[*MWS* 1.2 (2001) 215-230]

Notes and Queries

Max Weber on the Watchtower: On the Prophetic Use of Shakespeare's Sonnet 102 in 'Politics as a Vocation'*

David Chalcraft

> We have been taught to regard a representative of the people as a sentinel on the watchtower of liberty (Daniel Webster, in the American Senate, 7 May 1834).

When thinking of millennial themes it is pertinent to consider the 'sense of endings'. The endings that Max Weber gave to his three most famous studies, *de rigeur* for sociology and related subjects, namely *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–1905 and 1920; Weber 1930), 'Science as a Vocation' (1917, 1919) and 'Politics as a Vocation' (1919), share certain significant textual features. All three endings are characterized by literary allusion and metaphorical statement (Chalcraft 1994). This very quality of the endings renders the author's attitude to contemporary conditions and possible futures ambivalent, not to say ambiguous and slippery. And yet, this ambiguity is due less to Weber's inability to analyse situations and postulate continuing social and cultural trends than to his deeply held belief that when it comes to matters of 'judgments of value and of faith' the scientist, in this case the sociologist, is not qualified to speak; this is the meaning of 'Wertfreiheit' in Weber's sociology: freedom from value judgments. Rather the task is to present the ultimate choices that need to be faced, and encourage the individual to be resolute and consistent in the light of their value position and more or less informed understanding of the situation. Hence Weber is 'silent' as to what value-positions to take up, but is capable of indicating the seriousness of the situation—of modernity, of defeat in world war, of disenchantment and increasing bureaucracy.

* This essay is a revised version of a presentation given at the Oxford Millennium Conference, St Catherine's College, Oxford, 10-13 April 2000. I am grateful for the comments received on that occasion.

In the 'Science as a Vocation' and 'Politics as a Vocation' essays Weber closes his account with quotations that for the general audience are obscure and in need of interpretation. In this light Weber's rhetorical moves must be judged more or less unsuccessful since the quotations appear to hold more meaning for him and his circle than the public audience for whom the essays were intended. In this note I examine the two quotations: Isaiah 21.11-12 in 'Science as a Vocation' and Shakespeare's Sonnet 102 in 'Politics as a Vocation'. In my view the two quotations are mutually related and require intertextual commentary. I argue that Weber reads the Sonnet prophetically, framing its interpretation from the perspective of Old Testament imagery drawn explicitly from the prophetic corpus. Weber's insistence on ethical strength and responsibility (though the content of any ethic itself is not normatively proscribed) strikes a prophetic note. The Old Testament prophets demanded an altered disposition of self and nation and this meaning is shared in Weber's texts. Weber's particular use of Shakespeare's Sonnet 102 is evidence of the persistence of biblical imagery and models within the discourse of sociology and is but one example of the protean force of apocalyptic and millennial ideas persisting even in periods of modernist secularization in times of distress and uncertainty.

The Ending of 'Politics as a Vocation'

Towards the end of 'Politics as a Vocation' Weber speculates about the immediate future prospects for Germany and for political vocation in the modern era and also in the face of defeat after the Great War, in the following terms:

> It would be fine indeed if Shakespeare's Sonnet 102 fitted the situation:
>
> Our love was new, and then but in the spring,
> When I was wont to greet it with my lays;
> As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
> and stops her pipe in growth of riper days.
>
> But that is not how things are. What lies immediately ahead of us is not the flowering of summer but a polar night of icy darkness and hardness, no matter which group wins the outward victory now...[1] When this night slowly begins to recede, which of those people will still be alive whose early summer seems now to have flowered so profusely? And what will have become of you all inwardly? Embitterment or philisitinism, sheer, dull acceptance of the world and your job—or the third, and

1. Nicht das Blühen des Sommers liegt vor uns, sondern zunächst eine Polarnacht von eisiger Finsternis und Härte...

> not the least common possibility, a mystical flight from the world on the part of those with the gift for it or—a frequent and pernicious variant—on the part of those who force themselves into such an attitude because it is fashionable? In every such case I will draw the conclusion that they were *not* inwardly a match for their own actions, *nor* were they a match for the world as it really is, nor for their daily existence (1994b: 368-69; Weber 1994a: 87-88).

