
Between *polis* and *poiēsis*: on the 'Cytherean' ambiguities in the poetry of James G. March

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This paper provides an intellectual–historical reading of James G. March's poetic work, a facet of his production that may prove interesting to students of his contributions to the social sciences. To provide the appropriate historical understanding of that work, the paper draws an extended comparison between Dante as poet of a period in which civic life was paramount and March as representative of a more narrowly material civilization. The paper concludes that in its valuable readings of the contemporary milieu of Stanford and Palo Alto—exemplars of the modern American 'university city' or 'Ideopolis'—March's poetry offers insights into modes of life, both personal and social, that might be compared and contrasted with the poet's classic function in the traditional *polis* or city-republic.

Yo sé quien soy.

I know who I am.

For a knight errant to make himself crazy for a reason
merits neither credit nor thanks.

The point is to act foolishly without justification.

(Miguel de Cervantes, *Don Quixote*¹)

The tears of spring
Have dried their salts
Around our roots;

And we are what we are.

(James G. March, 'A Day in September'²)

The works of an author are seldom the focal point for academic theorizing wherever the possibilities of science, either in the offing or already prospering, beckon. Particularly in cases in which the author is, as in this case, known for his signal contributions to a wide variety of fields in the social sciences—from organizational and management theory to

¹Cited in March (1999: 377, 378).

²March (1980: 8).

economics, sociology and political theory—the inclusion of a separate body of works which comprise his poetry appears at best a nod of courtesy to his putative hobbies or perhaps simply to the cult of completeness. In intellectual history, however (the field in which this paper primarily operates), a dramatic shift occurs whenever an *oeuvre* carries the burden—some might add: the grace—of *poiēsis*. For the intellectual historian all standards of evaluation and judgment must recognize and bend to the new fulcrum that results.

James G. March, if one is to take his poetic thoughts seriously, would have nothing to do with intellectual historians. Apparently, as he would have it in a pungently short poem called, appropriately, ‘Intellectual History’, such historians turn ‘images/From the fun house/Of hypothetical reflections/Into a portrait/Of notions,/And a headache’ (March, 1977: 50). The headache, however, if such it is, is not the intellectual historian’s invention; it is the legacy of thinking that seeks to be genuinely universal, that is, liminal, transgressive, indeed—to cite March himself—to think ‘romantically’. Academic specialists retain the good sense of avoiding at least this kind of headache; but James G. March, it must be made clear, has not. For a man who even in his formal contributions flirts with ‘wild ideas’ or ‘the catechism of heresy’ (March, 1999: 225) and who is willing to invoke that demented Man of La Mancha on behalf of what he admits others might call the ‘romantic madness’ of extolling the university as ‘a temple’, higher education as a ‘vision’, students as ‘acolytes’, teaching as a ‘sacrament’ and research as a ‘testament’ (March, 1999: 378), a kind of Rubicon has indeed been crossed.

Crossed however—to what? In a setting like the medieval city-republic of Lucca in which this paper was originally presented,³ one is reminded that prior to the emergence of the modern nation-state with its ever-expanding administrative arms in conjunction with that mode of material society conventionally known as capitalism, the focal point for both *poiēsis* and politics had been commonly regarded to be the *polis*, the *res publica*, the *città*. James March, the political and democratic theorist, is all too aware of this fact. ‘Democratic governance’, he would be the first to remind his reader, ‘first arose in a small city-state’, by which he means the *polis* of Athens (March and Olsen, 1995: 4). Of course March would also be the first to add that much in the chief concerns of this tradition has been superseded by the revolutionary changes of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, to the degree that classical assumptions of democratic governance no longer generally hold; and where one finds today a continued concern with ‘citizenship or membership in the *polis*’ as ‘the most important and inclusive identity’—as in the case of communitarian theory—it reflects a confusion between a sense of ‘community’—whatever that might mean in today’s heterogeneous societies—and ‘civic identity and a framework of rule-based action’ which March himself espouses as the way out for genuinely democratic thinking in what Max Weber

³This famed *Comune di Lucca*, after a difficult period of Guinigi despotism, succeeded in retaining its liberty essentially all the way to 1799 (Meek, 1978: 333–343; Bratchel, 1995: 1). Indeed Lucca survived for two years after the fall of the far more powerful Republic of Venice—the last major republican state of Renaissance Italy—to Napoleon and French Revolutionary arms.

once famously called a disenchanting epoch.⁴ Nonetheless, March speaks as a classic political theorist when he confesses his formal thought to be 'romantic in its imagination of governance as having something to contribute to the commonweal and shared aspirations for the good life' (March and Olsen, 1995: 6). And indeed what could be more romantic than a theorist who claims to be committed to 'sustaining an institution of learning as an object of beauty and an affirmation of humanity' (March, 1999: 379)?

