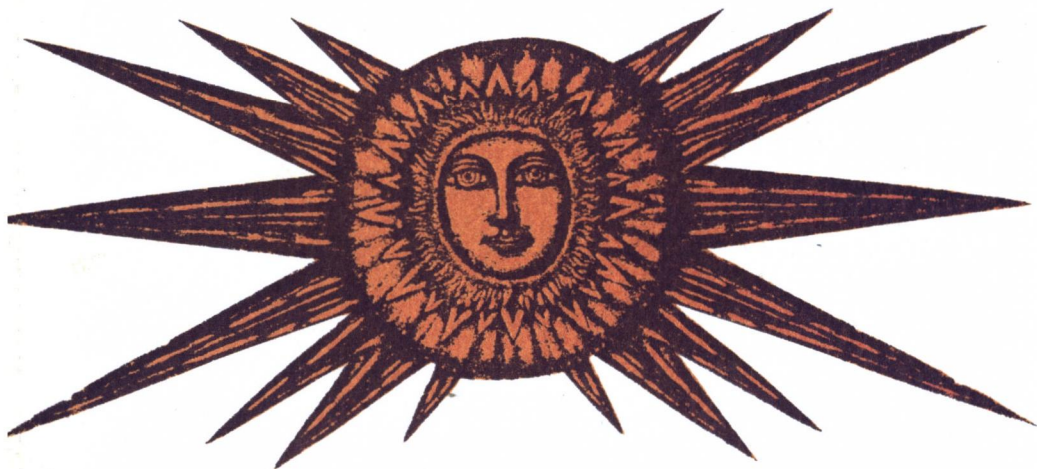


TEMENOS



John Allitt, Thomas Blackburn, Keith Critchlow
Stephen Cross, Yves de Bayser, David Gascoyne
Brian Keeble, Tom Lowenstein, Jean Mambrino
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John Montague, Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Santosh Pall
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Peter Russell, Philip Sherrard, Huston Smith

2

A REVIEW DEVOTED TO THE ARTS OF THE IMAGINATION

EDITORS

Kathleen Raine, Philip Sherrard
Keith Critchlow, Brian Keeble

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EDITORIAL

KATHLEEN RAINE

It is the stated policy of *Temenos* 'to affirm the sacred dimension in the arts.' This sacred dimension is not a quality imputed (as for example a site or a vessel might be consecrated for some ritual purpose) but something inherent in the essential nature of the arts, here considered as the proper and characteristic language of our vision of the world of Imagination. Only insofar as they embody and express the invisible, immeasurable qualities of humankind's inner experience have the arts, in Yeats's words, 'Prepared a rest for the people of God', those 'Gardens where the soul's at ease', that Holy Land which is the soul's native country. Banished from the *mundus imaginalis* we are condemned to live in a world of mere material fact. Poetry, painting, music, architecture and the other arts have ceased to embody the vision of a spiritual order. We live in a secular materialist society which starves the soul or feeds it a diet of bricks and scorpions.

We are not the first in the post-war years to have been aware of this predicament in Western society, or to have attempted to discover remedies. As the oldest member of the Editorial Board of *Temenos* it is appropriate that I should recall some of these attempts, which have been a part of the experience of my generation, and as such have helped to build the foundations upon which *Temenos* is established. It is fitting that we should acknowledge our multiple indebtedness, and in so doing indicate how we hope to continue the task, within the measure of our capacity.

By what is surely more than coincidence the name of Herbert Read is invoked in two of the contributions to this second number of *Temenos*. Herbert Read, before and after the Second World War, was the spokesman of the so-called 'Modern Movement' at a time when T.S. Eliot was a defender of tradition. The Modern Movement sought to 'liberate' the arts from the 'restrictions' of the past on the

assumption that, so liberated, 'original' productions of the Imagination would flower as naturally as daisies from the ground. Eliot, by contrast, held the view that civilization is of slow growth, being the inheritance of an accumulation of knowledge and wisdom unbroken from the beginning of history, a precious inheritance whose loss would spell the advent of a new Dark Age. Yet at the time the choice seemed simply one of emphasis, of temperament perhaps. The two protagonists for many years lunched together amicably once a week, although as time went on the differences widened and they no longer did so. But, choice or inclination apart, revolutionaries and traditionalists were alike inheritors of English culture with its language and literature, formed by these and by European civilization, Christian and pre-Christian. Atheist humanism, besides, was still on its best behaviour since those who denied a spiritual order felt themselves obliged to equal or outdo the religious in high-mindedness in order to prove that often disproved heresy that man is naturally good. Such writers as George Orwell, or that fine Marxist critic Walter Benjamin, spoke the same language, shared the same standards of taste as did those who differed from them in political or religious matters and would doubtless have been as disgusted as we ourselves at the present state of the arts; which is nevertheless the necessary outcome of a secular view of man. But Marxism was a heroic creed appealing to the altruism of a generation which, intoxicated by those films of the Russian Revolution which showed us an aspiration we in Western society no longer felt, was willing to go and be killed in the Spanish Civil War. That such pure and lyrical expressions of the human spirit as the recent Georgian film *The Wishing Tree* and Tarkovsky's *Andrei Rublev* and *Stalker* can come out of the USSR suggests that logical conclusions have not yet been successfully enforced, or perhaps in Russia God is not so dead as in the United States or in England where a more permissive materialism no longer feels it necessary to proclaim mankind's innate nobility.

The fatal flaw in a modern movement grounded in a materialist ideology was to become apparent in its results, as Herbert Read lived long enough to realize. What he failed to see in time was that the

revolutionary ideologies of the day, grounded as they were in secular materialism of one kind or another, implicitly or explicitly denied the human Imagination as well. Little that goes by that futile modern term 'creativity' comes from that source.

Perhaps Herbert Read's best contribution was his advocacy of 'education through art', (the title of one of his seminal books). The free expression of children in painting and writing is now the rule rather than the exception in our schools. The trouble comes when the children grow up. The radiance of so much child-art fades away if the inner life be not nourished and sustained on its proper food. Those who do not find true teachers are at the mercy of anything and everything that is 'in the air', ideas they absorb and give currency to without being aware of their origin or import. Eliot once said that no influence is so dangerous as an unconscious influence. The current ideologies of our society offer no support for spiritual growth and the children leave their vision of paradise when they leave their play-schools for the stony ground of a society that does not believe in Paradise at all.

The terms of the discussion have changed since those days: we no longer hear of a Modern Movement but of a New Age, a change in the premises of our civilization. A new generation no longer asks for 'liberation' (poor things they have it) but for revelation.

But the historical view of tradition defended by Eliot and after him by F.R. Leavis has also revealed its inadequacy. There is nothing sacred in much with which the past has burdened us, nor in history as such. A deeper meaning was given to the concept of Tradition by René Guénon and the aesthetician A.K. Coomaraswamy. To both the essence of Tradition is metaphysical: adherence to some spiritual tradition is adherence to those principles in which that tradition and its culture are established. Tradition is not grounded in history at all, but in revelation. Its basis is not human achievement as such but the abiding nature of things, and the *sophia perennis*, or Everlasting Gospel, is universal and unanimous; differing only (as Coomaraswamy says) in dialectical variations according to time and place.

When in 1941 Herbert Read reviewed (in *The Listener*) Coomaraswamy's essay *Why Exhibit Works of Art?*, he failed to recognize that whereas the Modern Movement supported and was supported by ideologies which deny the Imagination, Tradition, as understood by Coomaraswamy, was precisely an affirmation of a timeless cosmology from which alone true art springs. It was to this source that Yeats (who was a friend of Coomaraswamy) referred when he wrote, in words little understood by humanists then and now, that 'truth cannot be discovered but may be revealed'.

But if Herbert Read did not come full circle to Coomaraswamy's view he traversed a wide arc from his early anarchist philosophy. He came to see in C.G. Jung's insights into the psyche as a structured universe whose archetypal content is innate and predetermined, a possibly valid alternative to Tradition as defined by Coomaraswamy. The school of Guénon and Coomaraswamy has criticised Jung on the grounds that he seems to imply (by his avoidance of metaphysical issues) that the human psyche is itself the source of Imaginative knowledge. This view Jung himself (over whose door were carved the words 'summoned or unsummoned God is here') certainly did not hold. But Herbert Read, perhaps because he was committed to political ideologies of an atheist nature, stopped short of explicit or implicit admission of a universe above and beyond that of the psyche.

Whereas Guénon's doctrinaire rigidity seems to preclude the ever-living prophetic spirit that 'bloweth where it listeth', proclaimed by Coleridge and Blake, Yeats and all the Romantic poets, Jung saw that living spirit at work in the psyche, bringing light and healing to even the most alienated of the insane with whom he worked over so many years; a universe visited by archetypal images inherently sacred — noumenal, as he describes these visions. Yet both these currents of thought have contributed to the knowledge of the Imaginative world in our time.

It is in Henry Corbin that we find a resolution of the dialogue between the two currents of thought, held by some of their respective adherents to be irreconcilable. Although working strictly within the field of Ismailian scholarship, the Sufi mystics (many of them

persecuted in their day by the orthodox) were for him above all the witnesses to a living experience within the soul of what he has termed the 'imaginal' universe: a word he uses in distinction from 'imaginary' in the sense of non-existent. He was therefore held in suspicion by Guénon and his school who, even in defending a metaphysical tradition, seem often to do so from a conceptual rather than a spiritual standpoint. Like Blake, like Swedenborg, like all poets of the Imagination, Corbin knew, and constantly affirms, that it is in the world of the psyche, and not through discursive thought, that the metaphysical realities reveal themselves to the soul's 'eyes of fire'. While criticising Jung in several important respects he shared Jung's concern with the world of the psyche as the 'place' where spiritual events 'take place'. Yet in Tradition he saw the safeguard of the immediacy and integrity of that world; for Tradition constantly affirms a higher source of knowledge of which the psyche is the recipient. He warned against the danger of 'the forgetting and consequent loss of the ascending vertical dimension, for which an evolutionary horizontal dimension is substituted. The vertical dimension is individuation and sacralization; the other is collectivization. The first is a deliverance both from the individual and from the collective shadow'. (*The Man of Light in Iranian Mysticism*, p.51)

The intention of this editorial is an acknowledgment of indebtedness and likewise an indication of how some of the threads of timeless wisdom have reached us. Through poets and thinkers like Coleridge and Blake, Blake's acquaintance Thomas Taylor the Platonist and his greatest disciple W.B. Yeats, the Theosophical movement and allied schools at the turn of this century, a whole tradition of Western esoteric thought (Eastern also, but that is a subject too large and too important to speak of here) has entered the mainstream of our thought. In more immediate terms we are indebted to the Bollingen Foundation, established by Paul and Mary Mellon for the purpose of publishing Jung's writings and allied works relating to the soul and its universe. The Foundation has sponsored and published a range of works spanning the whole horizon of such studies

of 'facts of mind' from works on Gnosticism and mythology to Coomaraswamy and Henry Corbin. At the famous Round Table of the Eranos conferences at Ascona many significant meetings have taken place which have since borne fruit; notably Gilbert Durand's *École des Études sur l'Imaginaire* at Grenoble, reflected in James Hillman's work centred around the *Spring* publications in Dallas, Texas. There, besides Jung and his immediate circle, came Henry Corbin himself, Gershom Scholem, Karl Kerenyi, Professor and Mme Izutsu who, with Corbin and Dr S.H. Nasr, directed the ill-fated Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy at Tehran.

We in England are indebted to the quarterly periodical, *Studies in Comparative Religion* (whose *éminence grise* is the Buddhist metaphysician, Marco Pallis), which for many years has made known the work of Guénon and his school; as has Elémire Zolla's *Conoscenza Religiosa* in Italy. The growing desire of people in England to rediscover lost sources of genuine knowledge has more recently been reflected in the activities of RILKO (Research Into Lost Knowledge Organization) as a centre for the dissemination of a strict and exact understanding of the qualitative aspects of number and geometry, and in the publications of the Golgonooza Press.

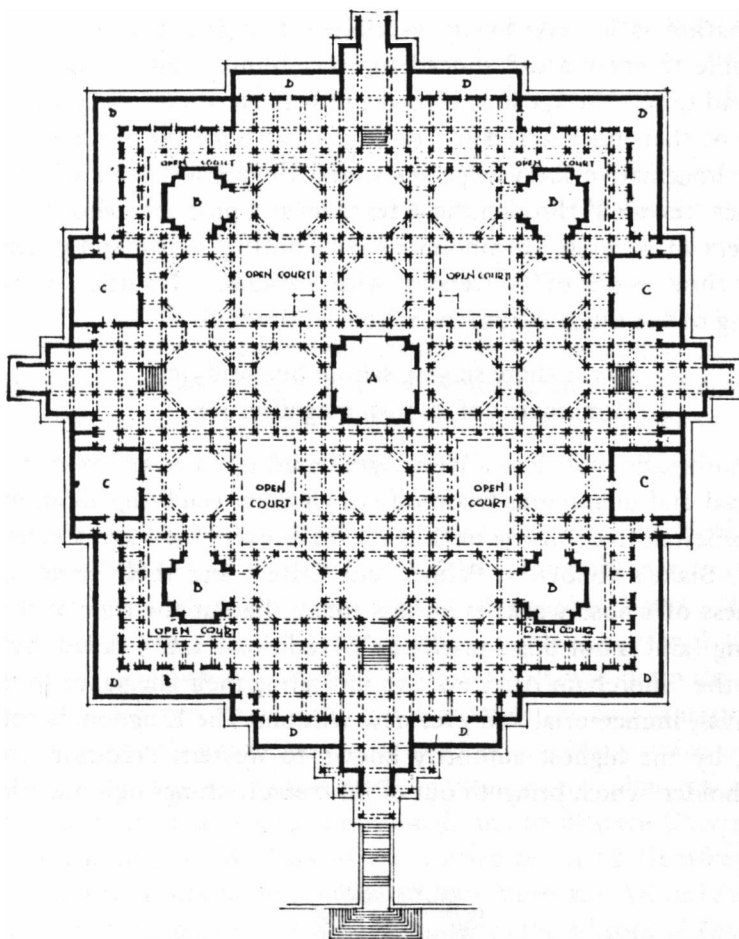
Watkins's bookshop has been famous ever since John M Watkins, at the request of H.P. Blavatsky, undertook the publication and sale of the classics of Western and Eastern theosophy. Yeats's Michael Robartes, looking for the poet himself, is made to say (in *A Vision*) 'You will find him in Watkins' bookshop'. It was there that Jung went incognito to arrange the publication of the first (anonymous) edition of his *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*. Many since owe to works we have bought there such knowledge as we have of a learning both exact and profound not taught in our Western Universities. The work of John M. Watkins was carried on by Mr Geoffrey Watkins (now retired) who remembers all from Yeats and AE and Stephen Mackenna (translator of Plotinus) down to the editors of *Temenos*, who have been frequent visitors there. We are proud to appear under the Watkins imprint. We are also grateful to our friends of the Lindsarne Association who are distributing *Temenos* in the U.S.A.

I have tried to indicate some of the more important influences which have in various degrees formed the thought of the editors of *Temenos*, although I have in this editorial spoken chiefly from my own experience of these. Yet there is none among those named to whom we are not all to some degree indebted. By whichever confluent current, we have reached the shared realization that while Imagination is an ever-living, ever-present source, a sacred world accessible to every artist, indeed to every human being at all times, yet Tradition is the age-long record and witness of humanity's experience of that inner universe. Tradition is at once the ground upon which Imaginative knowledge rests, and the record of its wisdom, whether 'revealed' through those teachers and prophets who are the founders of religion, or embodied in 'painting, music and poetry, man's three ways of conversing with Paradise'. Tradition is the learning of the Imagination, the school of the soul.

Nor is there singing-school but studying
Monuments of its own magnificence.