Weber turns the expectation of full summer into a prediction of doom, a prolonged period of darkness, with a subsequent suggestion that the darkness will eventually lift, leaving a remnant that has been tested by the events. He takes a love Sonnet and renders it into a prophecy of a time of testing and trial. This inversion of hope into a prediction of doom and judgment has analogies in the oracles of Old Testament prophets as discussed by Weber himself in *Ancient Judaism* (Weber 1952: 321-35), where the expected Day of Yahweh turns out not to be a day of rejoicing and release, but rather a day of calamity and a day of judgment (e.g. Amos 5: 18-20; cf. von Rad 1968). Weber termed such dramatic reversals of expectation and circumstances 'peripety' ('Peripetie'; Weber 1921: 338). Weber's use of 'Finsternis', rather than the more common and mundane 'Dunkelheit', to convey the idea of darkness taps into the figurative mode of speaking, which is shared by German translators of the Bible. There are other analogies too which suggest a close connexion between Weber's use of the Sonnet and his appreciation of themes and images from the Old Testament: for example, the notion of the remnant has biblical echoes, and is reminiscent of the contested status of the returnees from the experience of exile in the Jewish tradition.

As already noted such a rhetorical move on Weber's part would not be without precedent, in so far as the ending of 'Science as a Vocation', the sister essay to 'Politics as a Vocation' (see Schluchter 1979: 113-16; 1996: 46-7), talks of the 2,000 year 'tarrying of the Jews', and makes use of biblical imagery through the citation of the Edomite watchman's words from Isa. 21.11-12. Unlike the oracles cited in Amos, which offer hope after despair, in Isaiah the future is uncertain and the Edomite watchman merely reports that the night continues and daylight has yet to break. In effect, the watchman is more or less silent and only suggests that the present day situation will continue for some time yet, and even though hope has not died, and should not be allowed to die, he can only advise the enquirer to return later and ask once more. There is no prediction of doom or of deliverance; indeed, there is little by way of commitment at all.

Since Weber turns the promise of summer's blooming (in Shakespeare's Sonnet 102) into a prediction of a polar night of icy darkness, it can be said that Weber uses the Sonnet peripetically. The relation between Weber's peripetetic use of Shakespeare Sonnet and the ending of 'Science as a Vocation' is close, since the message of the Edomite watchman, 'it is still night', is precisely the point that Weber draws out of his exegesis and commentary on the Sonnet: namely, night is coming and eventually the day. It is Weber's interpretation of the quality of that night and its duration that is derived not from Isa. 21.11 but from other Old Testament sources. Further, the watchman's inability and hence refusal to speak and the placing of the burden on the enquirer bears similarities with Weber's notions of not speaking directly in matters of value and faith (e.g. Weber 1930: 182). Sonnet 102 also carries the meaning that there is a time to speak of love and a time to remain silent and this is important for the theme of maturity in politics in Weber's essay.

In order to understand the way in which Weber utilized the text, a few notes are in order, given the difficulty some commentators have expressed about the meaning of Isa. 21.11. We are not helped by the way in which English versions of Weber's text render the biblical passage cited by Weber:

> He calleth to me out of Seir, Watchman, what of the night? The watchman said, The morning cometh but also the night: if ye will enquire, enquire ye: return, come (Weber 1948b: 156).

For a start, in the original Hebrew the question is repeated twice as it is in most English Bible translations and German ones, including Luther's. Weber, then, curtails the biblical text in the way reported. It is important, however, to record the German Weber composed, the force of which is not captured in English versions of 'Politics as a Vocation'. This runs as follows:

> Es kommt ein Ruf aus Seir in Edom: Wächter, wie lang noch die Nacht? Der Wächter spricht: Es kommt der Morgen, aber noch ist es Nacht. Wenn ihr fragen wollt, kommt ein ander Mal wieder (Weber, 1994a: 23).[2]

Weber's German of the biblical text can be rendered not as 'the morning comes and also the night', which suggests the regularity of

2. The Luther Bible reads, 'Man ruft zu mir aus Seir: Hüter, ist die Nacht schier hin? Hüter, ist die Nacht schier hin? Der Hüter aber sprach: Wenn der Morgen schon kommt, so wird es doch Nacht sein. Wenn ihr schon fragt, so werdet ihr doch wieder kommen, und wieder fragen'.

night following day and day following night, but rather as meaning 'the morning is coming, but it is still night' (cf. Clements, 1984: 180-81; Stacey 1993: 131; Watts 1985: 275). That Weber had this meaning in mind is confirmed by his application of the text where the Jews are presented as still awaiting the promised morning after two millennia:

> The people to whom this was said has enquired and tarried for more than two millennia, and we are shaken when we realise its fate. From this we want to draw the lesson that nothing is gained by yearning and tarrying alone, and we shall act differently. We shall set to work and meet the 'demands of the day', in human relations as well as in our vocation. This, however, is plain and simple, if each finds and obeys the demon who holds the fibres of his very life (1948b: 156).