At the very least, then, James March must be taken seriously as both an original thinker into complexes once identified with the *polis* and *res publica* and as a sufficiently sophisticated exploiter of words to merit the designation of poet. The following exposition attempts to hold to that connection between *polis* and *poiēsis* in order to find ways to both critique and locate James G. March as political theorist and poet in the history of thought and of culture.

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In both the cases of *polis* and *poiēsis* the standards are meant, by March himself, to match the highest ethical and cultural incentives. To act with reference less to a concern for consequences and more in terms of one's 'self-conceptions and proper behavior'—what March terms a 'logic of appropriateness' rather than a 'logic of consequences'—is to establish the priorities of what he calls [no doubt seeking to amplify Aristotle's familiarly traditional standard of 'the good life' ($\epsilon\upsilon\delta\acute{\alpha}\mu\omicron\nu\omicron$): 'a proper life'.⁵ This is a standard that floats through some of the more compelling credos expressed in his poetic *oeuvre*, and perhaps the briefest way to grasp that *oeuvre* is to approach it as a set of ciphers on what 'a proper life' might entail for his own historical epoch, at a particular moment, in a particular political and pedagogical environment, for a particular person.⁶ This does not mean that March exploits what for academic discursivity is the looser medium of poetry to say what he otherwise might not dare pose within the strictures of scientific language, social or otherwise. Far from it; March's 'A Writer's Creed' in his latest work provides as uncompromising an acknowledgment of the primacy of the Word as any unrepentant poet might proclaim:

My words are not enhanced
By my having said them,
Nor diminished by my denial.
Truth lies in the words,

⁴March and Olsen (1995: 37, 38). Weber (2002: 60), with reference to his famous phrase 'Entzauberung der Welt', often translated as 'disenchantment of the world', although Stephen Kalberg in his new translation suggests 'elimination of magic from the world'.

⁵For a contemporary reading of the implications of Aristotle's standard, see Chytry (1989: 484–498) and March (1999: 377, 378).

⁶The term as such only appears very occasionally in the poetry itself. Examples are 'Editor' (March, 1980: 33) and 'The Other Pleasures of a Man' (March, 1990: 111).

Not in any authority
 Claimed by their author.⁷

And far from understating the poetic attunements of life itself, March does not hesitate to highlight them as colorfully as one might expect from those who have accepted poetry as a calling:

Life is not choice,
 But poetry,
 Filled with images
 Slipping through history,
 Flowers, brave women,
 And booze enough
 For a man's friends.⁸

The poetic works of James G. March consist of six moderately sized collections of poetry.⁹ Their titles—*Academic Notes* (1974), *Aged Wisconsin* (1977), *Pleasures of the Process* (1980), *Slow Learner* (1985), *Minor Memos* (1990) and *Late Harvest* (2000)—bear all the subdued charm of a Wisconsin native son of English origin (but also of marked Scandinavian—indeed Norwegian—sympathies) who is not loath to tout the legacy of reliability, modesty, occasional suspicion of what the author labels ‘smartness’ or ‘cleverness,’ and admiration for those midwestern women—from Iowa and about—with their milky attributes.¹⁰ The reader is often struck by a remarkable consistency of mood and ethos over a body of work extending from 1974 to 2000; every few years, it seems, James G. March must put down enough poetic thoughts to justify a publication of generally 100–120 pages made up of poems of mostly less than a page.¹¹ Even if some of these works originate from March’s youth, the fact of their being collected and organized in these versions after 1970 is a reminder that March’s poetic career coincides with his permanent move to Stanford, California, in 1970. If—a consequence to be exploited later in this paper—the *città* of Tuscany’s greatest poet Dante Alighieri was Florence, March’s cultural environment is the Stanford and Palo Alto—along with cosmopolitan links to similar academic communities all the way to Lucca, Italy—of late twentieth-century fame, prosperity and technological importance.

Moreover, all these works share a single dedicatory object bearing the name of ‘Jayne’ (the name of March’s wife), all but the last were published by the same London

⁷March (2000: 12).

⁸‘Irish Images’ (March, 1980: 49).

⁹In this survey I put aside occasional pieces of poetry such as his moving dedicatory poem to his friend and colleague Herbert A. Simon. I thank Mie Augier for providing a copy of that work.

¹⁰‘Surprises’ (March, 1985: 98).

¹¹Not surprisingly, the largest time gap between 1990 and 2000 also led to *Late Harvest* as his largest collection of some 146 pages.

Poets' and Painters' Press,¹² and—perhaps most to the point—all share the same organizational structure of following the alphabetical order of poem titles.

