Autobiographical Animal”, IV Year Medicine Students’ Dinner, 26 November, 1982, AJAF ii.

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“Flights of the Mind: Johnson and Dante”, The 1996 Fleeman Memorial Lecture: Johnson Society of Australia.

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“In the Mystery: Framing Medicine”, MS 1997, AJAF viii.

“Melting and Modelling: An Air of Truth Apparent”, Georgetown, 1997, AJAF viii.

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Retreat Notes:

“Going Steerage in the Ark: Notes for a priest’s retreat”, 1973, AJAF vii.

“The Hopeful Exile: A retreat for an intellectual”, 1974, AJAF viii.

“The Poem of the Mind: (Variations on a Spanish theme)”, 1974, AJAF vii.

“Singing for Supper: The Word and Its Flesh”, 1975, AJAF vii.

“Reveries and Colloquies”, 1976, AJAF viii.

“Before the Silences”, 1980, AJAF vii.

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Reflections:

This category includes a variety of writings such as theological presentations dating from Steele’s sojourn at Jesuit Theological College in the Seventies and some articles published in *Madonna* some of which may have been preached at an earlier date.)

“Compline”, circa 1970, AJAF viii.

“Coming in Useful: Notes on Easter”, [n.d.] AJAF viii.

“How to present Christ to modern man?” [n.d.] AJAF ii.

[untitled and n. d. “The people that sit in darkness have seen a great light...”.] AJAF viii.

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“The Names of God: II: Speaker”, *Madonna*, April, 1983, 11-12.

“The Names of God: III: Spirit”, *Madonna*, May, 1983, 11-12.

“The Names of God: IV: Space”, *Madonna*, July, 1983, 28-29.

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“The Names of God: VII: Silence”, *Madonna*, March, 1984, 24-25.

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“Parish and Possibilities: Sheepish Thoughts of a Provincial”, 1985, AJAF viii.

“The Society in Holy Week”, [n.d.] AJAF ii.

“Stills of Jesus: 1 - The Man at the River: Matt. 3: 1-17”, *Madonna*, March, 1985, 10-11.

“Stills of Jesus: 2 - Talking to a Demon: Matt. IV: 1-11”, *Madonna*, July, 1985, 24-25.

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“At the Heart of Life”, 1987, AJAF iv.

“Peggy Lee and the Examen of Conscience”, 1988, AJAF vii.

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“Roads and lodgings”, *Madonna*, July, 1994, 5-6.

“Blinding Lights”, *Madonna*, August, 1995, 11-12.

(*Madonna* publishes some of the 1996 and 1997 homilies as reflective pieces. See under “Homilies” below.)

Liturgies:

“Five Songs” [“This group of Five Songs was written for a series of liturgies in St. Paul’s Cathedral, Melbourne, for the Church Unity Octave in 1972”. Chris Willcock S.J]. “Three Songs for Easter”: “Covenant 1”; “Covenant 2”; “Covenant 3”; “Song to the Son of Man”; “Song of Pentecost”. Published in *Marching On Paradise*. [q. v. AJAF vii.]

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“Liturgy of Pilgrimage and Community”, 1972, AJAF vii.

“Mass for a Chosen People”, [n.d.] AJAF vii.

“A Liturgy of Light”, [n.d.] AJAF viii.

“Liturgy for a Strange God”, [includes a homily for the liturgy. n. d.] AJAF vii.

“A Mass for Peace”, [includes a homily for the liturgy. n. d.] AJAF vii.

“Mass for a Certain Planet”, [includes a homily for the liturgy. n. d.] AJAF vii.

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Homilies:

(Homilies recorded as written or preached at Newman College or Dahlgren Chapel, refer respectively to Newman College, University of Melbourne, and Dahlgren Chapel, Georgetown University, Washington DC. Date and place details can refer either to time and place of writing or of preaching. Professor Steele sometimes dates a homily with the date and place of writing, and sometimes he records the name of the chapel or church and a future date on which it is to be preached. This bibliography records the exact wording both of the title (together with its inclusion of other details such as occasion etc.) and of the place and/or date details as recorded by Professor Steele at the end of the homily. Unless stated otherwise all homilies are classified as AJAF viii, including footnote references.)

“Earth, Air, Fire, Water and January”, [n.d.] Anglesea, AJAF vi.

“Pentecost: A Farewell to Babel”, [n.d.] AJAF vi.

“For John and Danielle”, [n.d.] AJAF ii.

“Eucharist: The Word of God as Word of Man”, circa 1970, AJAF ii.

“28th Sunday through the Year (19th after Pentecost)”, circa 1970.

“Homily (John 4, 5-14)”, circa 1970, AJAF vii.