It is also clear, from comments in *Ancient Judaism*, that Weber takes the passage in Isaiah as an example of the survival of older pagan-fertility notions: 'For such myths the rule was that it must first be fully night or fully winter before the sun or the spring could return' (1952: 322). He also writes, 'A true peripety from misfortune to good fortune is to be found particularly in one of his [Isaiah's] oracles' (1952: 323). It is clear how he read the Edomite Watchman oracle and that he understood it as an example of the survival of pagan ideas. The conclusion Weber draws from considering the Edomite watchman's words is the need for commitment to vocation and fidelity to one's own ethical standpoint. This conclusion is common not only to the end of 'Politics as a Vocation' but also to the closing pages of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.

Weber's peripetetic use of Shakespeare's Sonnet 102 is but one example of the significant influence of Weber's study of ancient Judaism on his thought. Having looked initially at Weber's framing of the Sonnet within a model of biblical prophecy, it is also important to appreciate the language and theme of the Sonnet itself. Weber can use the Sonnet in this rhetorical way because the Sonnet itself lends itself to such an interpretation. What I want to demonstrate is that Weber creatively constructed the apocalyptic metaphor of the 'polar night of icy darkness and hardness', which is at the heart of his application of the Sonnet in his prediction, and that his thinking in this regard derives from his own exegesis of Shakespeare Sonnet 102 which he framed from a knowledge of biblical prophecy and imagery.

1. *The Language of the Sonnet Itself*

It is essential to have before us the complete text of Sonnet 102.

> My love is strengthened, though more weak in seeming.
> I love not the less, though less the show appear.
> That love is merchandised whose rich esteeming
> The owner's tongue doth publish everywhere.
> Our love was new and then but in the spring
> When I was wont to greet it with my lays,
> As Philomel in summer's front doth sing,
> And stops her pipe in growth of riper days—
> Not that the summer is less pleasant now
> Than when her mournful hymns did hush the night,
> But that wild music burdens every bough,
> And sweets grown common lose their dear delight.
> Therefore like her I sometime hold my tongue,
> Because I would not dull you with my song.

Weber only quotes four lines from the Sonnet directly (lines 5-8). Before the reversal of fortune Weber brings about through his application of the Sonnet, those four lines would convey that summer is indeed on its way. However, since Philomel, in Ovid's *Metamorphosis, Bk VI*, metamorphoses into the nightingale after her rape and mutilation (her tongue is severed), there is a close association of the Nightingale's song with suffering and separation throughout European literary traditions, and once one is cognisant of these relations it is clear that the figure of Philomel/Nightingale alerts the reader to the possibility of less than happy outcomes (Quinn Lang 1993). Philomel was silenced through mutilation because her accusations against the honour of her captor could not be borne by him. It is after her revenge against her sister's husband and child that she metamorphoses into a bird. Weber, however, does not comment on the notion of Philomel's playing ceasing in the Sonnet (lines 8, 13), which would strike an ominous note, but rather he emphasizes the coming and enjoyment of riper days, perhaps to make the reversal from good fortune more striking. Weber was familiar, it needs to be said, with both English and German editions of Shakespeare as his comments on Gundolf's translation of *Othello* and *Coriolanus* show (Gundolf 1922; Weber 1994c: 576-78). But it does need to be remembered that in German versions of the Sonnet 'Philomel' is not named, since the common rendering is 'Nachtigall'. We need to exercise caution therefore, but even so, the tradition of the Nightingale in German poetry could provide a similar tragic role for the creature in the

Sonnet, and associate the Sonnet with such thoughts that Weber derived.