This last facet may provide a more precise first clue toward the spirit of March's intentions. In two of his poems composed in Norwegian (another fascinating idiosyncrasy of his *oeuvre*), March acknowledges the authority of the Persian poet Omar Khayyam (1048–1126).¹³ Khayyam, it is well known at least from the Fitzgerald Victorian reading of his work, composed in a Persianate genre labeled the *Rubbaiyat* (translated into English as 'quatrains'), basically a poem of four lines (*rubaiyya*) tied together by rhyming patterns that need not detain this analysis (March composes for the most part in free verse), and which are organized in single collections of such *rubaiyya*—whether Khayyam's or those of anyone else composing in this genre—under the principle of alphabetically following the first letter of the individual *rubaiyya*, thus undermining any expectation that such collections contain a larger direction, narrative or theme (following Yarshatar, 1988). In the case of Khayyam's more authentic *rubaiyya* in Farsi,¹⁴ the result reflects the ruminations of a sensibility familiar with the most advanced thought of his time while utilizing the pinpoint urgency of the four lines—framed more or less in syllogistic tempo—to shoot home a lesson, or 'wisdom'. One is reminded of March when Khayyam's own original contributions are recalled to the science of his time in mathematics and astronomy, his active participation in the more important political circles of medieval Iran, and his writing of poetry not as a professional poet but as a man unwilling to leave it to others to ponder the nature and meaning of labyrinthine existence (for details, see Dashti, 1971).

Yet what March adds to this mix—absent in the works of the solitary and secretive Khayyam—is the rich content of a familial, social, and academic life devoted to one wife, children, grandchildren, peers, friends, weddings, mountains, spring flowers—and inevitably the 'klikety-klick' of the eternal feminine.¹⁵ Such themes form the core of each collection, and what minimizes possible tedium for the reader is the gradual evolution of thoughts reflecting an advancing age that promises a 'wisdom' resting more on renunciation of that age—and experience—than in claiming compensation through it. Instead, the cohesive glue that does make this body of work a subtle and sometimes triste evocation of 'wisdom' lies in the almost imperceptible reaffirmations of a man from Wisconsin whose 'proper life' cannot ultimately be exposed for all to see and read, since that same 'proper life' is more a matter of the 'right of an unimportant man'¹⁶—as March graciously puts it—than the well-known object of awards, respect

¹²*Late Harvest* (2000) was published by the Palo Alto Bonde Press.

¹³Appropriately titled 'Persisk Ekteskap' and 'Persisk Idyll' (March, 1980: 71, 72).

¹⁴The most reliable English collection to this author's knowledge is found in Dashti (1971: 187–205), and consists of only 75 authentic quatrains and 26 probably authentic quatrains.

¹⁵'Noise Pollution' (March, 1974: 69).

¹⁶'Plea from a Cripple' (March, 1980: 76).

and, in many cases, profound admiration. Perhaps it is not all that accidental that March's last poem is about 'Wisconsin Rules':

Where I come from,
A man doesn't say what he wants,
Every moment of the day,
And sometimes less at night,
Even in a whisper. We walk
A comfortable path of convention,
Keeping our ambitions hidden,
Mostly, not especially because
We want to fool anyone, but because
Lives are better when dressed
In the fabrics of silence.¹⁷

There is something of Fitzgerald here—the 'other' Fitzgerald who in one work at least, *The Great Gatsby*, captured that secretive orgiastic force emanating from the cornfields of the midwest cacooned in silence and occasionally painful regret. Here, in March's case, is the midwesterner who speaks early like a blushing Walt Whitman: 'I am the white son/Of conventional parents, . . . /If I were a play/I would have closed/In New Haven'.¹⁸ This is someone who polished his shoes on 'my girlfriend's mother's sofa',¹⁹ who confesses he is 'not native/In this place' called 'academe' where he remains 'A grateful immigrant/Far from home',²⁰ someone who is 'not/A son of the city' but claims prior natality in a Wisconsin whose 'thoughts/Are weighed/By the strength/Of their silence';²¹ indeed, someone willing to call himself a 'Yokel',²² whose 'family's fathers knew/Not to expect affection . . . /They were willing to wait/Among rules of civility/Without inventing promises/Or making plans'.²³

Very occasionally these same roots provoke a patriotism and attitude toward social change—particularly regarding gender relations—that betray the conservatism of the great American heartland: 'Yes, I am, indeed, American;/And you must shoot me so'.²⁴ More commonly they seem to recall the aging author of, if not timeless, at least long-term virtues of kith and kin:

¹⁷March (2000: 146).

¹⁸'Critic's View' (March, 1974: 31).

¹⁹'Shoe Polish' (March, 1974: 89).

²⁰'Immigrant' (March, 1977: 48).

²¹'Oral Facility' (March, 1977: 74).