“The Hard God and the Soft One”, circa 1970, AJAF iv.

“Too Stupid to be Fooled”, circa 1970.

“Campion”, Campion College, circa 1970, AJAF vii.

“Edmund Campion”, Campion College, circa 1970.

“The Living God”, circa 1970.

“Mass of the Holy Spirit for the Academic Year in Theology”, circa 1970, AJAF ii.

“Vows”, Campion College, circa 1970, AJAF ii.

“A Question of Life and Death”, circa 1970.

“25th Sunday of the Year (16th after Pentecost)”, 1971, Aquinas College, Adelaide.

“26th Sunday of the Year (17th after Pentecost)”, 1971.

“27th Sunday through the Year (18th after Pentecost)”, 1971.

“James McAuley, St John’s College, Sydney, Thursday 21st October”, n. d.; [James McAuley died in 1976.]

“Eve of Trinity Sunday: June 16, 1984. Mass for Business Managers of Sacred Heart Schools, Lake Forest, Illinois”, AJAF iv.

“Friday’s Child”, Jesuit Community Chapel, Loyola University, Good Friday, 1984.

“Thursday September 6th, 1984”, Community Chapel, Loyola, Chicago.

“28th October 1984: 30th Sunday in Ordinary Time: Oxford University Catholic Chaplaincy: The Old Palace, St Algate’s”, (15 June, 1984: Chicago), AJAF iv.

“Jesuit Mortality: Reflections for Campion Day, 1984”, [for Campion Hall, Oxford], 26 November, 1984, AJAF iv.

“Words for a Wedding”, January, 1985.

“Fr John Casey S.J., R.I.P.”, 1 February, 1985.

“For Tom and Marie Marrying”, 9 March, 1985.

“A Good Man with a Stone: Easter 1985”, 1 April, 1985.

“Funeral Mass for F.G. Steele: 6 May”, 1985.

“Ministry as Social: Our Province Today”, Fitzroy, 1985.

“The Emmaus Encounter”, Easter Wednesday, 1986, AJAF v.

“‘Smile and Spit into the Eye of Death’: on saying ‘no!’”, Campion College, 29 April, 1986, AJAF, v.

“Pentecost Eve and the Tower of Babel”, Superiors’ and Heads of Ministries’ Meeting, Anglesea, May, 1986, AJAF v.

“School Mass for Mothers and Daughter: Mandeville College, 4-4-86: Sixth Sunday of Easter: Year C”, 3 May, 1986.

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“The Mass - Precious Rite of the Christian Dreamtime”, [centenary celebrations of the Daly River Mission], *Annals Australia*, 50, March 1987, 32-33. AJAF iv.

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“Jesuit Family”, 3 September, 1987

[untitled homily for a marriage], 21 November, 87, AJAF iv.

“Between the Lake and the El: Two Ways of Keeping Faith”, [archival note: Loyola University, Chicago, 1st Sunday of Lent, 21 February, 1988] AJAF vi.

“The Consecration of the Commonplace”, 31 March, 1988, AJAF vi.

“The Sacred Heart: God’s Pledge of Commitment”, [archival date: 10 June, 1988]. AJAF vi. *Encounter*, 49, (Spring, 1988), 10-12. *Madonna*, June 1991, 8-10.

“On Choosing Life: Feast of St Ignatius, 1988. St Mary’s Cathedral Sydney. Riverview College Congregation”, AJAF vi.

“Priesthood as Prophecy”, [archival date: 29 July, 1988]. AJAF vi.

“Magnetism and the Lady: Feast of the Assumption”, 1988, [archival note: Church of the Immaculate Conception, Hawthorn, 15 August,1988]. AJAF vi.

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“Another Man’s Wound”, 6 October, 1988.

“On Not Being An Ape”, 7 September, 1989. AJAF *Supplement*.

“Just Like the Resurrection”, St Joseph’s, Hawthorn, Easter, 1989, AJAF vi. *Madonna*, April 1992, 4-5.

“The World According to God”, Newman College, 16 February, 1992.

“The Winding Way”, Good Friday, 1992.

“For Whom the Bell Sings”, Easter, 1992.

“Easter in Us”, *Madonna*, May 1992, 10-11.

“Easter and May, Bread and Fish”, Newman College, 2 May, 1992.

“On Declining the Trash Option”, 16 May, 1992.

“Crossing Over”, 21 May, 1992.

“What He Didn’t See”, Newman College, 8 June, 1992.

“Natural Flights”, *Madonna*, June 1992, 7-8.

“Winter”, Newman College, 1992.

“Shifts of the Spirit”, 25 July, 1992.