Summer's Bloom

Weber inverts this coming summer's day into a day of darkness and biting cold. Weber constructs the notion of Summer's bloom directly from the German version of the Sonnet that he quotes. In the English versions of Weber's text (Weber 1994b: 368-69) this link between the quoted text and the opening gambit of Weber's interpretation and commentary is missed, and hence the importance of the language of the Sonnet to Weber can be overlooked. 'Sommers Blühn' translates as 'summer's front' and is the subject that Weber contrasts dramatically through the image of the polar night.

The Verb Reifen

The language of the Sonnet in German is also significant in regard to a further possible source of Weber's metaphor. The German verb for 'ripen', 'reifen', can also be used to describe the presence of hoar frost ('es hat gereift'). Hence there are a number of derived adjectival and noun forms that convey the idea both of ripening, maturity and of cold and frost, and can be found in *Oxford-Duden*. For example, 'die Reife' means 'ripeness' whereas 'die Reifglaette' warns of ice on the roads. Weber puns on 'reifen' and the ripening maturity of the 'summer's bloom' is related to the appearance of a 'white hoar frost'. The development of the idea of change from summer's bloom to an icy night is contained in the language itself.

2. *The Wider Shakespearean Context: The Other Sonnets*

Moving to the wider context it is clear that there are suggestions in the other Sonnets that the temporal process inaugurated by the Nightingale and reflected in the changing songs of the lover-poet leads to change and decay, and to winter, to darkness and coldness. For example, the temporal processes that age are likened to the season of winter. In the fifth Sonnet, to take one instance, Shakespeare says:

> For never-resting time leads summer on
> To hideous winter and confounds him there,
> Sap decked with frost and lusty leaves quite gone,
> Beauty o'ersnowed and bareness every where: (lines 5-8)

The same passage of time can be viewed not only as winter but also as night. For example, in Sonnet 12 we read 'When I do count the clock

that tells the time, And see the brave day sunk in hideous night' (lines 1-2). In Sonnet 97 ideas of both winter and night, as symbols of separation of the lovers, are present:

> How like a winter hath my absence been
> From thee, the pleasure of the fleeting year!
> What freezings have I felt, what dark days seen!
> What old December's barreness every where! (lines 1-4)

There is no 'polar night' to be found in Shakespeare, but certainly the imagery of winter, cold and darkness is present, and hence to imagine a 'polar night' out of the promise of summer's bloom in Sonnet 102 would not be at odds with the context—and indeed the context itself may have suggested such an inference.

3. *The Symbol of the Nightingale in Sonnet 102 and German Poetry*

As mentioned above, in German texts 'Philomel' is often dropped and is replaced by 'Nightingale'. This is not inaccurate, since it conveys the Ovidian metamorphosis, but the classical reference can be lost. In the light of this it would be foolhardy to claim that Weber was utilizing the classical Philomel imagery. On the other hand, German literature has its own tradition of the symbol of the Nightingale that is not insignificant for Weber's argument. To be sure, there are traditions that connect the Nightingale with the sweetness and joy of love, and also traditions that associate the Nightingale and his song with desolation, betrayal and decay.

For example, in Goethe's *Ganymede* a positive note is struck. In this poem to spring Goethe gives loving praise to the grass, the breeze, the mist, the flowers, and the nightingale too 'calls lovingly to me out of the mist filled valley'. For Goethe the Nightingale's song means the awakening of spring and the announcement of summer no less: the whole is a thankful hymn to God (Forster 1959: 199). On the other hand, in Hoelty's 'An die Nachtigall' (To the Nightingale) the Nightingale's song evokes the birth of new love: 'Your sweet throat calls/ love awake in me'. And yet since the awakening of love will destroy the equipoise and health of the lover—making him 'haggard and deathly pale'—the poet begs the Nightingale to fly away. Similarly, the poet Reinhold in 'Nachtigall', attributes the remembrance of an ill-fated and hurtful love affair to the 'sweetest sounds' of the Nightingale. The poet writes that the songs 'penetrate my marrow and bone'. Both of these poems were set to music by Brahms (Opus 46.4 and 97.1 respectively).