No avant-garde, still less a New Age, based upon rejection of that universal and unanimous testimony of wisdom, can bring about any valid renewal. Every living birth is a re-birth, every 'new age' a 'renaissance'. Blake's followers, Palmer and Calvert and their circle, the freshness of whose works is no less today than at the time of their painting (and is not this a mark of all Traditional art?), called themselves the 'Shoreham Ancients', so indicating their allegiance to the perennial, immemorial and ever-new wisdom. The Kingdom is compared, by the highest authority known to Western Tradition, to a householder 'which bringeth out of his treasure things new and old'.





FLAKES OF FIRE, HANDFULS OF LIGHT

THE HUMANITIES AS UNCONTROLLED EXPERIMENT

HUSTON SMITH

Those of us who saw 'Einstein's Universe', that remarkable television programme the British Broadcasting Company created for the centennial of Einstein's birth last March, remember the words that laced it like a theme: 'Einstein would have wanted us to say it in the simplest possible way. Space tells matter how to move; matter tells space how to warp'. How, in the simplest possible way, can we describe the burden and promise of the humanities today?

I. THE HUMANITIES

First, by identifying their central concern. They have many facets, of course, but we will not be far from the mark if we think of them as custodians of the human image; one way or another, in cycles and epicycles, they circle the question of who we take ourselves to be — what it means to be a human being, to live a human life. We know that self images are important, for endowed as we are with self-consciousness, we draw portraits of ourselves and then fashion our lives to their likenesses, coming to resemble the portraits we draw. Psychologists who are professionally concerned with behaviour modification tell us that a revised self-image is the most important single factor in human change. It is when a person sees himself differently that new ways of behaving come to seem feasible and appropriate.

If then (in company with religion and the arts in our culture at large) the humanities are custodians of the human self-image, what is their burden and promise today?

II. BURDENS: SOCIAL AND CONCEPTUAL

Turning first to their burdens, they are of two kinds, social and

conceptual. As the first of these stems from our culture's institutional forms I shall let a social scientist in our own ranks, Manfred Stanley, tell the story. 'It is by now a Sunday-supplement commonplace,' he writes, 'that the social, economic and technological modernization of the world is accompanied by a spiritual malaise that has come to be called alienation.' The social changes contributing to this alienation reduce most importantly, I suspect — I am not attributing this further point to Professor Stanley — to disruption of the primary communities in which life used to be lived. No longer rooted in such communities, our lives are seen less in their entirety, as wholes, by others; and in consequence (so fully are our perceptions of ourselves governed by others' perceptions of us) we have difficulty seeing *ourselves* as wholes. High mobility decrees that our associates know only limited time-segments of our lives — childhood, college, mid-life career, retirement — while the compartmentalization of industrial life insures that at any given life-stage our associates will know us in only one of our roles: worker, member of the family, civic associate, or friend. Once again, none know us whole, and as our fellows don't so know us, we have trouble seeing ourselves as wholes as well.

This scattering of our lives in time and their splintering in space tends to fragment our self-image and in extreme cases to pulverize it. Engendering Robert Lifton's 'protean man' and abetting the existentialist's conclusion that we *have* no essence, the disruption of the primary community is, as I say, the heaviest burden I see institutional changes laying on our efforts to see ourselves as complete persons. But the conceptual problem our age has wrought is, if anything, even weightier. By this conceptual problem I mean the world view the modern West has settled into: its notion of 'the scheme of things entire' as it finally is. The statement by Professor Stanley that I began quoting speaks to this conceptual side of our predicament too — so precisely, in fact, that I shall continue to let him speak for me. He was noting, you will recall, the alienation that modernization has occasioned, and having alluded to some of its social causes drives straight to the heart of the matter as follows:

At its most fundamental level, the diagnosis of alienation is based on the view that modernization forces upon us a world that, although baptized as real by science, is denuded of all humanly recognizable qualities; beauty and ugliness, love and hate, passion and fulfilment, salvation and damnation. It is not, of course, being claimed that such matters are not part of the existential realities of human life. It is rather that the scientific world view makes it illegitimate to speak of them as being 'objectively' part of the world, forcing us instead to define such evaluation and such emotional experiences as 'merely subjective' projections of people's inner lives.

The world, once an 'enchanted garden', to use Max Weber's memorable phrase, has now become disenchanted, deprived of purpose and direction, bereft — in these senses — of life itself. All that which is allegedly basic to the specifically human status in nature comes to be forced back upon the precincts of the 'subjective' which, in turn, is pushed by the modern scientific view ever more into the province of dreams and illusions.¹

To say that it is difficult — burdensome — to maintain a respectable image of man in a world like this is an understatement. The truth is, it's impossible. If modern man feels alienated from this world he sees enveloping him, it shows his wits are still intact. He *should* feel alienated. For no permanent stand-off between self and world is possible; eventually there will be a showdown. And when it comes, there is no doubt about the outcome: the world will win — for a starter, it's bigger than we are. So a meaningful life is not finally possible in a meaningless world. It is provisionally possible — there can be a temporary stand-off between self and world — but finally it's not possible. Either the garden is indeed disenchanted, in which case the humanities deserve to be on the defensive, no noble human image being possible in an a-noble — I do not say ignoble — world; or the garden remains enchanted and the humanities should help make this fact known.

To set out to reverse the metaphysical momentum of the last 400

years might seem a task so difficult as to be daunting, but there is another way to look at the matter. Here, surely, is something worth doing, a project to elicit the best that is within us including resources we might not know we possess: so even if we fail in the attempt we shall do so knowing the joy that comes from noble doings. To get the project under way we must advance into enemy territory — we shall find it to be a contemporary form of what Plato called ‘upside down existence’ — and to do this we must cross a no-man’s land of methodology, ‘no-man’s’ being precise here because if either side were to capture it the battle would be theirs. So a short interlude on method to establish the ground rules for the ‘war of the worlds’ (read ‘war of the worldviews’) we are about to begin.

III. METHODOLOGICAL INTERLUDE

In a university setting, any move to reinstate the enchanted garden will naturally be met by the question, ‘How do you *know* it is enchanted?’ If we answer that we experience it so, that we find ourselves ravished by its mystery and washed by its beauty and presences — not always, of course, but enough to sustain conviction — we shall be told that this is not to know, it is merely to feel. This crude response requires of us a choice. Either we blow the whistle at once on this cramped and positivistic definition of knowledge, (as we shall soon see, its willingness to dignify as knowledge only such kinds as hold the promise of augmenting our power to control rules out the very possibility of knowing things that might be superior to us, it being possible to control only subordinates or at most equals. In a word, it rules out the possibility of knowing transcendence), or we can let this restriction of knowledge to what-can-be-proved stand, in which case knowledge becomes a foundation (one among several) for a higher epistemic yield — call it insight, wisdom, understanding or even intelligence if we use that word to include, as it did for the scholastics, Plato’s ‘eye of the soul’ that can discern spiritual objects. What we must never, never do is make proof our master. Fear that if we don’t subject ourselves to it we

may wander into error will always tempt us to this slavery, but to yield to the temptation spells disaster for our discipline. Even physicists, if they be great ones, see (as Richard Feynman pointed out in his Nobel Lecture) that 'a very great deal more truth can become known than can be proven'. 'Not to prove, but to discover' must be the humanities' watchword.

To rise above the tyranny of proof and with pounding heart bid farewell to the world of the inadequate — the rope is cut, the bird is free — is in no wise to abandon thoughts for feelings, as if bogs could accommodate the human spirit better than cages. To relegate the health of our souls to the whims of our emotions would be absurd. To say that in outdistancing proof we take our minds with us is too weak; they empower our flight. At this higher altitude the mind is, if anything, *more* alive than before; in supreme instances the muses take over and our minds go on 'automatic pilot', that inspired, ecstatic state Plato called 'the higher madness'. We cannot here track them to those heights where myth and poetry conspire with revelation and remembrance, science joining them at those times when hunches strike terror in the heart, so fine is the line between inspired madness and the kind that disintegrates. Such ozone atmosphere is not for this essay. Ours is the *to metaxy*, the intermediate realm between proofs that cannot tell us whether the garden is enchanted or not and inspiration which shows us, face to face, that it is. Proofs being unavailable in this 'middle kingdom', there remains the possibility that reasons may have something to say — proofs, no; reasons, yes. Even here we should not expect too much, for the more we try to make our reasons *resemble* proofs — in justifications or arguments that compel provided only that the hearer has rational faculties — the more they must take on proof's earthbound character; in grounding them in demonstrations that compel, we will 'ground' them in the correlative sense of preventing them from getting off the ground.

This last point is worth dwelling on for a paragraph, for it points to a dilemma the university is caught in but doesn't clearly see. On the one hand we take it for granted that an important part of our

job is to train people to think critically; concurrently we assume that the university is an important custodian of civilization: we have the celebrated retort of the Oxford don who, asked what *he* was doing for the Battle of Britain, replied that he was what the fighting was *for*. What the university does not see is that the criteria for critical thinking it has adopted work against the high image of man that keeps civilizations vital: the Aryans who fanned out in the second millenium B.C. to spread the Indo-European language base from India to Ireland — *Aryurvedic* medicine still flourishes in India, and *Eire* is simply *Aryur* spelled differently — called themselves *Aryan* (noble); while the Muslims who entered history in the greatest political explosion the world has known were powered for that explosion by the Qur'anic assurance, 'Surely We created man in the best stature' (XCV, 4). To cite but a single evidence of the contradiction the university is caught in here, 'there is no doubt that in developed societies education has contributed to the decline of religious belief', yet students of evolution tell us that 'religious behaviours are . . . probably adaptive; (their) dialogue with 'nature' . . . is an important integrator of (man's) whole self-view in relation to the world and to activity'.² I suspect that the conjunction of these two facts — religion is adaptive and the canons of modernity erode it — contributed to Max Weber's pessimism about the future, a pessimism shared by the foremost contemporary British sociologist of religion, Bryan Wilson. Seeing current society as less legitimated than any previous social order, Wilson fears a breakdown of civilizing values in the face of an increasingly anonymous and rationalized culture. I think we should ask ourselves very seriously whether the canons of critical thinking the university has drifted into actually further such a possible breakdown. It has been America's hope that these canons make for a better, more 'rational' world. It seems to be her experience that they do not necessarily do so.

But to proceed. If our first methodological point noted that attempts to force the question of the world's worth into the arena of proof preclude a heartening answer by that move alone, the second point concerns an innuendo that must be anticipated and

dismissed so discussion can proceed on a decent level. I refer to the charge, more frequently insinuated than openly expressed, that affirmative worldviews are products of wishful thinking. What are put forward as *good* reasons to support them are not the real reasons. The real reasons are psychological.

At risk of protesting too much, I propose to raise a small electrical storm here to clear the atmosphere. As barometer to show that the storm is needed, I shall refer to the British philosopher and sociologist Ernest Gellner. In his *Legitimation of Belief* he proposes that only such knowledge as lends itself to 'public formulation and repeatability' be considered 'real knowledge'. He admits that the 'moral, "dehumanizing" price' of this move is high, for it leads to the conclusion that 'our identities, freedom, norms, are no longer underwritten by our vision and comprehension of things, (so) we are doomed to suffer from a tension between cognition and identity' — note the enchantment departing the garden like helium from a punctured balloon. But we should pay this price manfully, Gellner contends, for its alternative is 'styles of thought (that are) cheap, . . . cosy (and) meretricious'. It is rhetoric like this that demands a storm to dispatch it. Gellner does not argue that the kind of knowledge he baptizes as 'real' in fact is so; only that 'we have become habituated to and dependent on' such knowledge and so 'are constrained' to define knowledge this way. 'It was Kant's merit,' he acknowledges 'to see that this compulsion is in us, not in things. It was Weber's to see that it is historically a specific kind of mind, not mind as such, which is subject to this compulsion' (all quotations from pp. 206-207).. But if anyone questions the worth of this compulsion to which 'we have become . . . bound' and proposes to try to loosen its hold on us, he must face, atop this already demanding task, Gellner's insults. For to take exception to his delimitation of 'real knowledge' is, to repeat his charge, to engage in 'styles of thought (that are) cheap and meretricious'. That last word drove me to my dictionary; I wanted to discover with precision how my mind works. According to the OED it is 'showily attractive . . . befitting a harlot'.

I deplore this whole descent into name-calling. Unworthy of discussions in a university setting, it leaves a bad taste in my mouth; part of me feels petty for allowing myself to have been dragged into it. But the phenomenon is real, so it must be dealt with. Volumes could be assembled of so-called arguments of this kind where a psychologically angled vocabulary is used without apparently taking into account the effect this is likely to have on uncritical minds. Though this kind of language is doubtless not intended to degrade the humanities, it does nevertheless betray an artless style of thinking in its authors. For if 'real knowledge' is restricted to what is public and repeatable, what is left for the humanities is mostly unreal knowledge or no knowledge at all.

I hope we are agreed that *ad hominem* arguments get us nowhere. Naturally, I wonder from time to time if my high regard for life and the world is fathered by desire and mothered by need, but this is a shoe that fits either foot. Psychologists tell us that on average people give themselves more grief through too poor estimates of themselves than through inflated estimates; it is self-contempt, not pride, that we have basically to deal with. So if we insist on playing this psychologizing game perhaps we should invite our prophets of the human nadir to join us on the psychiatrist's couch — Beckett who admits he was born depressed, Camus, Sartre, whoever your list includes — to see if Diane Keaton in *Manhattan* was right in seeing their gloomy worlds as personal neuroses inflated to cosmic proportions. Wittgenstein once remarked that the world of a happy man is a happy world.

The storm is on its way out, but with a last, receding clap of thunder as it makes its departure. When the question of whether we are saved by grace or self-effort became an issue in Japanese Buddhist thought, a militant advocate of self-power (Nichiren) made a statement that was counterdependent to a degree worthy of Fritz Perls. Personal responsibility being everything, he argued, a single supplication for help from the Buddhas was enough to send a man to hell. To which a member of the other-power school replied that as he was undoubtedly destined for hell anyway, being totally incapable

of saving himself, he might as well take his supplications along with him as comforts. I confess that, taste for taste, I find this latter posture more appealing than that of existentialists who strut life's stage histrionically hurling their byronic defiance — 'there's no meaning but my meaning; that which each of us personally creates' — at an unhearing universe; our own Ernest Becker is the latest culture hero in this existentialist camp. And I can say *why* I find this latter group less appealing; this switch from the psychologizing and subjectivism I have allowed myself to be dragged into for the last several pages to a *reason* is sign that the storm is over. The existentialists are more self-centered — so, at least, their writings come through to me. In countering the mechanistic image of man that science produced, existentialism arose precisely to recall us to ourselves, to remind us of our individuality and freedom — properties that science cannot deal with. In making this correction it served an important function; we humanists stand greatly in its debt. But there was something it didn't see — probably couldn't see at mid-century. In countering science's push for uniformities and determining forces it uncritically accepted a third scientific premise, the man/world divide that Descartes and Newton first moved into place. This third premise no more describes the actual nature of things than do the first two; all three are science's working principles, no more, no less. This uncritical acceptance of the third working principle of science drove the existentialists into an alienated, embattled, egocentric depiction of the human condition. In mistaking the separate, self-contained part of us for our true part, existentialism made a fatal mistake that has confused and lowered our self-estimate. I use the past tense in speaking of it because increasingly it has a *passé* flavour. It lingers on because theology and humanistic psychology have not gathered the academic strength to replace it with a convincing alternative, and philosophy hasn't given them enough help in their efforts.