“Praying In a Certain Place”, 23 July, 1992.

“Olympics”, 4 August, 1992

“The Wild Prayer of Longing”, Newman College, 15 October, 1992.

“Publicity, Privacy, Solitude”, Melbourne, 21 October, 1992.

“Against Intimidation”, 27th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 1992.

“The Sun and the Shadow”, Newman College, 14 January, 1993.

“First Sunday”, Anglesea, 26 February, 1993.

“5th Sunday”, Newman College, 17 March, 1993.

“Third Sunday”, Anglesea, 14 March, 1993.

“Palm Sunday”, Newman College, 27 March, 1993.

“Good Friday”, 1993, 2 April, 1993.

“Cry of the Spirit”, 18 July, 1993

“Dinny Homily”, 19 July, 1993.

“Asking for Wisdom”, Newman College, 24 July, 1993.

“On Taking Experience Seriously”, Newman College, 1 August, 1993.

“Valete Newman 1993”, Newman College, 6 October, 1993.

“Adventures in the Good Word”, Newman College, 17 October, 1993.

“Early Birds”, Anglesea, November 1, 1993.

“Koalas”, Anglesea, 1 November, 1993.

“Major Key”, Melbourne, 11 November, 1993.

“Coming”, Newman College, 25 November, 1993.

“5th Sunday, Year B”, [Georgetown University, 1994.]

“Fourth Sunday of Lent (A): Blindness and Vision”, [Georgetown,1994.]

“Easter Vine”, [Georgetown, 1994.]

“Wield of a Life, Wield of a World: Second Sunday of Easter, 1994”, [Georgetown, 1994.]

“Choosing to Love”, Dahlgren Chapel, 1994.

“Window and Mirror”, Newman College, 21 February, 1994.

“Good Enough to be True”, Dahlgren Chapel, 23 March, 1994.

“Ascension Day in Perth, 1994", Georgetown University, 18 April, 1994. [Homilist’s note: “To be preached at St Mary’s Cathedral, Perth: celebration of 100 years of Christian Brothers in W.A.”]

“Ways of Living: Trinity Sunday”, 1994, Georgetown, 2 May [1994]: for Newman College.

“Foods”, Dahlgren Chapel, 31 July, 1994.

“Looking Behind the Mask”, Dahlgren Chapel, 4 September, 1994.

“On Forgiveness”, Dahlgren Chapel, 24 September, 1994.

“Red Lights, Green Lights. Prophets, and Universities”, Dahlgren Chapel, 26th Sunday of the Year, 1994

“Realms”, Feast of Christ the King, St Patrick’s, Washington DC, 20 November, 1994.

“Feast of the Immaculate Conception: 1994”, Georgetown University, for 8th December [1994].

“Good Timing”, Dahlgren Chapel, 2nd Sunday of Advent, 1994.

“The Wars of Love”, Newman College, 18 February, 1995. *Madonna*, March, 1997, 37-38.

“Palmer’s”, Newman College, 27 March, 1995. *Madonna*, March, 1996, 37-38.

“The Expectation of Heaven”, Anglesea, 2 April, 1995.

“Power/Wisdom/Love”, Newman College, June, 1995. *Madonna*, June-July, 1996, 45-46.

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“God’s Comfort”, Newman College, Anzac Day, 1996.

“Blessed Trinity”, Newman College, 1 May 1996 for Trinity Sunday 1996.

“Corpus Christi 1996”, Newman College, 2 May 1996.

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“She’ll be Right”, Newman College, 28 July, 1996.

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“Beyond Normality”, Newman College, 7th Sunday, Ordinary Time, 1996.

“The Lord Within & Without”, Newman College, August, 1996 for 18th Sunday in Ordinary Time.

“Earthquakes, Etc.”, Newman College, 11 August, for 19th Sunday of Ordinary Time, 1996

“Providence and Pressure”, Newman College, August, 1996 for 20th Sunday of Ordinary Time.

“So It Goes”, Newman College, for 24th Sunday of Ordinary Time 1996.

“Making a Change”, for 25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 1996.

“Gambles”, Newman College, 21 August, 1996.

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“Sam & Georgina”, September, 1996.

“On Coming To the Party”, for 28th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 1996.

“A Self to Go On With”, for 29th Sunday in Ordinary Time, 1996.

“Not the Prime Minister”, Newman College, 31st Sunday in Ordinary Time, 1996.

“Keeping Up More Than Appearances”, Newman College, for 33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time, 1996.

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“Magnolias”, Georgetown, for Easter, 1997.

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“A Warrant for the Day”, Georgetown, 13 April, 1997. [Homilist’s note: “For use anytime at Newman”.]

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