In both these latter poems the Nightingale's song evokes feelings of remembrance rather than hopes or predictions for the future, in contrast to Shakespeare's Sonnet. Perhaps the poem which comes nearest to Weber's conception is J.R.M. Lenz's (1751–92) 'Wo bist du itzt?' (Where are you now?). In the poem the feeling of dullness, expressed within the forlorn lover is mirrored by the weather, and the departure of his lover to a place he knows not where is mirrored by the flight away of the Nightingale. When love is present the Nightingale sings, when love is gone the Nightingale's song ceases, and silence and dullness reign. The shining of the sun is replaced by cooler and wetter weather. Not the darkness of a polar night to be sure, but 'winter in the month of May': a thought contained in the final verses:

> Since you went the sun will refuse to shine and the sky joins with your admirer in weeping tenderly at your departure.
> All our pleasure is gone with you.
> Silence reigns everywhere over field and woodland.
> The nightingale, too, has flown after you.
> Oh do come back! Already the shepherds and their flocks anxiously call for you.
> Come back soon, or it will be winter in the month of May! (Forster 1959: 234).

In this way, the Nightingale in the Sonnet can be said to function like the watchman in other texts: its song announces to the lovers that change is imminent and dramatic and requires personal response. To be sure, this source for Weber's interpretation and application of Shakespeare's Sonnet is not as strong as the biblical prophetic context, as we will see.

4. *Some Further Old Testament Sources for the Polar Night*

It remains to return to the Old Testament to consider whether the formulation of the polar night of icy darkness can trace a stronger lineage directly to biblical texts and images and finally underline Weber's framing of the Sonnet within biblical imagery. A particularly striking correspondence between Weber's thought and certain prophetic texts can be seen in Micah, where the predicted period of cold darkness will also be a period of silence for the commentators—in this case, the false prophets:

> Therefore it shall be night to you, without vision
> and darkness to you, without divination.
> The sun shall go down upon the prophets,

> and the day shall be black over them;
> the seers shall be disgraced,
> and the diviners put to shame;
> they shall all cover their lips
> for there is no answer from God (Micah 3.6-8).

In Zephaniah the common trope of calamity associated with darkness is seen again. It is a good example, moreover, of the Day of Yahweh not being a time of blessing but rather its opposite:

> A day of wrath is that day
> a day of distress and anguish
> a day of ruin and devastation
> a day of darkness and gloom (Zephaniah, 1.15).

This notion of the Day of Yahweh is found earlier in the prophecies of Amos: 'Will not the day of the Lord be darkness, not light—pitch dark, without a ray of brightness?' (5.20). The New International Version renders this text: 'pitch dark', chosen to express the idea of darkness that the RSV attempts to capture with 'gloom with no brightness in it'. However the prophetic text that is most significant for our questions is Zechariah 14.6-7. In the RSV 14.6-7 is rendered: 'On that day there shall be neither cold nor frost. And there shall be continuous day (it is known to the Lord), not day and not night, for at evening time there shall be light'.

Marianne Weber, in her biography of Max, cites this text in reference to Weber's optimism as a young lecturer and social researcher in the 1890s. She suggests that this earlier optimism, the promise of light at twilight, turns into an experience of total darkness actually during the closing years of Weber's life (Marianne Weber 1988: 130). It is the promise of light at twilight that she suggests is of most significance to Weber's own self-understanding. To be sure this is to decontextualize that particular part of the verse. The Zechariah passage is of uppermost importance for further reasons: it contains ideas of frost and cold and of continuous day and night. However, there is some difficulty in rendering the Hebrew, with some English versions being nearer to the idea of a polar night than others. Given the difficulty of the ideas expressed, breaking with common notions of day and night and their durations, it is unsurprising that Greek, Syriac and Latin traditions of the biblical text all tell a different story. In Luther's Bible, the version Weber was perhaps most familiar with, v. 6 is translated: 'Zu der Zeit wird kein Licht sein, sondern Kälte und Frost'. If this was a version known and trusted by Weber, the source of the polar night of icy darkness would be close at hand, for Luther reads the Hebrew to

mean that not only will there be no light but that because of this there will be cold and frost: hence we have a dark, cold and frosty 'night'. The difficulty here is that other versions render the Hebrew to convey the unusual nature of the Day the prophet has in mind—namely, that there is no day nor frost nor cold. Whichever version Weber knew it is clear that the ideas of continuous day and the nature of a period of darkness similar to a polar night are present, and this text probably had considerable influence on Weber's reading of the Sonnet.