So we come to our central question, asking not if an image of man loftier than either science or the existentialists have given us is possible in our times — that would again divert us to a psychological

question, this time the question of whether Western civilization still has the *vitality* to believe great things. Instead, we ask whether this loftier image is true. Even here, though, we have not reached the bottom line, for as we noted earlier the final question is not whether *man* is noble but whether *reality* is noble, it being impossible to answer the first question affirmatively unless the second is so answered. If it be asked why I do not produce a moral culprit for our reduced self-image (evil men who have ground that image into the dirt by exploiting us) or even a social culprit (what hope for man in an age of mechanization and technique?), the answer is that important as these tyrannies are, they are not our final problem. Our final adversary is the notion of a lifeless universe as the context in which life and thought are set, one which without our presence in it would have been judged inferior to ourselves. Could we but shake off our anodynes for a moment we would see that nothing could be more terrible than the condition of spirits in a supposedly lifeless and indifferent universe — Newton's great mechanism of time, space and inanimate forces operating automatically or by chance. Spirits in such a context are like saplings without water; their organs shrivel. Not that there has been ill intent in turning holyland into wasteland, garden into desert; just disastrous consequences unforeseen. So we must pick up anew Blake's Bow of Burning Gold to support 'the rise of soul against intellect' (Yeats) as intellect has come to be narrowly perceived. To continue with Yeats, this time paraphrasing him, we must hammer loud upon the wall till truth at last obeys our call. We must produce some reasons.

IV. LEAVING THE WASTELAND

Aimed not at individuals (scientists, say) or disciplines (science or the social sciences) but at habits of thought that encroach on us all in the modern West — 'there never was a war that was not inward' (Marianne Moore) — the reasons are of two sorts, positive and negative. As the negative reasons mesh better with current styles of

thought — what we currently take to be reasonable — I shall begin with them. They are negative because they say nothing about what reality is like; they merely show that the claim that it is a lifeless mechanism hasn't a rational leg to stand on. My latest book, *Forgotten Truth* (Harper & Row, 1976), and essay, 'Excluded Knowledge' (*Teachers College Record* Vol. 80 No. 3 1979), work out this exposé in some detail; here I can only summarize their combined argument.

1. We begin with *motivations*. Nothing is more uncompromising about ourselves than that we are creatures that want.

2. These wants give rise to *epistemologies*. From the welter of impressions and surmises that course through our streams of consciousness we register, firm up, and take to be true those that stay in place and support us like stepping stones in getting us where we want to go. In the seventeenth century Western man stumbled on a specialized way of knowing we call the scientific method, a packet of directives counselling, first, what we should attend to, and then what we should do with the objects that come into focus through this attention. This new epistemological probe dramatically increased our understanding of how nature works and our control over it. As we welcomed this increase we 'went with' this way of knowing, enshrining it as the supreme way of getting at truth, and what it discloses as truth itself.

3. Epistemologies in turn produce *ontologies* — they create world views. In the case in question, the epistemology we fashioned to enlarge our cognitive bite into the natural world produced an ontology that made nature central. It may not be accurate to call this new ontology materialism, but clearly it is naturalistic. Everything that exists must have a foothold in nature (space, time, and matter), and in the end it must be subject to that footing.

4. Finally, ontologies generate *anthropologies*. Man being by definition a part of reality, his nature must obviously conform to what reality is. So a naturalistic world view produces, perforce, a humanistic view of man, 'humanistic' being used here as adjective not for the humanities but for a specific doctrine that makes embodied

man man's measure.

So far have we ventured down the road of this promethean epistemology, naturalistic ontology, and humanistic anthropology that it is virtually impossible for us to see how arbitrary the entire outlook is — how like a barren moonscape it would have appeared to our ancestors and continues to appear to everyone but ourselves. My own birth and early experience in China may make it easier for me to see Weber's point, earlier referred to, that the way our Western minds work isn't the way human minds must work; but nothing turns on this. I think we can say that the negative way of making our case for the humanities — our point that rationality in no way requires us to think that the garden isn't enchanted — has objective standing. We can *argue* with those who question it.

V. ENTERING THE HOLYLAND

Not so with reasons we may adduce for thinking that the garden is enchanted. These positive reasons are not *illogical*, but whether we admit the fact grudgingly or glory in it, the fact itself remains: these positive reasons require, as their premises so to speak, sensibilities that are unevenly distributed and cultivated. So purely rational clout cannot be expected of them. But as the Buddha said to Mara the Tempter when the latter tried to persuade him not to bother to teach because there was no hope that others could fathom his culminating insight: 'There will be some who will understand'. So I shall continue. Over the entrance to the magic lantern show in Herman Hesse's *Steppenwolf* was inscribed, 'Not for Everybody'. The following four arguments will seem like such only to those who at some level of their being have not been permitted to forget the immensity of what it means to be truly human.

1. *The argument from the human majority.* No culture save our own has disjoined man from his world, life from what is presumed to be non-life, in the alienating way we have. As Gilbert Durand has pointed out,

The traditional image of man does not distinguish, nor even

want to distinguish, the I from the Not-I, the world from man; whereas the entire teaching of Western civilization . . . strives to cut the world off from man, to separate the 'I think' from what is thought. Dualism is the great 'schizomorphic' structure of Western intelligence.³

Laurens van der Post tells of the South African Bushmen that wherever they go, they feel themselves known, hence at home. There is no threat, no horror of emptiness or strangeness, only familiarity in a friendly, living environment, hence also the absence of any feeling of loneliness. One of my favorite possessions is a *kakimono* that was given to me by a Japanese friend. In four Chinese characters that are bold and beautiful it proclaims that heaven and earth are pervaded with sentience, infused with feeling. This 'majority rule' argument that I am beginning with must naturally face the suspicion that attends all reasonings to the effect that 'fifty million Frenchmen can't be wrong'. But unless the minority (in this case ourselves) can show *reasons* for thinking the majority is mistaken (and in this case such reasons do not exist: that was the gist of my negative formulation of the case for the humanities) it seems wise to side with the majority. From within Western parochialism the view that man is of a piece with his habitat may look like it belongs to 'the childhood of the human race'. Freed from that parochialism it looks like man's central surmise when the full range of human experience is legitimated and pondered profoundly: the view that is normal to the human condition because consonant with the complete complement of human sensibilities.

2. *The argument from science.* We must be careful here, for science cannot take a single step toward *proving* transcendence. But because it does prove things in its own domain and that domain has turned out to be impressive in its own right, science has become the most powerful symbol for transcendence our age affords. I shall list three teachings of contemporary science that carry powerful overtones for those with ears to hear.

a. Fred Hoyle tells us that 'no literary imagination could have

invented a story one-hundredth part as fantastic as the sober facts that (science has) unearthed'. That reality has turned out to be quantitatively more extravagant than we had supposed suggests that its qualitative features may be equally beyond our usual suppositions. If the universe is spatially unbounded, perhaps it is limitless in worth as well.

b. Wholeness, integration, at-one-ment — the concept of unity is vital to the humanities; it is not going too far to cite radical *dis*-unity (the man/world split as a final disjunction) as the fiction that has reduced the humanities to their present low condition. Yet science has found *nature* to be unified to a degree which, again, we would not have surmised without its proofs. Matter and energy are one. Time and space are one, time being space's fourth dimension. Space and gravity are one: the latter is simply space's curvature. And in the end matter and its space-time field are one; what appears to us as a material body is nothing but a centre of space-time's deformation. Once again: if we could be taken backstage into the spiritual recesses of reality in the way physics has taken us into its physical recesses, might we not find harmony hidden there as well — earth joined to heaven, man walking with God?

c. The Cartesian/Newtonian paradigm will not work for quantum physics. It is going to be very difficult to fashion an alternative, for the new physics is so strange that we will never be able to visualize it or describe it consistently in ordinary language. But this is itself exciting. We don't know where we are headed, but at least the door of the prison that alienated us and produced the Age of Anxiety is now sprung. It's true that we don't know where we are going, but scientists themselves are beginning to suggest that our haven may be nowhere in the space-time manifold since that manifold is itself derivative and relative. Our final move may be into a different dimension of reality entirely. David Bohm calls this dimension 'the implicate order', an order to which Bell's theorem, Chew's S-matrix bootstrap model as Fritjof Capra interprets it, and Karl Pribram's holographic model of mind all seem (in their various ways) to point.

3. *The argument from human health.* 'Pascal's Wager' and James' 'Will to Believe' have made their place in philosophy by virtue of their sensible suggestions as to how to proceed in the face of uncertainty. I propose that we add to them what might be called 'The Argument from Human Health'. I shall use something John Findlay has written about Hegel to make my point here, replacing his references to Hegel with phrases that describe life's final matrix — in this essay what I have been calling, with Weber, life's garden.

In my not infrequent moods of exaltation I certainly sense my garden to be enchanted. When I do hard theoretical work and succeed in communicating its results to others, I feel that the whole sense of the world lies in endeavours such as mine, that this is the whole justification of its countless atrocious irritants. I feel clear that the world has sense, and that no philosophy that sees it as disenchanted can express this sense satisfactorily. But in my more frequent mood of mild depression I do not see the world thus. I see it as bereft of sense, and I submit masochistically to its senselessness, even taking more comfort in its cold credibility than in the rational desirability of an enchanted existence. I am not even convinced that there is one best or right perspective in which the world should be viewed: it seems a provocative staircase figure always idly altering its perspective.⁴

The point is this: 'depression' and 'masochism' are pathological terms. To cast our lot with them, assuming that we see most clearly when we are unwell rather than well, is itself a pathological move. The healthy move, it would seem, is to ground our outlooks in our noblest intuitions. This leads to my fourth and final consideration.

4. *The argument from special insights.* End meets beginning: I come at my close to my title. The title of William Golding's novel *Free Fall* has obvious affinities with my subtitle, 'The Humanities as Uncontrolled Experiment', but it is an account its hero gives of something that happens to him in the course of that story that gives me my title proper. Samuel Mountjoy — his name itself elicits

a small gasp in the context of the burden and promise of the humanities — is in a Nazi concentration camp awaiting questioning about plans for a prison break. Frenetically he rehearses the tortures that are sure to be inflicted on him to extract the scrap of information he possesses when suddenly, in his own words, 'I was visited by a flake of fire, miraculous and pentecostal; and fire transmuted me, once and forever.'

Intimations like these come, and when they do we do not know whether the happiness they bring is the rarest or the commonest thing on earth, for in all earthly things we find it, give it, and receive it, but cannot hold onto it. When it comes, it seems in no way strange to be so happy, but in retrospect we wonder how such gold of Eden could have been ours. The human opportunity, always beckoning but never in this life reached, is to stabilize that gold; to let such flakes of fire turn us into 'handfuls of light'. This second image comes from a Tradition in Islam that reads, 'God took a handful of His light, and said to it "Be Muhammad".' In its esoteric, Sufic reading, the Muhammad here referred to is the Logos, the Universal Man, the Image of God that is in us all; our essence that awaits release.

Notes

¹'Beyond Progress: Three Post-Political Futures' in Robert Bundy (ed.), *Images of the Future* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1976), pp. 115-116.

²Alex Comfort, *I and That* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1979), pp. 69-70.

³'On the Disfiguration of the Image of Man in the West', Monograph published by Golgonooza Press, Ipswich, 1977.

⁴In Alasdair MacIntyre (ed.), *Hegel* (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976), pp. 19-20.

THE SOUL MUST DANCE: YEATS'S 'BYZANTIUM'

SANTOSH PALL

The one was fild
With sacred nuptialles . . .
Hymen's sweet triumphes were abundant there
Of youthes and damzels dauncing in a Sphere.
The Iliad *

Why should we honour the Gods, or join the sacred dance?
'Sophocles' King Oedipus' **

The spherical perfection is the order complete in itself in enjoined harmony, the centre defined by its own movement. It affirms man's instinctive urge to inhabit the domain of the gods, the sacred precinct. The knowledge is reflected in the ancient man's realization that the congeries of energies and essences that constitute him are the same as those that actuate the universe. These forces, too subtle for the mind alone to understand until the interior faculties integrate the nature of man, permeate the whole self. The ancients knew that the sanctified ground was the attunement of their energies to the cosmic harmonies; the lost ground, the eating of the apple of rational knowledge which brought a disintegration of the earthly and universal harmony. Man no longer walks united with the cosmic rhythms; unresponsive to the divine measure, he is a prisoner within his physical substance. Freedom, the sacred ground, may be regained in being oneself when energies may recycle with the harmonious ebb and

* Homer, *The Iliad*, trans. George Chapman, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), p. 554.

** *The Collected Plays of W.B. Yeats*, 2nd ed. (1952; rpt. London: Macmillan, 1969), p.500.

flow of the universe in restored unity, an in-tuning beyond physical confines.

Yeats's poem, 'Byzantium', attests to this supreme knowledge, the poet's journey to the holy city which finally draws him back into himself, into that interior ground which resonates in symbols. The poem as well as the images enact the same ritual, the constant unwinding and winding of the thread of being, the perning in the gyre to 'die into a dance/ An agony of trance.' The movement of imagination is completed action, living and dying and living again.

But where can the power of this unimpeded movement come from, if not from the soul? Yeats's avowal of this occurs in the Dedication of his first version of *A Vision*: 'I wished for a system of thought that would leave my imagination free to create as it chose and yet make all that it created, or could create, part of the one history, and that the soul's.' Such a state results from a full vision when, inwardly attached to the soul, one is free from all objective experience. But how is the poet to embody this full vision in forms of art? To discern this we must look at 'Byzantium' with an eye to all its unfolding symbolism and the creative process embodied in it. When the poet's imagination is freed of the mundane daylight, we see 'Byzantium' tell us of the soul's history in poetic images brought to life in movement. No other poem of Yeats suggests so vividly the soul's journey in the circuits of the sun and moon, the starlit and moonlit dome, the two halves converging in the dancer image; the dance culminating in rhythmic surging waves within. The whole act is a sacrament in inner unity of life when imagination dances unfettered on the holy ground of being.

In my reading of 'Byzantium', I wish to suggest that Yeats's poem begins with the descent into the wordless depth of a musically attuned harmony, but ends in the divine rhythms of being. For the eternal act is not merely the wordless stir of strings in the dark hushed depth of being, but the curvature of inner life — the imagination set into motion to follow the curved line in its dome-like unity. To Yeats, as we shall see, the Imagination is the free and self-determinant act of the inherent Infinite Will. In this act, we shall

discover, Yeats is nearer to the orient than to the west which postulates, in the Coleridgean sense of the imagination, the human act in separation from the Divine. Consequently, it will come as no surprise to find Yeats ultimately define Imagination in the terminology of oriental metaphysics.

The action of the poem, like Creative Consciousness, lies between the dark nether world of this wordless depth and the resurgent images in the sea of Self. In Yeatsian symbolism, one could express it as the stillness of the dark moon and the rising creativity at the full moon, 'A starlit or a moonlit dome.' As these supreme experiences are within us, external majesties must fade into the region of the unspoken word. The poem begins with the dying of the images:

The unpurged images of day recede;
The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed;
Night resonance recedes, night-walkers' song
After great cathedral gong;
A starlit or a moonlit dome disdains
All that man is,
All mere complexities,
The fury and the mire of human veins.

Motion here is directed away from life. The daylight of the bright sense-perceptions has dimmed; the rhythms of life's antinomies seem to cease: 'The Emperor's drunken soldiery are abed,' the intoxicated senses not consumed by fire as yet, but only lulled asleep. The word pattern of the formulated song or the resonance of the inner words recede as the gong of the great cathedral sounds. We realize that the poet has already moved into the dark night of the soul; the midnight bell tolls in Yeats's art at the hour when God wins. In this darkness of the soul, the imagery indicates that nothing is audible to the ear, just as nothing is visible to the physical eye. In the night of Byzantium, as darkness thickens upon its unageing monuments, we feel the soundless hush as a melodious flow of its darkness. The manifestation of this deepened hush is silently 'visible' like the sensuous image of music, the melodic contour of

the poet's consciousness in its darkened unity. In this inner vault of one's being, the dark void, or the void made luminous, there is no life of the senses, no 'complexities, /The fury and the mire of human veins.'