²²'Yokel' (March, 1977: 134).

²³'My Family's Fathers' (March, 1990: 75).

²⁴'Fair Judgments' (March, 1985: 30). Other examples include March (1974: 71; 1985: 42, 69–70, 89). Also see March (1990: 27) for March's antipathy toward talk therapies and confessionals.

Dullness has its rewards.
 Who would bother to write
 The story of a quiet man
 Who came home most nights,
 And on time, built rocking horses
 That tipped, and lived happy
 Loving children and a wife?²⁵

At best these solid virtues produce a direct and admirable credo: 'I believe/In sympathy, dignity,/And the grace/Of simple decency'.²⁶

Yet the author of these passages is also a man who has tasted the fruits and 'costs' of, as he admits, the 'good life': 'beauty, power, and wealth'.²⁷ After all, how could one not be 'corrupted/by an easy life and a clever wife'? So on to the realms 'among the lotus blooms' where one meets 'some nice folks', and learns to be seduced by cuisine. Forget that Wisconsin 'world/in which soup was served hot,/but beer was not,/peas and beans/and potatoes were fine,/rice was for mice,/and only the winos drank wine'. Welcome the 'genuine treat:/quails with snails,/and pigeon breasts/wrapped in vest of tarragon;/and parmesan on ptarmigan,/with lemon on the side'. We have left our midwestern kin far behind, even though 'I know damn well my father would say/I should forget the poulet au jardiniere/and return to the comforts of turnips and beer'.²⁸

It is easy to make light of such slidings by acknowledging a permanent social shift to modes and comforts of a life befitting success and achievement. March proves himself a poet by neither succumbing to the facile self-justifications of the parvenu nor simply parroting puritan concerns over loss of innocence. 'Every cardiologist', he recognizes, knows that propriety could do with 'a little bit of sin/ . . . for keeping the arteries open', even if admittedly it 'can lead/To an awful lot of trouble'.²⁹ But he also recognizes that rituals of public confession over moral lapses serve the upper class far more than 'the poor, the honest, and/The insistently intelligent'. The former will go to church and maintain their propriety, 'Reciting a catechism of rectitude/Without too serious an illusion/That their recitations are close/To reality'. The latter, alas, 'haven't practiced/The skills of mock contrition/And the art of manufacturing/Tears of repentance that/Sustain a moral code'.³⁰ Yet perhaps indulgence is itself an index of a culture and civilization that may be peaking: 'Signs that the American empire nears its ends,/Joining Spain and Rome in sure decline' by bearing the hallmark symptoms of

²⁵'Toy Builder' (March, 1985: 107).

²⁶'Resistance Movement' (March, 1974: 81).

²⁷'The Cost of a Good Life' (March, 1980: 102).

²⁸'Refinements of Taste' (March, 1985: 77–79). See also 'Asian Invitation' (11) and 'Spatulas' (94), in which the utensils of cuisine become the objects of meditation.

²⁹'Public Office' (March, 2000: 93).

³⁰'Rituals of Confession' (March, 2000: 105–106).

‘unjustified arrogance,/A distinctive cuisine, neuroses of indulgence,/And a copious capacity for denying/The inconvenient demands of hard work’, but also perhaps containing the divine sign that it may be time for others to ‘have a turn’.³¹ Such grand vistas are not meant, however, to absolve James March, beneficiary of such power, for there is also always an underlying ‘hypocrisy’ in pontificating to others (including especially one’s children):

However content I am
With my life today,
It is, in the end,
Indefensible.³²

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If such two-sidedness speaks well for March’s sensitivity to the stratifications of his time, it is also deeply ingrained in his manner of thinking both formally and poetically. March’s poems are replete with phrases redolent of ambiguities and ambivalences: the ‘ambiguity of affection’ or the ‘ambiguities of experience’ are not simply hesitations within earlier texts but are mirrored in the later ‘ambiguities of judgment’, ‘ambivalence of indecision’, ‘ambiguities of truth’, and even the ‘thickets of maybe’.³³ Perhaps there is little surprise in this for students of his formal thought. March, it is commonly recognized, made ambiguity topical for decision theory, and the importance of ambivalences is central to his ambitious work in redirecting contemporary democratic political theory (March and Olsen, 1995: 168–181; March, 1999: 17–18). What the poetic *oeuvre* brings into clearer focus is the man who dwells in, and is responsive to, that region of ambiguities, ambivalences, hesitations, not so much as a weakness but as further confirmation of a self-identity, an adaptiveness, that echoes classical models of the whole personality: ‘A wise man hides/The sounds of experience/In the white noise/Of his reticence’.³⁴ Yet James March is not classical, and perhaps in that absence lies a web of issues that may be worth highlighting.