For Weber, the future he is predicting and envisaging is a polar night—a continuous period of night of many months. In passing, we should mention that Weber was writing in the decade when the tragic story of the 1912 Scott expedition to the South Pole (Scott 1913) and the heroic survival of Ernest Shackleton's *Discovery* exploration team to Antarctica in 1919 (Shackleton 1999), were widely publicised and became justly famous. To be sure, it was the model of the Old Testament prophets that was uppermost in Weber's mind, but he chose to give expression to these ideas not directly through biblical imagery, as in the close to 'Science as a Vocation', but rather through the use of Shakespeare. Following Gervinus (1903), Weber joined a long line of writers who utilized Shakespeare, 'the world's poet' (Marianne Weber, 1988: 517) to comment on German national affairs. Weber's uses of Shakespeare is worthy of further analysis (cf. Chalcraft 2001).

5. Weber, the Love Poetry of old Provençal and the Figure of the Watchman

How was Weber able to link discourses of politics with a discourse of love? What are the warrants for using a love Sonnet to speak about the fate of nations? The figure of the watchman mediates between the traditions.

The image of the watchman as a prophet—having a far-reaching and clear-sighted view that is not available to all—is clearly adapted from the role of the sentinel. In Goethe's 'Faust', for example, we find both military and prophetic functions fulfilled by Lynceus the watchman in the 'Deep Night' episode. He is a lookout for events beyond state/palace borders as well as a grieving observer of miscarriages of justice within the domain. There are analogies with Amos in the Old Testament. Goethe does not miss the biblical resonances of what Lynceus, horrified, witnesses, and he has Mephistopheles say, 'What passes here is far from new; There once was Naboth's vineyard, too (Kings 1.21)' (Part 2, Act 5, line 11286).

The tradition of troubadour poetry found its greatest expression in

the German world in the work of the master, Wolfram von Eschenbach (Walshem 1962: 97-99). His poem, beginning with 'Its claws have struck through the clouds' narrates the concerns of the watchman who is looking out for the Knight he has admitted to the chamber of the Lady, his illicit love. Eventually the Lady, hearing the watchman's warning song, releases her knight, but not before much kissing, 'and much else besides'—a sweet leave-taking. The Knight says: 'Watchman, what you sing takes many joys away from me and increases my lament. Every morning at daybreak you bring news that I do not, alas, wish to hear' (Forster, 1959: 28).

In these romance traditions the watchman's gaze is fixed less on the horizon of national events and more on the coming of daybreak so as to protect his lady or lord from having their illicit love affairs discovered by the forces of the everyday world. In many poems the role of the watchman is taken by the birds, and their morning song awakes the lovers.

In Keats' 'Ode to a Nightingale' the poet is put in mind of 'Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!' (Keats 1988: 346, line 14). It was whilst vacationing in the south of France that Weber wrote home about the 'old, decayed' 'love courts' of Les Baux near Arles, that Keats was longing for. Writing from Aigues-Mortes (Provence) on 31 March 1912, Weber records:

> Yesterday afternoon I set out from Arles on a long carriage ride through the alternately gay and serious Provence to the old love court of the Seigneurs de Maurika in Les Baux near Arles, on a wild cone-shaped rock overlooking a green valley enclosed by protruding gray rock walls, exactly like the ones we saw on the trip from Burgos. In the Middle Ages the place once had 3600 inhabitants; now there are only a hundred, and it is in ruins. The Seigneurs were the greatest in Provence and the centre of the troubadours; one of them became emperor of Constantinople (Marianne Weber 1988: 484-85).

Weber's description bears close resemblance to a contemporary Baedeker in the features it chooses to emphasize, and in the detailing of particular facts. What Weber does not write home about, but which he is most likely to have been shown, or seen, or read in his guidebook, is the history of the Huguenots in the place and that there survives from their church building a window with the watchword: 'post tenebras lux' ('after the dark comes light'). The watchword itself may derive from the Isaiah text.

Hence we see that love poetry, on the one hand, and the idea of the watchman on the other, are linked, in this instance, by a sense of place. It is the watchman that wakes the lovers. And the citadels of

old where the watchmen kept their look-out are now overrun and ruined. In days of old they housed the courts of the troubadours: the approaching danger signalled by the watchman was unheeded, or the inhabitants were powerless to resist the onslaughts of the attackers. Germany too lies waste, and the love song—whether youthful or mature—needs must be stopped, until better times arrive.