However, in the first stanza, a terseness and seeming expectancy lurks beneath the night hush, some tacit hint of a dream in sleep which takes us to the fluid shadowy stir and diffused imagery of the next stanza:

Before me floats an image, man or shade,
 Shade more than man, more image than a shade;
 For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
 May unwind the winding path;
 A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
 Breathless mouths may summon;
 I hail the superhuman;
 I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

The descent continues upon the unwinding path of life to enter the dark of the living grave, the Hades of terrestrial instincts, impressions and memories, the dream-world of 'kamaloka'. If we interpret the stanza within Orphic tradition, a tradition well known to Yeats, Hades is the lowest of the three kingdoms of being — spirit, soul and body — the Plutonian realm where the soul descends after death. It is dark because it is the outermost circumference of existence and hence furthest away from the Source. Originally designated by the ancients as the sublunary estate of the spirits in a state of mortality, it is the land of the dead where forms and shapes move in a haze of uncertainty, of which Yeats had quoted in his *Autobiographies* from the Chaldean Oracles: " 'Stoop not down to the darkly splendid world wherein lieth continually a faithless depth and Hades wrapped in cloud, delighting in unintelligible images.' " But in his stanza, Yeats unlocks the gates of Pluto's realm wherein lie the people of dreams. It is difficult for the eye to pierce through the mortal realm of spiritual gloom and recognize shapes and subtle emanations: 'Shade more than man, more image than a shade.' Shade, by its very

nature, bespeaks of a shadowy ghostliness; image, a more defined shape, in simplest terms, means a likeness. I think Yeats uses it here in its simple meaning as a likeness or a double of man's earthly features. 'The shade is said to fade out at last,' Yeats observes in his Note on his play, *The Dreaming of the Bones*; so would an image unless it acquired the precision of a symbol, a life beyond the dead and the living. What characterizes shade, image and man is the impermanence of their corporeal frames. For, in metaphysical tradition, they comprise the trinity of matter — body or form of a spirit, mind, and body in a material state.

Yeats was aware that this is a 'universal belief' in both the traditions of the East and the West, the way in and out of the Ancient Mysteries. It is here, then, that we prepare for life in death. For within each physical being is a higher, or spiritual, being, whatever we may call it, spirit, soul or consciousness, the supermundane that the poet hails: 'I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.' This is the image of the serpentine labyrinth of life and death. In its symbolic rendering, the essence of labyrinth is movement conveyed through the imagery of the winding and unwinding thread. The motif suggests itself in Yeats's early poetry in the dances of the superbeings in the spirit-world: 'I know where a dim moon drifts, where the Danaan kind/ Wind and unwind their dances.' It may be interesting to note that in the Megalithic cultures the labyrinthine dances represented the journey of the dead. The mummy wrappings of the image point to a body composed of death which, in turn, evokes the image of Osiris who, swathed in mummy-wrappings, presides over the Underworld as the god of death.

The belief in guardian spirits, too, is an ancient and universal one. It brings to us the knowledge of the superhuman kingdom of our being, of the soul's immortality; that life is not only on this side of death but also on the other side. This expresses the rhythm of continuity. Yet the image must not be confused with the dancer image of the later stanza of the poem. Life-in-death and death-in-life is only the image of the way forward. Being ensnared in its labyrinth is merely to gyrate in the Dance of Death where communion with

death is established by the annihilation of life. This is consistent with the purgatorial rite as described by Yeats in his early story, 'Rosa Alchemica', where, under the ceiling of the Byzantine vault, he danced with such a Hades' bobbin: 'I was dancing with an immortal august woman, who had black lilies in her hair, and her dreamy gestures seemed laden with a wisdom more profound than the darkness that is between star and star.' The dance goes on and on till life is vanquished, the victim fallen: 'I danced with one who was more or less than human, and who was drinking up my soul as an ox drinks up a wayside pool; and I fell, and darkness passed over me,' the darkness of death and not the radiance of life. Life cannot partake of its own permanence till it rises above the illusion, not merely of birth, but also of death. Dance, in its essence, is simply life on a deeper plane of consciousness, possessed in surrender to it; by becoming the One Life, which knows no end of life and death, itself it is the vibration of the unending and unbeginning being. How can a body wound in mummy-wrappings move its limbs in such a dance of life? To the poet, 'Hades' bobbin' is the shrivelled mummy-truth 'wound in mind's wandering/ As mummies in the mummy-cloth are wound'. This special ghostly image of the mind has no life, 'no moisture and no breath.' But it marks the first cognition of the poetic experience. The breathless mouth may summon other breathless mouths; the wordless depth may echo the wordless stir, string may start echoing string — the imperceptible sound of the nascent being. From silence we gain the marvel of form, subtle as sound.

'Music,' Yeats had observed very early in 'Discoveries,' 'is the most impersonal of things, and words the most personal.' Does the poet suggest that music is the utterly impersonal combination of mathematics and sound in what he called 'the impersonal land of sound and colour?' Or, are words the personal edifices created by him, sometimes hauntingly dark as the night of Byzantium, at other times luminously transparent in its moon, resonant as its dome or blazing as its fires, rhythmic as the dance? Why else is the theme in these later Byzantine poems shaped this way? Does he feel that poetry is in this harmony of sound where symbols seem to be the

unageing monuments of that sensual music where in 'the salmon-falls, the mackerel-crowded seas,/ Fish, flesh, or fowl, commend all summer long' the creative play that may shape itself in the hammered gold, perpetuated and undying? So close do the words come to the poet's experience that they are suffused with the language of action, that movement of the imagination when character is not isolated from deed. 'Character in action,' Yeats called this, 'a pause in the midst of action perhaps, but action always its end and theme.' However, in these earlier stanzas, as discussed, it is the musical quality that binds together the meaning in the tonal image of itself, the image not yet visible to the naked eye, the wordless stir is the soundless stirring of dehumanized feeling, yet not its creative play. Life is incorporated, absorbed, brought back into a phantom visage which the mind can measure in a deathly stillness. This is not the completed artifice, but the superhuman image of the incompleting, imperfectly realized, emotion — incomplete, for passion must pass through the smithies' fire before it attains the perfection of the moment eternal, the poised gesture. How else will we realize the 'miracle' that follows, of the dead coming to life in the artifice of eternity? Or those spectral mummied images of the poet's being consumed to become the full-blooded images?

The embodiment of emotion detached from shadowy memory is the golden artifice which appears with its double, the cock of Hades:

Miracle, bird or golden handiwork,
More miracle than bird or handiwork,
Planted on the star-lit golden bough,
Can like the cocks of Hades crow,
Or, by the moon embittered, scorn aloud
In glory of changeless metal
Common bird or petal
And all complexities of mire or blood.

Yeats's iconic theme here suggests that the artifact may be understood in association with the cock of Hades, the dark bird of the nether world of dehumanized mummies. The two, bearing comparison with

the twin birds of the *Mundaka-Upanishad*, are aspects of the one and the same force. The golden bird is the creative aspect, whereas the cock of Hades, the destructive force, can also compare with the Biblical raven which fed upon the carcasses in a world reduced to a dark hell after the Great Deluge, the play of a blind force in a dead universe.

Yeats must have, once again, learnt of man's pristine unity, like that of the birds, from Tagore's writings: 'In Sanskrit, the bird has been called the twice-born: so too the man is named, who has gone through the ceremony of the discipline of self-restraint,' a purging of human desires to 'become at one with the All.' This necessitates the second death of the next stanza. It is this which will explain the miraculous act and its embodiment in the image. 'Miracle' carries the meaning far beyond the work of mere hand or any natural agency. It symbolizes the twin aspects of reintegration and manifestation; the solar emblem, the golden bird, is the risen Initiate, the life-giving effulgence of the poet's being reincarnated in shape. The black bird, being the destructive aspect of the same force, scorns the world of flesh. The golden bird, likewise 'can . . . crow'; or embittered by the moon sings 'aloud' the soul's truth, its scorn of 'common bird or petal/ And all complexities of mire or blood.' In this disdain for life Yeats wants to emphasize in his artifact a distance from life; yet the moon embittered song may be all too human — articulated, would it be nature or art?

To understand this crucial aspect of Yeats's art, the phrase, 'by the moon embittered,' requires more than a paraphrase here. Even when we keep in mind the purity of the moon implicit in the first stanza of the poem, or agree with the universally accepted reading of Yeats's symbols of the sun and moon, the sun as the masculine and spiritual energy, and the moon as the symbol of feminine principle and flux, there still remains a certain evasiveness of meaning. Yeats does speak of 'the embittered sun' in an earlier poem, 'Lines Written in Dejection':

I have nothing but the embittered sun;
 Banished heroic mother moon and vanished,
 And now that I have come to fifty years
 I must endure the timid sun.

According to occult symbolism as explained in Theosophical writings, the moon is the mother because of the 'mysterious power' that it exercises over the world of 'human gestation and generation.' It is the change, the banishing and vanishing of 'heroic mother moon,' the absence of generative power, that makes the sun bitter. Yeats's cautious move towards the solar experience recalls the warning to the poet early in life to avoid 'the solar ray' and seek water, for solar symbolism 'meant elaborate, full of artifice, rich, all that resembles the work of a goldsmith, whereas 'water' meant 'lunar' . . . all that is simple, popular, traditional, emotional.

To come back to the present poem, the fickleness of the moon, with its ever-changing phases, fits in by implicit contrast with the next line about the bird: 'In glory of changeless metal.' But that is not all. What is profoundly important is the marked change now in the poet's thought. The sun, no longer 'timid,' is the dazzling image at which the poet looks with an eye made sunlike; nor is it mere endurance of it, but a deliberate seeking. Is it the poet's realization that the mother moon is the productive womb, whereas the vital power to create or generate, illuminate infinite seeds and images, the pattern of flux, is the divine potential of the sun? However, when old, the potency needs to be roused, the inert source, the slumbering imagination, wakened to actualize its potentiality. It is interesting to look at the imagery of these lines in the earlier drafts: 'Or roused by star or moonlight mocks/ Or wakened by the moonlight scorns.' Its own energy 'rouses' or 'wakens' the slumbering potential to procreate, to sing, to articulate, even if it is to scorn its own transitory image, to sing 'of what is past, passing, or to come,' as in the earlier Byzantine poem. The solar energy that the golden artifice embodies transcends the lunar sphere of shifting patterns. Therefore, we still ask, why 'moon embittered?'

There is a dual thrust in the stanza which is consistent with the mixed metaphor of the two birds, the successful interpolation of the dark bird in this second Byzantine poem. For there is an analogy between the cosmic darkness and the dark of man's being, the black birds of the cosmic 'pralaya' and the dark bird of the poet's theme. Yeats had understood the black raven as 'the desire and will of man,' mortal impulses of the nether world of man, which, in his poem, take the black shape of his passion, dark and silent as the night of his soul. To the poet, in the cosmos of his poetic myth, passion is the gathering bitterness of life; tenderness, desire, love, hate, all end in the bitter whirl of Memory, that dark pool of being where whirls of 'irrational bitterness' of life move to the centre for bitterness to purge itself. The poet's 'irrational bitterness' is like the child's cry for the moon, the world of fantasy that scorns the 'complexities of mire or blood.' At the same time, if the poet has to know passion in its fullness, he must know it in its height and depth, Eden and the nether world. Even on the ground of Eden, can he grasp the stark and bleak reality of the world of the dark bird of Hades? Perched upon the bough, can it crow like the cock of Hades and yet be the image of divine transcendence, sing of the cycles of time and yet be beyond them?

To the poet the bitterest fact of life seems to be old age: 'One looks back to one's youth as to a cup that a mad man dying of thirst left half tasted,' Yeats had written to Olivia Shakespear towards the end of the year 1926, a little after his first Byzantine poem, or as he rhymes of it in the same letter:

A madman found a cup of wine
And half dead of thirst
Hardly dared to wet his mouth,
Imagining, moon accurst,
That another mouthful
And his beating heart would burst.

Yeats would later characterize this as that 'double thirst' which haunts so much of his most deeply moving poetry of those and later

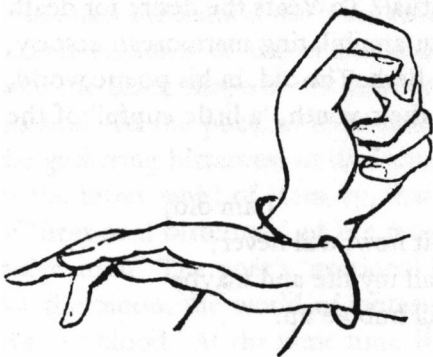
years, and which is expressed so well by himself in another letter of the same period: 'One never tires of life and at the last must die of thirst with the cup at one's lip.' It brings to mind, as does the golden bird of the poem, the tragic ecstasy of the nightingale.

But what would be a cup if it did not hold Life which is at the heart of things temporal and spiritual? To Yeats the desire for death is not the decadent desire for an annihilating marmorean ecstasy, nor bitterness mere scorn of the flesh. The old, in his poetic world, seek the perpetual day-spring of their youth, 'a little cupful' of the immortal waters of being:

I am old,
And if I do not drink it now, will never;
I have been watching all my life and maybe
Only a little cupful will bubble up.

It is the cup which will resurrect the old into the imagination that the dead may dream back, to become, to dance. But 'wisdom must live a bitter life.' It is only the principle of permanence which gives endurance to a changing form, but then 'only an aching heart/ Conceives a changeless work of art.' Only by being 'moon embittered' the bird may, like the nightingale, sing more virulently, knowing that the moonlight must pass away, yet capturing the 'joy in the passing moment, emotion without the bitterness of memory.' Sweetness may compensate for bitterness; a bird song is the true voice of passion and not a mechanical refrain of nature. Yeats, however, strives not to escape the pain or bitterness — not merely bear aloft with the bird — but to warble of it in bird notes, the possibility within it of its own transmutation. Roused, wakened or embittered, the golden artifice, knowing of its own enduring essence, the enduring pattern of reality, scorns and yet sings of the 'themes of the embittered heart.' But in distinction from 'common bird or petal,' it is as Yeats wants of his poems: 'to be all emotion and all impersonal,' memories forgotten and re-born in what may be called gestures 'natural to the twice-born'; emotion embodied in the perpetuated artifice, life transmuted into art.

Yeats is certain that images fashioned out of the same essence can correspond; symbols, too, can have an equivalence like Yeats's Shape-Changers, one moment 'half woman and half bird of prey' dancing in the fading light, another time the woman-idol of metallic



Bird perched upon the bough. Hindu dance mudra.

Drawing courtesy Mrs Mary Mody.

radiance of the moon that it 'flings out upon the fifteenth night.' In the earlier play, *At the Hawks's Well*, Cuchulain had declared to this half woman half bird: 'Grey bird, you shall be perched upon my wrist,' but had not succeeded in his quest, for he had not been able to achieve identity with the act; he merely staggered but could not dance like the immortal being. The

plastic power of the soul comes only, Yeats knows, 'by an act of imagination,' a disengaging from time and place to reach the axis of being, the golden tree of the present poem. It is there that the poet's imagination may find a resting-place in the image perched upon the bough. The two halves of the symbol, like the two birds, perch together upon the axial unity of the star-lit bough. Shape-changing is the process in the poet's own experience, of consciousness which is undivided; that moment, re-born in fire, which in its perfection, remains unchanged in gesture symbolic of it.

We miss all conception of this truth in the symbol when we overlook the vital movement inherent in it. Only symbols which embody the dual force, the motion of life and death, the embodied act, are eternal in their rhythmic perpetuity. The creative act is the symbol of agony and sacrifice; the contradiction of death must be re-birth

into higher being. It is destruction that heralds creation, bitterness the song, the agony that ends in the dance:

At midnight on the Emperor's pavement flit
Flames that no faggot feeds, nor steel has lit,
Nor storm disturbs, flames begotten of flame,
Where blood-begotten spirits come
And all complexities of fury leave,
Dying into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

The poem once again moves to the Emperor's pavements in the Byzantine city which has become empty after the night gong, withdrawn into the dark vault of the soul. But now the dark interior landscape of the imagination suddenly flames. It is as if the ghosts of the second stanza flicker and swarm to torment the inner silence, passions and emotions that blaze in the hell of memory. Of what 'guilts' has the imagination to free itself? In the second stanza there was only the physical death, a purging of the images of the day, of sense perceptions. It signified the soundless depth where old emotion moved as melody; words, without the moisture of the living, floating in the ghostly interior of the mind. Now the poet's experience deepens to full realization of the cognitive act begun in the earlier stanza. The transition is, perhaps best understood in Yeats's own words: 'The toil of the living is to free themselves from an endless sequence of objects, and that of the dead to free themselves from an endless sequence of thoughts.' To this Yeats adds, 'One sequence begets another.' The earlier sequence of stanza two leads to the present act; there must be spiritual death now for spiritual re-generation of the image, the act of the imagination begun finds its culmination.