For—to this reader at least—the author of these poems often seems ultimately discomfited by thought in general and its pretensions. Sometimes his laments are the understandable complaints about the familiar games that professors play: to win, to gain tenure, to reap the material and status benefits of being ‘smart’ and ‘clever’. Sometimes it would appear that professors, these ‘appertifs of life’, are not even men: ‘When a man is not a man/But a professor’.³⁵ Not that March himself is immune to

³¹‘Decadence’ (March, 2000: 30).

³²‘Reminders’ (March, 1980: 83).

³³‘Maps’, ‘To a Girl Friend’ (March, 1974: 64, 97); ‘Mistakes of Harmony’ (March, 1977: 62); ‘Greater Evil’ (March, 1990: 55); ‘Speaking Clearly’, ‘Brave Philosophies’ (March, 2000: 123, 22).

³⁴‘Sounds of Experience’ (March, 1980: 94).

³⁵‘Appertifs’ (March, 1974); ‘Sponsors’ (March, 1980: 95).

these games: 'As willing tribute to/The ministers of pretense,/I perform/Learned conversations/With consenting adults/in Private./But not among strangers/Not where/The agents of honesty/Hide'.³⁶ Yet it seems that not even wisdom helps in the end. Controlling ambition and forgetting (dubious) desires may finally produce 'real wisdom', but: 'you probably won't like it'.³⁷ And were one to prefer 'the pretenses of experience', March can only confide to us that 'life runs lousy experiments,/And that we grow older, not wiser'.³⁸

It is not that March has not enjoyed the benefits of a formidable intellect. He has gone forth in battle, has punished the weak and the corrupt in the public arenas of academic combat:

Choose carefully
And speak smart.
Because
If I can,
I will
Chop up your ideas
Stuff them into an old condom
And hang them in my trophy room.³⁹

Yet March equally admits that there is another domain in which one simply begins to do without thinking of consequences, for the true standard of judging a man is to 'Ask whether he can act/Without assurances/Of good consequences'. And quite often such an attitude is not all that different from the spontaneous foolishness of children—or, for that matter, of kittens. It means to free joy from 'justification/Within a calculus of consequences'.⁴⁰ It means to join forces with the 'realists of happiness'.⁴¹

Has March himself joined these mysterious and beguiling legions? Since William Empson's classic work for modernist literary aesthetics, ambiguity has come to mean at least 'that a word or a grammatical structure is effective in several ways at once' (Empson, 1947: 2). This claim for multiple meanings is particularly evident where March's poetry enters domains of enjoyment and happiness. This paper proposes to call

³⁶'Learned Conversation' (March, 1977: 54). Also: 'Doctor, councillor, and/Endowed professor/Of almost anything,/You give names/To the parts I play/In order to conceal/Weaknesses in their scripts' ('Indian Chief', March, 1980: 46).

³⁷'Finding Wisdom' (March, 2000: 46).

³⁸'The Pretenses of Experience' (March, 2000: 134).

³⁹'One More Time' (March, 1974: 72–73). See also 'On Being a Patsy', 'Rivals' (March, 1974: 71, 82); 'Without Reason' (March, 1977: 133); 'Warning' (March, 1980: 115–116). More gently, see 'Job Description', 'Monuments' (March, 2000: 60, 65).

⁴⁰'Beginnings', 'Essential Things', 'Proper Authorization' (March, 2000: 16, 41, 90).

⁴¹'Realists of Happiness' (March, 2000: 95).

this domain 'cytherean' (see Chytry, 2002) to honor the Cytherean goddess of love and beauty from Greek mythology for whom love, sex, Eros, passion, pathos, libido and what March often evokes as 'the gonads' (e.g. March, 1974: 74, 2000: 114) all form, if not elements of potential bliss and satisfaction, at least the throbbing promise of an imminent nakedness. Although reticent to go beyond the virtues of prudence, March will have nothing to do with 'the pale preachers of self-denial'⁴²—even if March himself measures freedom more by what one must do than what one simply wants—and is the first to declare: 'I'm not ashamed of instincts/For enjoying the syrups of life.'⁴³ Such syrups, as every successful male academic knows, are always floating through the classroom and lecture hall, threatening the pious instructor with temptations to act or at least engage in profound calculations on the ratios available for pedagogical seduction:

Students sleep
With teachers
At rates greater
Among the latter
Than the former.⁴⁴

After all, what is one to do before this barrage of brassieres, of 'a nylon flounce/Hiding breasts that bounce,/And a belly that's broken in', 'softness dancing' under skirts, those 'buttons on a blouse/Opened without reluctance'⁴⁵—and a great deal more besides that propriety and the occasion forbids quotation. James G. March, one is forewarned from the start, is no angel: 'Professors aren't heroes./But they are convenient,/Curious,/And often have softer beds/Than the nearest competition.'⁴⁶ In any event, these are not foibles that one can just abandon with age:

She is the kind of woman
Who knows who she is,
Licking her lips
With bright pink lipstick
And saucy skirt,
And enjoying the effect.
Old advisors aren't blind,

⁴²'Complications,' 'Measures of Freedom' (March, 1990: 29, 69).