6. Weber's Thematic Use of the Sonnet: Maturity in Love and Politics and the Role of Silence

The Sonnet, taken as a whole, clearly resonates with some key themes in the essay. I offer some general observations on these correspondences in bringing this note to a close. In 'Politics as a Vocation', Weber criticizes the commercialising of politics and experience with its resultant cheapening of serious matters, and the cacophony of many uninformed voices all claiming to speak to the political situation. What is needed are persons with genuine political insight and vocation, an ethic of responsibility and a recognition of their leadership qualities by others. Similarly in the Sonnet the condition where 'wild music burdens every bough' (line 11) leads the poet to 'sometime hold my tongue, Because I would not dull you with my song' (lines 13-14).

The Sonnet speaks of love and passion and its temporal dimensions. Weber is speaking, analogously, of politics and knowledge. Since, for Weber, both are covered by passion and commitment, he can move from thinking of one to thinking of the other, and we have seen the discourses of love and politics can be mediated by the figure of the watchman and the sense of place in the love courts of old Provence. The critique of immature love contained in the Sonnet is mirrored by Weber's critique of immaturity in politics. Immaturity has little to do with youth, and more to do with attitude and experience. The mature lover and the contrasting euphoria of the first days of love in the Sonnet equal the mature politician and the political infants contrasted by Weber. True valued love and the true and legitimate call of politics relate.

Knowing when to speak and how to speak, and basing one's analysis on a inner disposition, is essential to maturity. The mature prophet knows not to speak when only darkness looms. He learns to hold out and wait—stand firm and resolute. But the mature politician also knows to keep the future in mind, given the ethic of responsibility, which foresees the consequences of present actions in the future and

is prepared to accept responsibility for unintended consequences, evil arising from the good intentions.

The fiery passion of the springtime of love, when love is in its youth, cannot compare to the deliberate, sober and well-proportioned love of the mature, or of the mature relationship, when the summer is not 'less pleasant' (line 9). Analogously, the political immature, the political infant, may speak often, may entertain many romantic dreams, may steadfastly hold to ultimate ends without respect to means, but cannot compare in terms of personality, inner poise, nor understanding of actual events and processes, of the ways of the world, with the mature person of politics.

It is the mature lover who deigns not to cheapen things by talking, by remaining silent until there is something to say, remaining steadfast and true as a lover throughout. Similarly, it is the mature politician who knows when to speak, when to lead and when to follow. For Weber himself as a sociologist knows when value-judgements are being made and when they are not. 'Politics as a Vocation' conveys the great and tragic loss of promise in political affairs occasioned by the forces of modernity, and not least by defeat in the Great War. This terrible loss of summer in public and private affairs is at the heart of Weber's peripetetic use of Shakespeare's Sonnet 102: his interpretation and application of the Sonnet is prophetic and to certain extents apocalyptic.

7. *Final Thoughts*

The Huguenots of Les Baux awaited the light that comes after the day. The Jews, Weber tells us in 'Science as a Vocation', have tarried for a thousand years and more. Weber claims that his audience must do differently. But the time for silence still persists, the night of polar darkness lies ahead. Only after that, after decades of realism and the 'boring of hard boards', will the poetry begin again. It was to take much much longer. The Edomite watchman's ambivalent reply needs must be echoed in its sentiment by Weber. He has reached those subjects which cannot yet be spoken of; after the darkness comes the light. But when it comes we do not know, and it is, following Zech. 14.7, to be a continuous night of long duration; but if one seeks the light, look and wait, and, most importantly, wait but do not tarry; your calling must be an effective calling, working rationally on and in the world. Such a call for moral rectitude in accordance with an ethic of responsibility and a commitment to vocation is Weber's stance.

Weber does not recommend a passive calling but one involving working on the world, an effective calling, and he equally does not hold out the prospect of a summer's bloom for his audience, but rather, a 'polar night of icy darkness'.

Note

All biblical quotations are from the RSV unless otherwise stated. All quotations from Shakespeare's Sonnets are from *The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, edited by G. Blakemore Evans (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and for *Faust* I have used the Norton Critical Edition, edited by Cyrus Hamlin (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976).

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