Immediately we are led to see that the refiner's fire does not purge or drive out the dross of 'mire or blood,' the day images, but it purges, as Yeats writes in the stanza, 'complexities of fury,' the passions of the unexpiated dead, the hollow images of night. Images of night which emerged after the first death were the living finding freedom

from 'an endless sequence of objects'; now the dead seek liberation from 'an endless sequence of thoughts.' To explain this we may turn to Yeats's note on 'An Image from a Past Life,' where he wrote of his image as not from 'concrete memory,' but 'chosen from *Spiritus Mundi* by the subconscious will,' which corresponds with the summoned shade or image of the earlier stanza of the poem. But he had further explained in the note that if such an image is to cease being a torment, a perplexity, then it must divest itself of all clinging passions and emotions through the winding thread of lives. It is this deathless dance set into motion in the beginning of the poem which attains its poise through agonizing motions of the dancer, the quintessential image of the entire act. For the act of imagination, to the poet, is the ritualistic rite beyond the mummied truth of the mind or the blood-begotten furies of the heart.

This takes us to the dance of agony, the refining act of the image. The image dwells in 'the Burning House' of the soul, 'suffers/ In a single day or a single night,/ . . . Eight hundred million four thousand/ Passions and evil thoughts,' the Chorus sings in the Japanese play, *Motomezuka*, or as Yeats sees it, an endless gyration in the starlit or moonlit dome of the soul. 'How many more' would come to torment her, she 'who died ages ago?' sings on the Chorus. In the play, the image, purged through 'the waters of the stream,' after dying a physical death, lives on through the hell of her burning passions, or as Yeats's summary of the play tells us:

I think of a girl in a Japanese play whose ghost tells a priest of a slight sin, if indeed it was sin, which seems great because of her exaggerated conscience. She is surrounded by flames, and though the priest explains that if she but ceased to believe in those flames they would cease to exist, believe she must, and the play ends in an elaborate dance, the dance of her agony.

To the poet passion is no sin, yet some salvation is sought from its torments. Must the image remain buried beneath the mound of memories? 'Must I remain forever hidden beneath the moss,/ Here in these shadows of the grass?' asks the Chorus on behalf of the

young woman, Unai, in the play. Through what empty hells must it pass till the mirror is absolutely cleansed in the final 'oneness of the void?' What shapes does 'sin' acquire before the imagination is absolved of memories? The natural climax is the flame-like whirling image in the smouldering smoke of its passion:

UNAI. I thank you, priest.
In the midst of my ceaseless agony,
Your words of prayer have reached my ears.
Now, through the smoke of the Hell of Awful Burning,
I see a tiny chink of brightness.
O welcome comfort!
But I am afraid . . .
What strength have I to escape?
And once more — how horrible! —
Their ghosts take flight, and there appears
Before my eyes a mandarin duck,
Now changed to a bird of iron!
Its beak is steel, its claws are daggers,
It tears at my skull and now it will devour
The marrow of my bones!

...

PRIEST. She shrieks, "My torments have begun!"
Hardly has she spoken than from the mound
A swarm of flickering flames sweeps down.

UNAI. These lights are human souls
Turning into demons!

PRIEST. They brandish their scourges,
They run after her!

UNAI. I try to flee, but the sea is before me!

PRIEST. And behind, an ocean of flames!

In this consuming act of the imagination, flames leap and dart, grow 'dim or bright according to the intensity of the passion' that

accompanies the event which the image dreams back. In the play, the image tries to escape but is 'trapped between water and fire,' the terrestrial and divine, desire and salvation, is 'helpless, lost.' In this Burning House of fleshly desires, she presses 'against a roof pillar,' seeks the axial Unity of Being:

CHORUS. She presses and clings fast.
But suddenly the pillar's length
Bursts into flame. Now she embraces
A column of fire.
Alas, I am burning, she cries,
It is unbearable!
Every limb is transformed
To white-hot flame and pitch-black smoke.

UNAI. Then once again I rise up, whole.

But she rises once more only to suffer more hells of pain till, emotion exhausted, the Phantasmagoria of the imagination completes itself.

CHORUS. She rises up once more.
Hell's demons lash her with their whips,
They drive her off. Away she stumbles,
Destined to suffer again and again
The infinite tortures of the Eight Great Hells.

...

But then — a brief reprieve in her anguish? —
The demons vanish, the flames die out,
And darkness covers the scene

...

She vanishes.
Like the dew on shady meadow grasses,
She vanishes from sight.
The shadow of the dead has disappeared.
The ghost of the dead is gone.

Emotion consumed, the image vanishes into the dark depth; the image dies a second death, dies

into a dance,
An agony of trance,
An agony of flame that cannot singe a sleeve.

This 'trance,' in the oriental religious tradition, is the dreamless sleep of Nirvana, that bottomless dark lake of his heart where, as the Indian poet also wrote, the image must plunge and vanish so as to resurrect in the mirror of the full moon of the heart, the image in the imagination. In Yeats's poem we see the image enact this death, passion purged through the very burning of its fire.

In such symbolic dying, no shape clings after death; no man, image, or shade haunts, no earlier passions or memories torment. The Imagination is freed of all except itself; everything pared off, burnt away, the image stands revealed in the depth of its being, the word realized which lay hidden in emotional melody, the resonance of inner meaning. It is then that we may discover in this resonance the dance of life begin, the act of the Imagination take place. Unity, the final act, is not mere harmony of soul-strings in the unconscious slumber of dreamless sleep, but to resonate with the energies in the cosmic dance, the conscious rhythmic act of being, when, as Tagore writes, 'living atoms . . . vibrate in tune with the note of the harp-string.' Flames are merely the external signs of that consummation of being which gives release to the inner powers in the dance of life.

To die into the dance is to die into the heart of rhythm, that stillness where all movement begins. The dance is movement no less than a flame — unflickering, poised. In self-sufficing gesture of the soul, rhythm expresses itself in terms of the Infinite. This is what is indicated by Yeats in his earlier Byzantine poem when he asks the sages to descend from their niches to pern in the gyre. The gesture of wholeness must be of time still, and time moving. More aptly, in the second poem, the dancer becomes the symbol of the act, unmoving, yet movement itself. Yeats was aware that only those who have become their own movement know what movement is in stillness. I think that is also why the poem, in conscious design, moves from Nirvanic stillness to the intensity of rhythm in stanza five. In

moving from fire to water, Yeats reproduces the cosmic myth of re-generation. In symbolic ultimates of the dance the whole vista of meaning and process may be seen. In dance-like waves, image follows image in released rhythms:

Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood,
 Spirit after spirit! The smithies break the flood,
 The golden smithies of the Emperor!
 Marbles of the dancing floor
 Break bitter furies of complexity,
 Those images that yet
 Fresh images beget,
 That dolphin-torn, that gong-tormented sea.

Rhythms of life flow with the vigour of imagination. In fluid continuity images run to the midpoint, the Paradise, 'Astraddle on the dolphin's mire and blood.' Their vehicles are moulded out of their thoughts, 'both aquatic and fiery' symbols of the mortal and immortal forces of being.

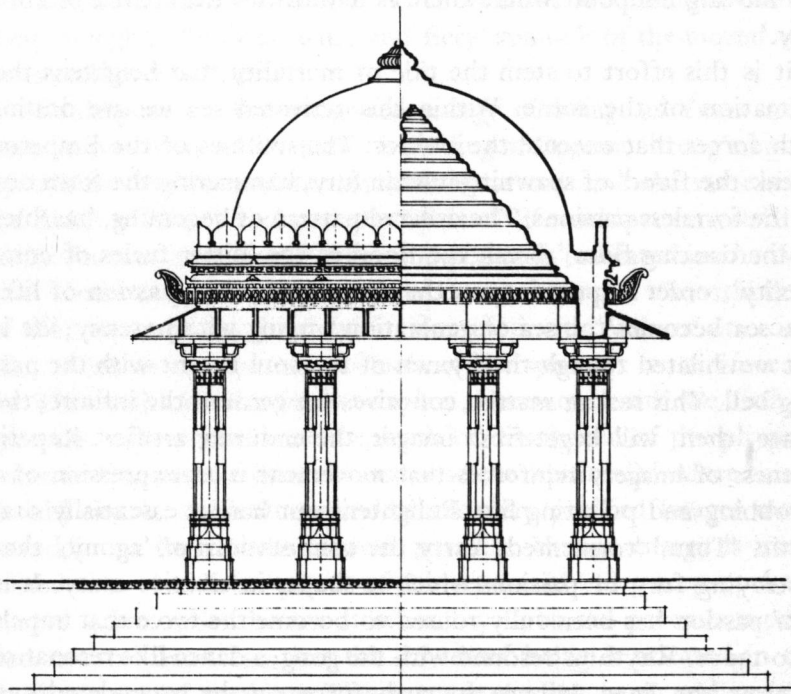
The dolphin, or the integrated energy of being, as Yeats must have known even earlier than his reading of Eugenie Strong's book, *Apotheosis and After-Life*, symbolizes 'at one and the same time the Spirit of life eternal and the Spirit of life and love terrestrial — in the human compound.' That compound is indicated in the dolphin's 'mire and blood,' for water to the ancients was 'the vital fluid of life.' Esoterically, the dolphin, identified with 'Makara' or crocodile, a fish, is the 'manasic' vehicle of the spirit. It is therefore, as the Theosophical texts further explain, 'connected with the birth of spiritual 'microcosm,' and the death or dissolution of the physical universe (its passage into the realm of the Spiritual).' After this it should not be difficult to understand why purified images move astraddle on their backs towards paradise. Human energy is transmuted into the divine power of the terrestrial being to propel the purged spirit across the sea of sensuality upon the pavements purified by the flames so that the power of being is released in the rhythmic act of creation. This is made evident in an earlier draft

note by Yeats on the Byzantine poems: 'and in one poem I have pictured the ghosts swimming, mounted upon dolphins, through the sensual seas, that they may dance upon its pavements.'

This, undoubtedly, brings to mind the image of Nereids riding upon the dolphins in the Sea of Neptune, the astral fluid of the ancients, where one can be ensnared in the delusion of dreams or 'maya.' But it is the direction of the dolphins which tells us that it is a willed act and not mere drifting. When dreams are backed by the rational faculties of the illumined Mind, they reveal the creative process of the one life in its play, the creative dance, and not the illusion of 'maya' in the sea of consciousness. The intent of the lines points to the application of Buddhist symbology where the fish, because of its manoeuvrability in deep waters or against the current to the source, symbolizes Nirvanic unity. Only by dying at the gate of Nirvana can the redeemed soul pass on to perfection, into that self-moving midpoint where there is re-birth in 'the artifice of eternity.'

It is this effort to stem the tide of mortality that heightens the animation of the scene. Within this activated sea we are dealing with forces that execute the artifice. The smithies of the Emperor 'break the flood' of spawning human fury, hammering the form out of the formless passions. The ordered pattern of becoming, 'marbles of the dancing floor,' break the flood of the 'bitter furies of complexity'; order imposed upon the disordered bitter passion of life. The sea becomes the sea of generation surging with potency; life is not annihilated though the hymen of the soul is rent with the passing bell. This sea, or matrix, conceives the germ of the infinite; the image, then, will beget fresh images, the enduring artifice. Repetitiveness of imagery reinforces that movement is an expression of a throbbing and pulsating life. Enlightenment here is essentially dramatic. 'Torn,' 'tormented,' carry the connotations of 'agony,' that destroying fury of passions which re-shapes in creative unity. It is as if passion has been fully roused to become the force that impels it to move. Rhythms resound with the gong; a dance-like resonance informs the lines. Miracle is, such force can be engendered and

embodied in a line. In this, the stanza gathers to itself the resonance of all the other images and symbols of the poem. The winding thread, the darting flames dancing to some invisible measure, the dying into the dance, the released energy in the dolphins' movement in the vibratory waters of being, are evidence of the same spiralling rhythm which connects us with the symbolic depth of our invisible source. The dome represents the ordered harmony of this movement in the curved line of imagination, the growth or movement of life from chaos to order, from outward to inner; the bird, the embodiment of this movement in gesture. It is this harmony and rhythm of motion which makes the whole a dance, the in-tuned movement which confides to us the secret of an abiding life. The paradise myths give hint to this inner mystery.



THE ARTIST AND THE SACRED: WHERE THE BATTLE LIES

PHILIP SHERRARD

It is now some twenty years since the late Herbert Read published what were perhaps his final reflections on the state of the arts in the contemporary world. They were contained in an article to which he gave the title 'Testament' (see *Encounter*, October 1962). It is a striking and disquieting article, from many points of view. Read sees little hope for the arts. Indeed, he goes so far as to say that 'the arts fight a losing battle in our technological civilization'. At the same time he insists that although the battle is being lost, or has in all but name already been lost, none the less artists must enlist in order to fight in it. Otherwise 'we retreat into despair, silence or some dirt-dump'. At another point he is even more stringent: 'Every writer who retires to an Aegean island . . . thereafter undergoes a subtle process of degeneration. It is not necessarily a physical degeneration . . . It is the workings of a remorse for the desertion of the front line in a cultural battle, a battle that has to be waged in the thick of our fragmented and alienated societies.' Harsh words, especially to the ears of one who has 'retired' to an Aegean island; but not on that account necessarily untrue. What the article fails to say anything about, however, is why the arts are fighting a losing battle. And this, surely, is the crucial question, because until one has answered it one cannot really say who is fighting in the front line and who is not. One cannot even say where the front line is. That is why it is a question that every artist should try to answer; and what follows is my attempt to define briefly my position in relationship to it.

Whatever else one may say about works of art, it is quite clear that they are not self-generated or autonomous. They are born from or at least through living men and women. In this respect they take on the colour, if one may put it like this, of the people who give

them birth. They reflect the way of life of these people, the state of their consciousness, the quality of their being. This way of life may be rich or poor, beautiful or ugly, significant or fatuous, human or inhuman: the works of art that come from it will be in the image of their particular parent. This is to say that works of art always follow, or derive from, the way of life (or state of consciousness, or quality of being) of those responsible for them. Living, or being, precedes its expression in artistic forms, and it is not the other way round. A spiritual or sacred art — the art, say, of Byzantium and of mediaeval Europe — presupposes a way of life centred in the knowledge and experience — or, rather, in a knowledge that is the experience — of spiritual realities. It presupposes a metaphysical view of the universe, one that sees reality as issuing from God in successive levels — levels that may be summarized as the angelic, the psychic and the physical. When this vision of things is lost, art ceases to have a spiritual or sacred content. This in its turn means that artists are no longer living a life in which the experience of spiritual realities is their overriding concern. It means that they are living a life in which either their individual mental or rational activities or their individual emotions or a mixture of both are now the determinative factors. Correspondingly, they will see themselves and the world they live in as realities that exist in their own right, apart from God, independent of God. Western art of the last few centuries is for the most part a reflection of this way of looking at things. It is a record of what happens when man tries to live as though he were a self-subsistent being of reason and sense, and as though the universe is not multi-structured but to all intents and purposes limited to its purely physical dimension.