⁴³'Marshmallows' (March, 1990: 67).

⁴⁴'Student/Faculty Ratio' (March, 1977: 108). See also e.g. March (1974: 51, 70; 1977: 18, 107; 1985: 47).

⁴⁵'Student' (March, 1977: 107); 'Sober Lady,' 'Wardens' (March, 1980: 92, 114); 'Library Catalogue' (March, 1990: 65).

⁴⁶'Incest' (March, 1974: 51).

Or immune to perfume,
Just because they're harmless.⁴⁷

Were these the reveries of a lonely man, they might well strike one as poignantly wistful. The author of these works is, however, a genuine lover, and the concrete human object of his love ('Jayne') is inevitably capable of helping him withstand all these outside allurements—the, if you will, 'laws of lechery'⁴⁸—by offering a presence and rewards that saturate the everyday of March's academic life. Whether during those long moments in the airport or on the airplane, in foreign hotel rooms, or within the incitations of the conjugal bedroom, this one and only Beloved focuses the poet's love, devotion, friendship and faith with a completeness that obliterates her potential rivals. So much so that March himself will occasionally drop literary intentions to simply declare with unwonted unambiguity:

If I told you
Everything I feel,
I would say less
Than is true.
I need you
And I love you;
And these are facts
Uncorrupted by feelings.⁴⁹

March may be proud of his manliness, as not a few poems attest: 'I am comfortable as a man,'⁵⁰ but he is absolute in his devotion:

Ask me if I
I am faithful
And I will answer
Yes.
And you will know
I am.⁵¹

Nor does this Cytherean *profession de foi* abate with time:

⁴⁷'Reprise' (March, 2000: 101).

⁴⁸'Glass Houses' (March, 1977: 35).

⁴⁹'Authenticity' (March, 1980: 16).

⁵⁰'Testimony' (March, 1974: 94). Compare the lament: 'Must I really stop being a man/To be a professor?/Whatinhell is bad/About whisky and women?' 'The Research Ethic' (March, 1974: 95).

⁵¹'Obiter Dictum' (March, 1977: 69).

I love you.
And all the rest
Is ornament.⁵²

And finally:

I am dependent on you
Without regret or condition
And love you every way
That a man can love.⁵³

Even if sometimes the dynamics of consummation run up against new complications:

I never doubted
That a man's gonads
Could be his undoing,
But most of my life
I assumed the risks
Were connected to
The exuberances of sex,
Not the plumbing
Of the prostate.⁵⁴

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The body of James G. March's poetic writings forms indeed a 'work', an *'oeuvre'*, in the proper sense of a distinct identity emerging throughout with its developments, its emotions, its pretensions, its contexts, its wisdom, even its failures. Yet while the serious student of his more discursive intellectual contributions may be satisfied with a peek into the emotions and reflections of a man who has played such a major role for the social sciences, the intellectual historian seeks more. Once the poetry is not read as an addendum or 'surplus' to the 'serious' writings of an author but is accepted as part of the whole that comprises that same author's being, questions arise—questions not so much of critique as of placement. For in an important sense the poetic works of James G. March offer a rare and unique treasure for the student of late twentieth-century culture and civilization. They are workings in the 'soul' of that same culture and civilization, one that has been congratulated for its many virtues but certainly not for having, or caring to have, a 'soul' in the classic European sense.

The 'Cytherean ambiguities' of James G. March highlight this treasure because they effectively call into question the satisfactions of that same culture. To be sure, the ambiguities found in these works are only to be expected from awareness that has

⁵²'All the Rest' (March, 1985: 8). See also 'Maslow's Maxim' (March, 1990: 68).

⁵³'Audit Exception' (March, 2000: 8). See also 67, 83, 115.

⁵⁴'Sexual Surprises' (March, 2000: 114).

grown knowledgeable and in the end 'wise' even in its putative 'unwisdom'. The problem does not lie in ambiguities as such that touch on the inconclusiveness of a satisfaction and happiness inevitably leaping the confines of an academic and intellectual life to the foolishness that brings the rare moment of bliss. The problem lies rather in the yawning gap between consideration of those satisfactions and the nature and purposes of the intellectual life and works that gird such a yearning.