A price has to be paid for everything: choice involves elimination. If I choose to live as though I were identified solely with my human aspects, or even if I choose to live as though I could be human while identifying solely with my human aspects, I eliminate from my life and hence from my art all that is more-than-human, all that is spiritual and capable of endowing myself and my art with a spiritual or sacred quality. I condemn myself to living in a world, and to

creating a world, which reflects more and more the idea that I now have of myself, the idea of what I now consider to be real and possible and important: that reflects more and more the norms of a rationalistic outlook and the dominantly materialistic sense of life that goes with it. The final consequence of this choice, transposed to a communal scale and embracing for all effective purposes the whole of western society, is the modern technological world: a world which on the one hand represents the final objective embodiment of the norms of reason and logic in its endless annihilating technical and mechanical processes and on the other hand is characterized by a blind search for ever more powerful, stimulating and violent forms of emotional or physical sensation. Such a world is indeed the *reductio ad absurdum* of a way of life based upon the notion that man is a reason and sense-conditioned creature and nothing more.

If in terms of this reading of our recent history we now ask why the arts are fighting a losing battle in our technological civilization — or have already lost the battle — the answer will be similar to that given on another occasion: the devil cannot expel the devil. An art which is itself the product of exactly the same way of life or sense of life as that which has produced this civilization is powerless to prevent or check or in any way reorientate the development of the world of which it is a part: it is ultimately defeated from the start. Artists whose way of life does not include the experience of spiritual realities or even the acknowledgment of these realities, and whose art is therefore the product of their individual and subjective mental, emotional or sensational activities and preoccupations, are simply deluding themselves when they talk of being in the front line in a cultural battle against the domination of machines, the depravity of taste, the vast inhumanity that typify our contemporary societies: they are the servants and victims and instruments of exactly the influences that have shaped these societies, whatever gesture of defiance or cry of anger they may make against them. For the bitter truth is that both the artists and the works of art that have formed the culture of our local European and American world — that culture for which Herbert Read told us we must fight — are for the most part

among the chief agents of precisely that fragmentation and alienation the full effects of which are now all too evident. There can be no art that can resist, let alone prevent, the triumphal course of our technological civilization towards whatever nemesis it may be leading us except that which itself derives from a way of life whose vision and central experience transcend the categories of reason and sense of which this civilization is the final monstrous projection. And there can be no art that manifests such vision and experience — no art that possesses a sacred quality — until there are artists who have first rediscovered how to live a way of life in which their realization is possible.

In short, the battle is not to be waged in the first instance on the so-called cultural front at all, and to act as though it were is inevitably to implicate oneself in and to implement the very process of degeneration that one most wishes to avoid. It may indeed be that the only positive course now for the artist is one of retreat from the cultural battle, retreat not into despair or some dirt-dump but into silence or into what Yeats has called 'our proper dark': that chaos or abyss of pre-formal possibilities in which he may come to know the pre-artistic (because unmanifest) sources of spiritual energy from which our world is increasingly estranged. It may be that he has to renounce all art in the contemporary sense and to re-baptize himself in the waters of art's negation — waters that are the *fons et origo* of its existence. What, in other words, may be demanded is a renunciation as total as that of the catacombs and the monasteries: a renunciation from which sprang Aghia Sophia and Chartres, plain-song and ikon, and through which was generated that spiritual capital of which the art and the life of our post-mediaeval world has been first the exploitation, then the dissipation, and finally the exhaustion. But even if such a renunciation is beyond his scope, he must at least resign from the belief that, with the weapons with which he is armed by our humanist and scientific culture, he is capable of doing anything that doesn't make matters worse. He has to resign, not in the name of his civilization (by which in any case he has already been defeated, and in which in any case it is impossible to

live creatively in the normal way), but in the name of those more-than-human, those spiritual realities that we have so neglected and denied. For unless he can do this — unless he can rediscover those realities and make them effective in his own life — he will not be able to confer on his art that more-than-human, that sacred quality which alone can help us towards the realization of values capable if not of displacing at least of indicting those that dominate our present desacralized world.

Yet given that an artist today would like to produce an art of this kind, is it possible for him to do so? Can he so become aware of spiritual realities that he is able to saturate his art with their lustre? An art that possesses a sacred quality is an art that mirrors the miraculous presence of the spiritual world. It is an echo from heaven on earth, transfiguring with a supranatural beauty the matter in which it is embodied, removing its opacity and making it a symbol of a higher level of reality. In this way it serves as a vehicle that puts man in mind of his spiritual origins and helps him in his efforts to return to them. It therefore presupposes on the part of the artist what we have called a metaphysical view of the universe, one that sees reality as issuing from God and as possessing a hierarchical — angelic, psychic and material — structure. But it also presupposes the irruption of the higher level — the angelic level — into the psychic and physical planes of his existence, for otherwise he cannot confer on the material of his art that luminosity without which it cannot properly be called sacred.

In a society in which a metaphysical view of things is the norm and whose members are all to a greater or lesser degree engaged in the practice of the religion in which this vision is enshrined and whose purpose is to awaken an awareness of it in every individual, it is quite clear how the artist can attain a personal experience of spiritual realities and so endow his art with a sacred quality. Moreover, the images and symbols of which he makes use in his art, as well as the method according to which he works, will for the most part be those already consecrated by his particular religion and their efficacy in terms of producing a sacred art will already be well attested. In

such a traditional society his art therefore will be to all intents and purposes a liturgical art, designed to function within a framework of worship and ritual observance, of prayer, ascetic practice and contemplation.

In our modern society none of this applies, and that is why the question of whether or not in its absence it is possible to produce an art that possesses a sacred quality is a very real one. It is easy to say that it is possible but only on condition that the artist affiliates himself to one of the traditional religions that still in spite of everything survives in the modern world, accepts its discipline, practises its spiritual exercises, and adopts its consecrated artistic forms and methods. But one wonders whether it is so simple. An artist must by definition make use of a language, pictorial, musical or verbal. If his art is to function, this language must be alive, dynamic, rooted in the artist's own experience and sensitivity. Moreover, it must be a language that communicates, if not to the whole of a given society, at least to those sections of it with which the artist in some way identifies himself. An artist cannot function in a vacuum, unrelated to a particular historical and social context. He must have one foot firmly in the world of time and place, in the world of change and transitoriness. In a traditional society, this language is for the most part given to him. It is given to him in the forms and symbols of the religion that dominates his particular collectivity and marks all its activities. He will of course modify these forms and symbols according to his own particular sensibility and in response to certain inner needs of that collectivity in the time and place in which he lives. But any such modifications will be subordinate to the over-riding coherence of the traditional language of which he makes use — a language which he shares with his collectivity and through which consequently he can communicate in a living manner an awareness of spiritual realities to that collectivity.

In a non-traditional society, an artist may still wish to communicate an awareness of spiritual realities, but the conditions under which he must do this have now radically changed. First of all, he will have no language which is given to him as it is in a traditional

society. He must find his own language, his own voice. To say that he can find this language in the forms and symbols of the religion which his society has rejected, and so remind that society of them, is to ignore the other side of the artist's predicament: to be rooted in a particular historical and social context and to use a language that communicates vitally and dynamically to those to whom he tries to speak and for whom the language of a traditional religion has ceased to function creatively. For an artist to refuse to enter into the living actuality of his time and place, including all that is most sordid, tragic and wayward in them, or to refuse to speak in a language that reflects their temper and pathos, is for him to condemn his art to lifelessness and sterility.

This does not mean that the artist has to be politically committed. To discern where and in what forms the voice of eternity speaks in the broken accents of a disinherited time and place, and to give expression to this voice, demand a commitment, and a self-exposure, of a far deeper kind than that of mere politics. It demands an unflinching truth to one's own inner being and to the language that comes as genuinely, as non-artificially, from one's soul as the tree from the earth. In this respect it should be remembered that an artist is as much chosen as choosing: he is the messenger, the instrument — the victim even — of a power that he must obey as a condition of being an artist at all. This means among other things that a great deal of the preparation for his work — its inner gestation and parturition — goes on at a level which he cannot consciously control, with the result that he cannot be precisely aware of the nature of what he is to produce or of the form it will have when produced, any more than a mother can be precisely aware of the nature of the child to which she is to give birth or of the form it will have. In this sense, an artist simply does what he has to do. To choose to do otherwise, however desirable for other external or objective reasons, is to cripple and defeat himself as an artist. This is to say, in this context, that it is impossible for an artist to continue to use a traditional language — in terms both of symbolism and method — when this has no vital creative link with his own world, inner or outer.

Indeed, part of the artist's task in communicating an awareness of spiritual realities in a non-traditional society may require that he uses forms and methods that are specifically non-traditional in the liturgical sense, because only through such forms and methods may he be capable of transmitting to his spectators or readers or listeners a true and living awareness of what their life is like when reduced to a non-spiritual or non-traditional level. He may have to make them aware of the hell in which they live by projecting it before their consciousness in the forms of his art. In this way an art which appears to be the most anti-traditional in form and method may well have a sacred function or at least a sacred intention — T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is a case in point. But this apart, the norms of a traditional liturgical art cannot serve to determine whether a work of art in a non-traditional society has a sacred function or not. In fact, it may not be going too far to claim that in a non-traditional society an art which makes use of traditional forms and methods is likely to be a mere stereotype and not art at all in the creative sense of the word. Be this as it may, the art of a non-traditional society that seeks to communicate an awareness of spiritual realities, of the miraculous presence of the spiritual in the material, must do so in terms of symbols and images that will be but derivatively related to those of the liturgical art of a traditional society, or may not be related to them at all. In this respect it has to be remembered that as everything, rightly seen, mirrors the eternal, and as everything, rightly seen, is a symbol of a higher level of reality, a work of art may use a symbolism little related to that of a traditional liturgical art and may still act as a bridge between the material and the spiritual, earth and heaven, and may still possess a sacred quality and function.

This still leaves unanswered the question of how an artist in a non-traditional society such as our own may himself become aware of spiritual realities and so be in a position to manifest them in his work. It may be taken as axiomatic that before he has given his assent to that metaphysical view of things of which I have spoken no artist is likely to embark on the task of trying to realize in terms of his

own experience the possibilities it implies, still less to embody them in his art. But once he has given assent to it, it is certainly true that by affiliating himself to an authentic religious tradition, even if it is not one that commands the allegiance of the collectivity within which he lives, he may none the less, by penetrating into its mysteries, attain a spiritual awareness and so be able to infuse this awareness into the forms of his art.

Yet even without such affiliation an artist whose intention and attention is concentrated on the discovery and expression of spiritual principles within and without (and this, too, must presuppose his acceptance of a metaphysical view of the universe) may well be given moments of revelation and illumination, intimations and intuitions of eternity, and so transfigure the material of his art with that beauty and rhythm which are the hallmark of the sacred. To affirm this is not to propose, in a way that is now fashionable, that the artist enjoys some special status that exempts him from conditions that apply to 'ordinary' human beings, and so from the need to practise a spiritual discipline. Yet to deny it would be to deny not only the freedom of the Spirit to blow where it will but also the testimony of those works of art produced during the last centuries — relatively few though they may be — that communicate such beauty and rhythm in spite of the fact that their creators have lived outside the framework of a formal religion. But whatever his course, of this the artist must be sure: that only when his art possesses a sacred quality will it present a positive challenge to our technological world and to the degradation of human life which is endemic to it; and that he will be powerless to manifest such a quality in his art unless he has first made it effective in his own mind and heart. The primary battle is not cultural, but spiritual; and the artist has to fight it not in the thick of our fragmented and alienated society but in the depths of his own being, where alone its outcome will be decided.



KRISHNA AND THE GOPIS IN THE FOREST OF BRINDAVAN

KATHLEEN RAINE

A DEPARTURE

I

Always and only in the present, the garden,
Always today of past and future the sun,

Endless everlasting light in flower
In flowers and leaves, in boundless sky pure.

East of the westering sun, west of the new moon
Stands my small northern house and daffodils in bloom,

Yet in this wide beautiful eternal place
My heart is sore with memories and loss,

For I am leaving you, my little world,
That still today shines with the golden light,

End and beginning of the one epiphany
Here and now of all that was, all that will be.

Grief, departure, exile — what are these
Mute Eumenides, who for all the bird-song and the daisies
Compel from my reluctant eyes these futile tears?

II

'Be glad' (a far voice speaks to me)
'Be glad you are required to part
'From all that withholds you from being free

'As the hills, as the clouds, as bird and tree.
 'Break all bonds, old woman, while you may,
 'Enter your own eternity.'

'Then what is grief?' I reply,
 'Unriddle me this sore heart
 'That has no words, but tells and tells
 'From mother to daughter, daughter to mother
 'That love must choose, over and over,
 'Mortal things, all earth's minute
 'Petals and wings.'

'You have loved other gardens long ago,
 'And all in the one green veil are woven together,
 'Unbroken the stream of the light, the stream of the air,
 'Seed to grass, acorn to oak, forest to fire,
 'The unborn and the dead companion you everywhere,
 'Where you have been always you are.'

'It is their transience makes dear
 'Places and days that once were home,
 'Sheltering refuges of earth
 'Nearest at heart when they are gone,
 'Faces we will not see again:
 'Is it not death that seals our love?'

III

It winds into the heart,
 That unbroken thread
 From present to past,
 Without to within,
 From seen to seer,
 Sky, garden, tree, bird
 Transmuted, transposed

To memory, to pain
These young leaves, these daisies,
The dappling wind
That glances on blades
Of glistening grass,
Become what I am
Who am the sum
Of all I have lost,
Who am the maker,
From greenness a joy,
From wind, wisdom,
From cold earth, gold,
From gold of the sun
Life-blood of sorrow
That deepens the heart.
I am my past
And future approaching
Days unknown.

But of all these none
Brighter nor dearer
Than the wind and the daisies,
The little hedge-sparrow
Fearless and sun-glossed
Searching the flower-bed
Outside my window,
Winged with time
The ever-present
Flitting and flaunting
Its here and now
Light into love,
Leaf into loss.

IV

Vista of winter woods where we will go no more —
The frozen lake, mute swans; beyond,
That chateau all remember
Where dwells, or where once dwelt —

I glimpsed, long, long ago, the place, but they are dead to us
Who in another time, another land
Are what we might have been, might be
If world were reverie, or dream a world.

The two black watch-dogs guard;
Propitiatory cake to close these mouths —
Hope out of what memory
Like music in still air, as if — but here
The dream is changed: no door into that house.

V

Into this meagre earth, all these last years,
Imagined paradise has in these budding apple-trees,
These daisies closing in the evening grass,
Sent down invisible roots
That now I must tear up again,
From this little house wrench its inhabiting dream.

This quiet room —
Oak cupboard, lamp, the jug of daffodils,
The little bunch of wood anemones
Left by my granddaughter who herself is gone,
This sheltering present only another memory-place
Where sad ghosts wander
Who are ourselves grown tenuous
Haunters of home we can never re-enter.

My mother's arm-chair, the writing-desk where my father
Kept faded snapshots, his sister's bible, my grandfather's
last letter;
Painting of a rainbow a friend made from this very window,
The cups and plates, the dominos and jigsaw-puzzles,
The cat hearth-rug and faded Morris curtains
Never again together.
Moss and sticks do not make a nest, but the careful weaver
Of fragments the winter winds will scatter.

Logs glow on the hearth, the evening sky is clear
In the west where the sun has set, darker
Where the rising moon, one day past Easter,
Is veiled in cloud. Snipe whirr
Over the marsh: it seems that never
Could I let go this here and now,
But on my unsteady table yet again I write in sorrow:

O woman's heart!
Eternity's long now is for us unending departure.

VI

This, my last home
Is woven of memories
Lifelong; my mother's
Bridal-gifts, linen
Her fingers sewed,
Her work-table stored
With thimble and skein.
I have lived on
In my mother's world
With things her fingers
Endeared by touch,

Cake-tins, kitchen gear
Tell of her life,
Of hearth and table
Swept and spread
For husband and child,
Silent messengers
Charged with her love
To be delivered
Now she is gone
Who from her dreams
Drew out each clue
To be unwound,
Each stitch a thought
To clothe, to hold fast
Her one daughter
Some day in a future
That now is my past.

It is myself
I leave behind,
My mother's child,
Simple, unlearned,
Whose soul's country
Was these bright hills,
This northern sky.

VII

Take but a step
And there is no return,
Look back from the field gate,
Home is already gone.

'I could have changed my mind' —
But the one mind knows all

Future and past together
In the unchanging whole.

'What if some other way
'The price were found
'I need to keep this house,
'Could I not then stay?

'What is the sum I need
'But loaves and fishes multiplied?'
But even he
Whose hands bestowed

Harvest of earth and sea
Knew when his time had come,
Might not evade
By the mere turning of an ass's head

What he had to do,
Although he chose
Of all the directions of the world
The worst road.

VIII

What, then, do they gain
Who follow an invisible master,
Leave land, wife, father and mother?
Nothing! who can bargain
With that giver who takes all?
But being what we are must travel
Who are ourselves his way unknown,
His untold truth, his light unseen.

IN PARALDA'S KINGDOM

I

All day I have listened to their voices sounding
Over the high fells, the wind's kingdom,
Unhindered elementals of the air,
Their long continuous word meaning
Neither sorrow nor joy, loud singing
Great angels of the stars will hear when I am gone.

II

At rest in changing:
Across the blue they move
Passive in the embrace of the winds of heaven,
Visible melting into invisible, to reappear
In wisp and fringe of pure
Vapour of whitest mist as slowly they gather and
come together
In serene for ever
Unbroken comingling consummation of water and air.

III

They accuse none,
Rays of the westering sun, or these
Folding clover leaves and sleeping daisies,
The missel-thrush that sings
To me, to all within the compass of his song,
My neighbour field-mouse
Venturing tremulous from hide under stone
Accepts the crumbs I have scattered;
From grass-blade to farthest star nothing withheld
From the unjust or the just; whom also made
The giver of these.

VI

Stillness after storm, heart at rest
In quiet song
Of missel-thrush; the winds
Have fallen, their work done.

I who am of another kingdom
Yet have endured their blast,
Attended their wisdom,
My work too ended,

Who to their wild voices
Have added my descant
Of joy and sorrow,
Sounding of intangible thought.

Who made that music
Alone can know
What meaning moves
When gale winds from the hills blow.

VII

On wet west wind soft sift of rain
Wafts from birch and briar breath
Of invisible life on the invisible air:
From memory's lost beginning
Recollection from beyond time reminds that love
Is for nothing other
But a state of being
long forgotten.

DAVID GASCOYNE

PRELUDE TO A NEW FIN-DE-SIECLE

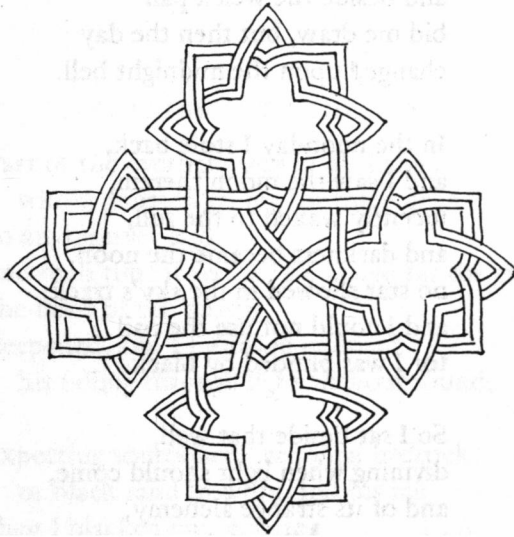
Incessant urging, curt, peremptory:
Write what you will, in verse or otherwise,
Intelligible, using simple metaphors.
Address a reader not just hypothetical
But flesh and blood in no need of harangues.
The time has come. We're on the very brink.
Of what? Can any prophet, true or false,
Make himself heard above the mad uproar
Of all the mingling and ambiguous,
Self-righteous or dismayed denunciations,
Warnings and dire predictions that assail us from
All 'informed sources', media-debased and bent?
--- If this is a poem, where are the images?
--- What images suffice? Corpses and carrion,
Ubiquitous bloodshed, bigger more beastly bombs,
Stockpiled atomic warheads, staunchless wounds,
Ruins and rubble, manic messiahs and mobs.
--- But poets make beauty out of ghastliness . . .
--- You think I want to? Think truth beautiful?
--- 'A terrible beauty is born . . .' --- It is indeed.

In youth I did in spite of everything
Believe with Keats and Shelley such things as
That poets can 'legislate' and prophesy,
Or like Stravinsky when he wrote 'The Rite'
Become transmitting vessels for new sounds
From an inspiring, unknown world within.
I'm over sixty now, my dubious gift has gone;

I can but grope for unexpected similies.
 But now as in the Thirties I do once again
 Feel passion and frustration and that sense
 Of expectation, imminence and pressing need
 To declare something that just must be said.
 Mature awareness knows that poetry
 Today demands the essence and the minimum:
 That only Silence such as God's could say the Whole.
 One stark vocabulary at least remains,
 The litany of lurid headline-names
 Merely to mention which can nag the nerves:
 Vietnam, Angola, Thailand and Pakistan,
 Chile, Cambodia, Iran, Afghanistan,
 Derry's Bogside, Belfast and Crossmaglen;
 Up in Strathclyde or down on Porton Down,
 At Three Mile Island and Seveso, Italy:
 Then there are Manson, Pol Pot and Amin,
 To name at random just three myth-monsters,
 Too many more to mention, all mass-murderers,
 None of them needing adjectives, and though we're sick
 Of being sickened by them they will stay engraved
 Or branded on even callous memories.

And yet I yearn to end by trying to evoke
 A summer dawn I saw when I was not yet eight
 And having risen early watched for an hour or more
 Unfold in glory all across the Eastern sky
 A transcendental transformation of auroral clouds
 Like a prophetic vision granted from on high.
 I cannot see much now. The dawn is always new
 As nature is, however much we blind ourselves and try
 To poison the Earth-Mother. But an ancient text
 Tells of what I believe will happen soon today:
 The raven disappears as night draws to its close,
 Then as the day approaches the bird flies without wings;

It vomits forth the rainbow and its body becomes red,
And on its back a condensation of pure water forms.
For that which is above is still as that which is below
For the perfecting of the One Thing, which is now
As it shall ever be, World without End, D.V.



JEREMY REED

ALLEGORY OF THE WELL

for David Gascoyne

Lately I came by a well,
and I saw the sun therein,
emblazoning its eight rays
at a sky black as moleskin,
and beside the well a pail
bid me draw, but then the day
changed upon the midnight bell.

In the noonday I stole back,
and I saw the moon therein,
lucently waxed to the full,
and darkness became the noon,
no star showed in the sky's track;
and I could not use the pail
for I was blinded by black.

So I sat beside that well,
divining when light should come,
and of its strange alchemy,
but a star eclipsed the moon,
and fell down inside the pail.
Neither in the well nor sky
would the sun show through the gale.

And rasping within the storm,
a winged serpent with gold claws
brooded like an owl over

the well, and its arcane laws,
 while I watched a sun with horns
 challenge a moon with lunar
 rays, and a strange egg was born.

From it a jewelled marine-cock
 sought the hoopoe in its nest
 for its medicinal stone,
 while the serpent's scarlet crest
 set fire to water and rock;
 and by that well I stood alone,
 gold pebbles littered the track.

FALLING WITH THE SUN

Part of the overhang was in his hand —
 who'd gone on falling for three days,
 so an observer said,
 and each time it seemed he would hit the ground,
 the floor of the quarry
 deepened, and I followed in dread
 his falling through light without sound,
 expecting somewhere, terminal bedrock,
 or black sand to withstand his fall,
 then I blacked out, clinging
 to roots, having once turned around in shock,
 and seen an iron ball
 pursuing us, and its humming
 was evil; it had taken knocks,
 but followed the man's falling without shift.
 Obscured by the ball, I pursued,
 broke in a second man,

and when the ball veered, saw who in the shaft
fell without shift of head,
and his implacable mission,
seemed not to dodge the ball, but drift

towards a matrix that would take his weight.

I followed, once looking around
to see no pursuer
or tackle followed in my path. I shut
my eyes to prevent sand
rubbing, then opened in terror;
we'd gone on falling, but the dark locked tight.

And clinging to a branch I found this man,
who'd pursued the one falling down,
and eluded the ball

I'd followed. He kept asking for the sun
to break through his dark dream
of falling through a shaft whose narrow walls
were without handholds to climb up again.

I judged him delirious, but I said,
we must have been years in falling,
and he responded, three,
without bottom. I said, look up, that red
ball which is hammering
the entrance is the sun, and we
no choice have, but to dive in dread.

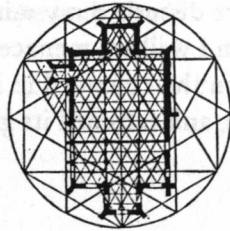
HOUSE WITHOUT WALLS

I bid my enemy depart,
he cursed me, and took me for dead,
who lay beneath my fallen house,
and dreamed upon a pallet-bed.
The Tree of Death grew in my head.

And in the leaves I saw his face,
and then a storm beat down that tree,
and in its place my ruined house
was raised, but then my enemy
was in the house and had the key.

I went off and my anger showed,
and grew to a black speaking cloud,
which took me from my own country;
my enemy lay on the road
couched as a dog, I wished him dead.

And where I went my house followed,
I dreamed I died so that I lived,
and when I woke I joined the dead.
My enemy lay down and died,
The Tree of Life grew in my head.



TREE OF FRIGHT

for Anthony Rudolf

When I walked into the garden
a black shadow grew from my head,
it grew larger pointing upwards,
and evil birds alighted on
it, and the garden turned to weed.

When I walked into the shadows
it grew light, and pointed downwards
to the weeds, and a serpent weaved
black and white and yellow flowers,
and on its tongue retained a seed.

I balanced this shadow, it grew
divided between dark and light,
dark by day and light by night,
and when the wind blew it was still.
I called it by the name of Fright.

I nurtured it, and it conceived
clouds upon a heavenly tree,
whose black and gold leaves shone brightly,
but then the gold leaves turned to red,
and with the black fell from the sky.

My Tree of Fright remained austere;
its spectre disturbed my mind,
and when I walked, menaced the ground;
the serpent had climbed in its bare
branches, and fattened its green rind.

TREE OF DEATH

I gave my love a scarlet rose,
it withered to a blackened thorn;
luxuriant green of the oak
reverted to a dead acorn,
leaving us helpless to the storm's
mintage of heavy rain.

The thorn drew blood, and on the ground
it shone as an eight-pointed star,
and when I placed the acorn there,
a warlock child with silver hair
sprang up. We knew the midnight bell
as the last of the year.

You stand beneath the Tree of Death,
not Life, the warlock said, and placed
his foot on the circumference
of the enormity the dead
would come to inhabit when raised
upon the plain, naked.

And through the dark we feared to see
horsemen break out of each cloud.
We linked arms on our marriage day,
and danced the dance of death in shrouds,
while overhead the moon was blood
red on the risen dead.

ODD CREATURE

Man in the garden lost his rib,
and woke that night to a red moon,
and sought his cradle in death's crib.

His opposite though similar
evoked in him a night-fever:
he felt his flesh; it bore no scar.

And recollected the green shade
preceding sleep, and then a cloud
had overcome him in the glade.

He never saw who came and went,
but pain was in his side, and who
he scented, hid from his intent.

But had he lost one rib or two,
his opposite could not appease
the hunger he felt grafted to?

It seemed a third species had gone
off independently, and he
would fear its shadow in the room.

And lived elusively, he'd hear
it in the tree tops or its lair;
and neither would enquire for fear.

And later found its skeleton,
and dug it in the earth; it died
oddly uncontesting even

numbers, and then the two would fight,
and he would mourn its passiveness,
and she, to have known it by night.

THE PILGRIM TO WHINNY-MOOR

On the road upward: black, unhallowed mud;
no light within the hermit's cave.

Pray that no evil's dispensed on this road.

And in the sodden furrows, a grey shape
paces in nines then disappears.

Pray that I unriddle that cat or bat.

On either side of my path a brown mist,
twists, but my holiness is straight.

Pray that I come to where I go, not lost.

Much importuned, I gave freely of alms;
and to each, his coin multiplied.

Pray that the night's without inclement storm.

Voices there are, whose temptations I hear;
my body is my spirit's trust.

Pray that I offer to the troubled, care.

Who dies tonight, may he cross Whinny-moor,
his soul unconfiscated, there.

Pray that they offer soul-cakes at his door.

May I too come to Whinny-moor at night,
and encounter no Brig o' Dread.

Pray that no wind disturbs my candle's light.

ABROAD TONIGHT

for John Robinson

Listen, the lord of the four winds
has come to sow the fields tonight,
and in the furrows spiked thistles
have become stars whose eight-rayed light
define a constellation, and
the scarecrow becomes a prophet,
leading the birds into the night.

Listen, the lord of the great clock
which ticks in outer space has come
to consult its face, and to note
that earth and earthly deeds are done,
and amplifies its dying tock,
while a peacock hatched from the sun
faces the peahen of the moon.

Listen, the lord of darkness prowls
abroad tonight, and all the dead
are gathered in a roundelay,
and wear black stars upon their heads,
and are scattered like burning straws
to the four winds, and overhead
the Lord of all the warlords broods.

CHRISTOPHER SMART IN MADNESS

They spare me Bedlam for St Luke's Shoreditch,
 who am appointed heir to King David,
 and fester here where rabid
 cries accompany Battie's enquiry
 as to madness: whence comes this divine itch
 to see into the limits of the sky?
 I trundle God's gold ball in Satan's ditch.

They bait me like a bear. My creditors
 are importuning demons who'd usurp
 my episcopal claims. They hurt
 my fevered head, and festinate the ague,
 so that I shrink back in my noisome lair,
 and crouch there, distracted, unwitting, vague.
 The fire of ADORATION burns my hair.

My wife's a Moabite, a Newbery,
 for whom I squandered my pen in burlesque
 before the angelic lyre struck
 my holiness before David. Now I pray
 that all hurt things are of one ministry.
 Listen, the redbreast sings in February,
 appointed angel to our misery.

And I am delivered from London's news,
 its pettifogging brawls. Johnson alone
 gives meat to a dead skeleton
 of words; and came by. How his linen stank,
 like mine. His strength prevents him breaking through
 to the other side of reason. I drank,
 before a red cloud opened in the blue,

and I prayed vociferously to God,
 and bound myself to the purgative wheel
 which burnt the lining of my soul.
 Jubilate Agno, they'd confiscate,
 except my mind's like a worm in a clod,
 which cut in half can still compose, secrete,
 and render consecration to David.

Cuckolded, cheated of inheritance,
 I shiver here, and hear the sudden bell
 of Staindrop Church. Lilac umbels
 chequered the grass, the wild polyanthus,
 I picked for one Anne Hope, and then in trance,
 saw our heavenly marriage through stained glass.
 God's voice was further then. I had distance.

And now a pauper go. My alms are words
 of prophecy. God lit my candlestick's
 orange and immutable wick,
 but still they never see. Harping-irons
 prod us to tasks, who cower here in dread,
 and see rats catch the bread for which we pine,
 and hungry, live upon raw gin instead.

Let Peter rejoice with the white moonfish
 that's radiant in the dark, and let attend
 Jesus on us, unsound of mind,
 who cured Legion. My brethren here despair
 of light, and must in other madhouses
 repine for day; and go without repair.
 I pray so loudly that the others curse.

The prison dampness comes to coat my skin,
who venture in God's fire, and see the stone
on the right-hand side of his throne,
witheld from man. And gold within the dark,
I see the mine of Hell where the napkin
of the escaped Jesus still redly marks
the stone, and brooding on it I see Cain.

Outside it rains. I hear a horse collapse,
and men beat it ferociously with sticks.
It died. I pray God for redress
of all animal injuries. Tonight
I wept, and thought to incur a relapse,
and in his knowledge God brightened his light.
Tonight Christ's lantern swings inside this house.



DAVID MIDDLETON

CHURCH WINDOW: NATIVITY IN WINTER

for David Jones, i.m.