In the political thought and life that preceded the modern to which March has made his major contributions, the focus of both private and public life was the *polis*, the *città*. To take up again the case of Lucca, it was one of the city-republics of which there were apparently some 200 or 300 before the consolidative processes of the Italian Quattrocento (following Waley, 1969: 11). No doubt the most famous of them, and the most influential for the tradition of thinking to which March belongs, was the Florence of the poet Dante Alighieri. It is therefore worth taking a look at what it means to be the poet of such a *polis* in order to draw out important contrasts between a genuinely 'political' age and March's own. Only then may one hope to place March's *oeuvre* historically.

Whatever may be the readings of Dante and his works as the summation of the medieval synthesis of thought and faith, it is clear that for the Florentine civic humanists inaugurating the Quattrocento Renaissance—among others, Coluccio Salutati, Poggio Bracciolini, and particularly Leonardo Bruni⁵⁵—Dante was the most civic of poets, committed to the life and prosperity of his beloved Florence as the ultimate *città*.⁵⁶ Contemporary Dante scholars are no less clear about the degree of this devotion: 'Dante associated himself with his native city to a degree almost uncomprehended in modern times. Florence was not merely his birthplace; it was the very context of his being.'⁵⁷ Lest the usual objections be raised that Dante's Florence is far removed from secular and indeed management priorities, it is precisely in that same Florence that the key transition was made from an ethos of landed nobility to that of the merchant and commerce, including some of the vital innovations in modern business practices, from Mediccean banking, credit, insurance, and international networks to the first schools of business and management in which the alchemist's gold of double accounting was taught and exploited.⁵⁸ Even if these are to be read as merely the beginnings of a process

⁵⁵This reading is particularly evident in Bruni's important *Vita di Dante*. See Baron (1966: 532–534).

⁵⁶'Dante came to believe that the city, the *città*, was the place where men and women could properly live and thrive—if the city were organized, ruled, and shaped in the Florentine manner of the 1280s. *Città*, in its richest meaning, was a term of utmost value for Dante.' Even Paradise was presented as a kind of *città*. Lewis (2001: 10).

⁵⁷Lewis (2001: 2). Also: Dante 'was first and last a Florentine' (3).

⁵⁸The importance of this transition to commercial ethical values is argued in Auerbach (1961: 64) and Lewis (2001: 6–10). By the period of the civic humanists, the first effective arguments on behalf of the ethical value of commercial success are developed. In particular, it is worth looking at the arguments

the full bounteousness of which are celebrated in contemporary material civilization, it is worth asking which is ultimately the more impressive: the foundation of a process or its further sophistication.

These factors help provide an appreciation of the practical, political and commercial mind of Dante himself as the greatest of Tuscan, and indeed Italian, poets. Dante was trained in practical political activity, served on city-planning commissions, and worked within a highly commercial society.⁵⁹ None of this would be renounced by the exile who wept at his enforced separation from his native *città*. Yet Dante is first and foremost a poet because of the crucial event in his life, indeed because precisely as poet of the *dolce stil nuovo* he managed for the first time in European sensibility to capture adequately in language both sensuous appearance and event. The bliss of receiving the greeting of the Beloved in the bodily form of Beatrice Portinari, on May 1 in 1283, after a prior illumination, also on May 1, in 1274 when he and his Beloved were a mere, mystical nine is of course a lasting fixture in European intellectual history. To capture Appearance and Event through that greeting was gift enough for a lifetime of creation, culminating eventually in Dante's masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*, over which the heavenly figure of Beatrice presides. What is striking here is that already in his youth Dante expressed the intuition that the 'event' of the Beloved was indispensable for the prosperity and sacredness of the *città* in the hearts of all citizens,⁶⁰ for he discovered his vocation as a poet when he first uttered the realization: 'Since there is so much bliss in those words that praise my lady, why have I ever spoken anything else?'⁶¹

Certainly one need not propose that James March should meet such Dantean standards—or for that matter follow such Dantean excesses. What remains important is the vast difference in temper between the poet of the *polis* and the poet of a 'disenchanted' epoch. Through articulating that difference it may prove possible to give March's poetic *oeuvre* a historical importance that might be otherwise overlooked.

If *poiēsis* and *polis* can never be entirely kept apart from one another, and if James March lacks his Florence, he still creates out of an environment which provides perhaps the only major equivalent for the life of the *polis* in contemporary material civilization. The identity of that environment has already been brought up as the milieu of Stanford and Palo Alto in which March's poetic works has been mainly put together as a body. The details of that comparison are worth noting before this paper concludes with a reading of such a specific milieu for the significance of March's life and works.

One of the unfortunate byproducts of the 'ivory tower' mythology applied to the

raised by Florentine's great chancellor Leonardo Bruni (1987: 300–317). Werner Sombart notes that by 1303 simple bookkeeping had been perfected in Florence (Sombart, 1967: 126–127).

⁵⁹Auerbach (1961: 66). See also Goudet (1981) for Dante's politics.

⁶⁰As Dante equally notes, 'After she [Beatrice] had departed from this world, all of the previously mentioned city [Florence] was left a widow, stripped of all dignity' (Dante, 1962: 61).

⁶¹Translation in Dante (1962) with slight alteration.

American university is that it has discouraged recognition of the latter's role in the creation of the kind of 'temples of beauty and humanity' that March himself espouses. Fortunately, more recent historical studies serve to underscore a unique American contribution to the history of the university in the 'concept of colleges and universities as communities in themselves—in effect, as cities in microcosm' captured in the social and pedagogical phenomenon of the *campus*,⁶² a word that is traceable to the distinctive spirit of *campanilismo* once dominating the Italian city-republic (Waley, 1969: 8). In Paul Venable Turner's comprehensive account of the Campus, the richness of this tradition as an ongoing, educational, social, even political and utopian project is handsomely conveyed, helping to explain why even that influential historian of the City, Lewis Mumford, might detect analogies between the historical *polis* and the 'university city', and also why the former president of the University of California, Clark Kerr, in coining the concept of 'multiversity' should associate that phenomenon with the university becoming a 'city' or 'Ideopolis'.⁶³

Within this process there is little question that Stanford and the development of its campus have exercised a powerful role (see Turner, 1984: 169–174; Gaines, 1991: 122–126). What is all the more striking is the manner in which that development has so transformed the city of Palo Alto in which it is imbedded that, at least prior to the recent bursting of the technological bubble of Silicon Valley, Stanford rooters saw fit to call it the 'Florence' of the hi-tech age. Certainly the economic, financial and technological power of Stanford and Palo Alto is undoubted: as venture capitalist John Doerr has pointed out, it may well be 'the greatest legal accumulation of wealth in the history of the world'.⁶⁴ Small wonder then that Stanford is often regarded as 'a self-contained republic unto itself', the 'Fortune 500 University', with Palo Alto serving as 'a new form of civilization' meriting the description of 'virtual city', or indeed 'the invisible city'.

James G. March, it is here suggested, is the poet of this counter-Florence, this 'invisible city' to the truly 'visible city' of the original Florence: March, a man who is central to the more enlightened niche of its university arms, but whose poetic *oeuvre* offers entry into some of the perturbations, satisfactions, contradictions, and whatever passes for wisdom in its virtual age. It is of course impossible to predict how long the upward curve of this particular counter-Florence will last. So long as it keeps recovering with new technological surprises, it is difficult especially for its partisans to recognize that Stanford and Palo Alto also belong to history, which implies the latter's sensuous

⁶²Turner (1984: 3), who claims the word was first used for 'grounds' at Princeton University (then the College of New Jersey) in 1774 to replace the Harvard *yard* or *grounds* (4, 47).

⁶³Mumford himself drew on the example of the University of California, Berkeley (Mumford, 1961; Kerr, 1963).

⁶⁴For all the following facts and quotes on Stanford and Palo Alto I am indebted to the incisive study by Kätz (1998). Kätz also pertinently notes that if one is to grant Stanford and Palo Alto the status of being a genuine world city, where is its Parthenon, its Pitti Palace, its Louvre, its British Museum? Of course, as he adds, there is always the Barbie Hall of Fame.

reality as well as impermanences. Intellectual historians who work with evanescence accept the duty of remembering what is memorable. In the poetic *oeuvre* of James G. March, itself to be located within the totality of his work, they may well find an invaluable resource for understanding a moment of culture and civilization that is singular in these respects.

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In any case, James G. March the poet would probably care little for the pedantries of this reading of his poetic *oeuvre*. He has smelled out such types and asks only to be protected 'from/The absence of recollection', to pour his 'secrets out/In the sun to dry/And leave me empty glasses/Of memory'.⁶⁵ Intellectual historians of course are not alone in being so heartily dismissed by March; so is everyone else:

This general disclaimer:
Despite the untidiness
Of a life not intended
For public consumption,
You shall not look for me
Among the artifacts I leave,
For I have taken
Everything of substance
In my bag and left nothing
Behind that matters.⁶⁶

After all, what is the ultimate 'Success' for 'A good man' but doing one's job right and leaving not a trace:

No one needs him
After he's gone.
No one who stays
Depends on him,
If he has done it right;
No one asks
Why flowers grow,
Or how a summer ends,
Or notices long
That he has gone, quietly
Into the dark.⁶⁷

⁶⁵'Empty Glasses' (March, 1977: 25).

⁶⁶'Blank Pages' (March, 1990: 20).

⁶⁷'Success' (March, 1980: 98).

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