Ice stains the woman's face
Bending before the child,
Creator of her grace,
Abstract of pain made mild.

The winter freaks the pane
Enclosures hedged in lead.
Snows flock against the grain
Of stable straw and bed.

Impassioned, on the rim,
Tears cross from rising eyes
Of him who sees hers dim
He once made bright and wise.

The maker broke the glass
So stained to save the dead,
Artisan of the mass
He shaped for wine and bread.

Now freezing streams refract
The starlights these engrain,
Gold even fears exact
From Anarch Night's domain.

JOHN MONTAGUE

MOUNT EAGLE

The eagle looked at this changing world;
sighed and disappeared into the mountain.

Before he left he had a last reconnoitre:
the multi-coloured boats in the harbour

Nodded their masts, and a sandy white
crescent of strand smiled back at him.

How he liked the slight, drunk lurch
of the fishing fleet, the tide hoist-

ing them a little, at their ropes' end.
Beyond, wrack, and the jutting rocks

emerging, slowly, monsters stained
and slimed with strands of seaweed.

Ashore, beached boats and lobster
pots, settled as hens in the sand.

II

Content was life in its easiest form;
another was the sudden, growling storm

which the brooding eagle preferred
bending his huge wings into the winds'

wild buffeting, or thrusting down along
the wide sky, at an angle, slidways to

survey the boats, scurrying homewards,
tacking against the now contrary winds,
all of whom he knew by their names.
To be angry in the morning, calmed
by midday, but brooding again in
the evening was all in a day's quirk
with lengthy intervals for silence,
gliding along, like a blessing, while
the fleet toiled on earnestly beneath
him, bulging with a fine day's catch.

III

But now he had to enter the mountain.
Why? Because a cliff had asked him?
The whole world was changing, with one
language dying, and another encroaching,
bright with buckets, cries of children.
There seemed to be no end to them,
and the region needed a guardian —
so the mountain had told him. And
A different destiny lay before him:
to be the spirit of that mountain.
Everyone would stand in awe of him.
When he was wrapped in the mist's caul
they would withdraw because of him,
peer from behind blind, or curtain.
When he lifted his wide forehead
bold with light, in the morning,
they would all laugh and smile with him.
It was a greater task than an eagle's
aloofness, but sometimes, under his oilskin
of coiled mist, he sighed for lost freedom.

THE WELL DREAMS

The well dreams;
liquid bubbles.

Or it stirs
as a water spider skitters across;
a skinny legged dancer.

Sometimes, a gross interruption:
a stone plumps in.
That takes a while to absorb,
to digest, much groaning
and commotion in the well's stomach
before it can proffer again
a nearly sleek surface.

Even a pebble disturbs
that tremor laden meniscus,
that implicit shivering.
They sink towards the floor,
the basement of quiet,
settle into a small mosaic.

And the single eye
of the well dreams on,
a silent cyclops.

II

People are different.
They live outside, insist
in their world of agitation.
A man comes by himself,
singing or in silence,

and hauls up his bucket slowly —
an act of meditation —
or jerks it up angrily
like lifting a sliver of skin,
sweeping a circle
right through his own reflection.

III

And the well recomposes itself.

Crowds arrive, annually, on pilgrimage.
Votive offerings adorn the bushes;
a child's rattle, hanging silent
(except when the wind touches it)

a rag fluttering like a pennant.

Or a tarnished coin is thrown in,
sinking soundlessly to the bottom.
Water's alchemy washes it clean:
a queen of the realm, made virgin again.

IV

Birds chatter above it.
They are the well's principal distraction,
swaying at the end of branches,
singing and swaying, darting excitement
of courting and nesting,
fending for the next brood,
who yet seem the same robin,
thrush, blackbird or wren.

The trees stay stoically silent.
 The storms speak through them.
 Then the leaves come sailing down,
 sharp green or yellow,
 betraying the seasons,
 till a flashing shield of ice
 forms of the well's single eye:
 the year's final gift,
 a static transparence.

V

But a well has its secret.
 Under the drifting leaves,
 the dormant stones in
 the whitewashed wall,
 the unpredictable ballet
 of waterbugs, insects,

There the spring pulses,
 little more than a tremor,
 a flickering quiver,
 spasms of silence;
 small intensities of mirth,
 the hidden laughter of earth.

INVOCATION TO THE GUARDIAN

Master of royal decorum,
 Great Lord of Babylon,
 Excelling in the javelin,
 Drawing of the long bow,
 Charioteering, lion spearing:

All powers in the realm,
Both physical and mental,
Swift resolver of problems
With no apparent solution;
Who could read the tablets
In abstruse Sumerian, Sir

Legendary as Nimrod of Nineveh,
Swift as Alexander of Macedon,
At twenty, the *hegemon*, benevolent
As the Buddha struck Ashoka,
Scholarly as Cormac of Cashel,
Wise as Justinian, rapid
As that codifying Corsician;

Who gave you craftsmen
Their limitless freedom,
The hollow bronze lion
Crouched ready to spring,
The human headed scorpion:

I have seen your workroom
admired your quiet handling
of some impossible problem;
moving from point to point
unperturbed by admiration,
so selflessly absorbed in
the task to hand, climbing
the ladder, to defy oblivion:

Stand by us now, magister,
Staunch our deep wounds,
Light our dark island,
Heal our poor Ireland.

PETER RUSSELL

A SUMMER GARDEN – 1931

I

I used to sit in the Avonside garden,
Loll in a striped deck-chair;
Drugged by the honey-soft thrumming of air,
The invisible rhythms of heat expanding,
Coloured butterflies weightlessly landing,
Forced as it seemed simply to *be*,
Not act on this monotony.
Would pray for the Spirit of Nature's pardon
For my intrusion there.

I could have been fishing,
Drilling the field for seed behind the tractor's wheel
Or at carpentry making a chair –
Any of those things my parents were wishing
I'd do, rather than simply feel
June shadows moving slowly where
Wasps were testing the nectarines,
Bees threading the white flowers of beans,
Floccus of clouds overhead
White as my bed,
And the damp turf under my heel
Where the worm consumes his meal
Heaving like heated lead –
Hot silence endlessly moving –
Contentment, in itself reproving . . .

I suppose I was 'seeking for God',
 for Beauty in physical things
 Risen from mud;
 Puzzled by how
 The divine was implanted
 In branches and arms and wings
 Poised between air and sod.
 The vine seemed painted
 Eden-pure in its lines
 Of leaf-edge and tendril twines,
 But the grape where it clings
 Today, in this autumn and now
 Is wrinkled like my brow.

I thought of the blue sky full of stars,
 And the Milky Way
 Hidden by day,
 And fast receding nebulae.
 Delphiniums glowed like heated metal,
 The thrush's and the blackbird's song
 Merged into one long
 Bubbling noise no one could parse.
 Top buds of the green lupin-spike burst
 Like ripe pea-pods in the heat, but first
 Dropped off the lowest petal.
 Day seemed to dream my lazy life away.

II

Great hunk of flesh
 Amongst this peacefulness,
 I thought 'What am I doing here,
 Where simply moving's sure to crush
 Grass-blade and beetle and bacteria?
 Even to pray would be to break the hush

Of mistle-thrush and wren and bee and caddis,
 And breathing would disturb the perfect air.'
 I thought 'Some wings there are
 That cut the air so fine
 That not an atom's out of place
 And not a plume is out of line, —
 When on their way they race
 They leave no trace.'

No wings are mine,
 My footsteps base
 Tread the pure dust, they do not tread the vine.
 Each creature goes about its business, only I
 Gaze with some earthly longing at the sky;
 Would sail my ships upon the water
 And be obeyed in every quarter.
 As though the sun were not Timepiece enough
 I would invent a time to drill this stuff
 Of sunbeams and of country air
 Till it go dancing pair by pair,
 And never dare
 To call my tune my bluff.

III

For I am Man
 Whether I will or no.

The Garden's perfect if I let it be.

But spade and hoe
 And logarithm and clock
 Are part of me
 And have been since the world began.

I started Time and now it binds me too
Like Ouranos to do and not to do.

It's hard to bear the shock
Of this discovery,
But harder still
To dig and till,
To feed my flock
For good or ill;
To sow my seed
Howe'er I bleed,
To cast my net
Though I do fret
To wield my plane
In spite of pain,
And then to love
As though above
The curse of Cain . . .

Sometimes I could have lain
Down on the earth and died
But could not die for shame . . .

For I have made the wild tame,
Invented words with which to grieve
And arms that maim.

I taught the woman how to weave . . .

I was the first who ever lied . . .

IV

The stone-wall shadows lengthen on the grass
This mood will pass

The swifts are circling in the sky
A first bat flimmers by

Hawk-moths are visiting the privet-hedge
I'm on the edge . . .

Life's but a sigh

Late frost is falling — drape the frames with cloths
Here too are moths

Close up the garage-doors and lock the sheds —
And you, turn down the beds

The birds are hidden now in bush and tree
There's only you and me

Crouched on the ridge the nightjar thrums —
What comes?

Eternity . . .

Sudden and shrill the shriek of the owl
My soul is foul

The garden is quite deserted under the light of stars,
Hushed now the roar of cars

I live behind bars . . .

The mole is tunneling underground
Without a sound

Thither I too am bound . . .

Across the yard I hear a hedgehog creep
Does Nature never sleep?

Mercy, I weep . . .

V

For knowledge grows everyday and the universe grows
But wisdom is hidden and nobody knows
Whither the soul goes

The bulbs press up in Spring and the daffodils flower
The bluebells are so soon over;
The whole summer seems like a single hour,
Then the cattle are suddenly searching again —
For the clover . . .

VI

Autumn is vintage and olive crop
The first frost blackening the latest rose . . .

Things seem to stop

Heap up the fires
Keep out the cold
The soul aspires
Though it grow old

You wonder when
Winter will end, — and then

Look, the first snowdrop

SONNET

And have I time to linger near this brook,
 To hear its gurgling, nestle in its reeds;
 To reminisce, tell my neglected beads,
 To pass an hour for once without a book?
 And have I heart withal to cast a look
 At water, stones, nondescript grass and weeds,
 To speculate on what the Mayfly feeds,
 To silence Thoth and cipher Thamus' crook?

Are not the sounds of nature rhetoric,
 Its actions grammar, its seasons dialogue —
 Is not the rushing of the stream the ground?
 Some say the Lover is the man who's sick,
 Deranged by fever, blinded by a fog —
 I say he is the fallen soul made sound.

STILL

desiderarunt te oculi mei (Terentius Afer)
dies noctesque me ames, me desideres (Cicero)

Here in the still and quiet of the night
 The slow osmosis through the sponge of brain
 Conducts the day of violence and pain
 From Supermarket to the eternal light.
 The Zodiac, like a fossil ammonite
 Where life in stone inanimate has lain
 Conveys desideration once again,
 Energy, eye and ear, music mundane.

A warmth is flowing through the cool of dawn —
 It comes from words, revealed originals,
 The shower of gold to Danae's virgin plight.

Reading the texts on this September morn
 April erupts, a gift like ashes falls,
 Arrows of vision, living stones alight.

LA BELLE VOYAGEUSE

Who is *La Belle Voyageuse*? I do not know her,
 Yet somehow know that She exists.
 O she is always travelling, always beautiful, always on
 her great white horse,
 And always smiling with delight at all the fortunate people
 Who see Her gallop past.

One day perhaps —
 She'll pass *me* on the wayside where I stand,
 Waiting and waiting and waiting — Night and Day . . .
 O Isis and Osiris, Astarte and the Rising Moon!
 O Aphrodite! and the noonday Sun!
 May it be given to me
 To catch at least a little glimpse of Her!

TEARS

Dry your tears, old warrior —
 Better drink a cup of tea!
 The young who pass your window, who see you weeping
 there,
 Will laugh, and laugh and LAUGH,
 Thinking you're an old fool in love
 With some sweet girl who has rejected you

Oh little do they know
 How much, how MUCH I am in love,
 And that my tears, my never-ending tears,
 Are tears of JOY! And I'm in LOVE —
 Not with some youthful lovely girl
 But with - but with, - but with —
 THEM, them, them, and *all* of them,
 All of the boys and girls, the women and the men —
 And all the *things*, all things upon the earth —
 And with the Sun and Moon, the myriad Stars,
 With Space itself, with Time, —
 And little do they know, for all the tears they see me
 wipe away,
 That I am OUT OF TIME —
 Though here, and here, — and HERE,
 I'm FAR and Far away . . .

PERSEUS

I'm sailing on the wind like Perseus,
 Two golden wings upon my swift-shoed heels.
 The clouds rush by, the Himalayas and the Moon,
 All History clashes in a trice, infinitely visible and near —
 A million fathoms down below.

I do not know

Where I am flying to, but fly I will, and fly —
 Fly to the very hall of all the gods
 Where nectar and ambrosia flow,
 And all the beautiful gods and goddesses will be
 at home
 In their great and beautiful, crystal-jewelled palace,
 Somewhere —
 Where even the astronomers can't go . . .

YVES DE BAYSER

A SELECTION OF POEMS FROM

'INSCRIRE'

(1)

stars, you loved your names
the sky was at your bedsides, the famine of the fire

holidays lit up the snow
we governed the summer we
learnt to lie to cure
terror of song
we heard the storm destroy itself

to you, nightingales of the eclipse, grass
the beaten track, fragility
the scarecrow dies upon
the fields of fine weather and rain

saved up, you will grow old no more

(3)

numerous sweet dangerous hands
consorts, when the day wandered we
wrote to rooms, edge of roads
motionless in the immense and painted air
wherein stars of less size than our hands
let the lightning-flash be touched and the page torn

(5)

at the foot of the tree at the stone's knees
 in all the sounds of the daylight in
 the night that I still find
 it's written, that's certain: I want to die
 she is that is not death

I write to dreams to their own dreams
 the lying-in-wait place sets up the encampments
 of the moon
 my dog my anxious soul
 a cry awakes you at the moment of death
 and the question is answer the inquiry protests

the days and the roads rush up
 the non-poet lives in a dream

(10)

the non-poet lives in a dream

at my request,
 it was that delicious suffering, a reverie of the years
 just past

thrown down like myself, by the sleep of the master and exemplar,
 the fellow beings, the nomads, the miracles reach the plain, remove
 the limits, the frontiers, the fronts, push back the horizon, dispel
 the flight, pursue the empire

beyond the ramparts, there is the suppression of free procedure, the
 walls leaning against the walls along the walls like children, the image
 of the walls around the walls, around the dwelling, around the
 guard-dog, around the giant dwarf, around a snake, on the edge of
 the alley, near the crevasse, how one is born a poet

nothing predisposed me to live

the voice said: last-born of the images, born-assassinated, they are your bright hearth, your franchise, your brood and your blood, gratitude to fire now dead, and knowledge of astonishment, wound of a horse and the diamond's flaw, if the way on the warren was your road, a piece of game would tremble in the kerchief, your brother the scholar, brother treasurer, brother astronomer gratifies and consoles, oh my guest, I am stronger than you, you will forget me, you will forget the individual at the corner of the street, at the corner of the woods, in the eyes, in the games, near the familiar stars, close to the most familiar, the extreme end of a tress of hair

(11)

precursor

truly, he stands no more on my left, upright, proud, illiterate, hallucinated, drunk with a gift, that of courage

I do not know if the seasons were our parents, they were thirsty, they were hungry, I implored the darkness from the dark, and under the fleece of a passport, I stumbled in the eyes of the civilizing street, the lizard, who's afraid of fear

more or less as in days gone by at the moment of expiry, the soaring flight of fear, vigour and due time

today the tormented one, the well-being of one of the nightmares, the healthy appearance of beauty, proclaims the exorcist

cousin, from the words you use for thirst, I recognize the breach of the first steps, the private future of sleep, I am at last, my lord, your all-powerful distress

(17)

often

my brother speaks: I used to dislike daytime
 whoever esteems me will have guessed the fact
 a young girl wept
 I hated a bird the night hated
 at least I believed the night to be a portrait of my life
 when the sky and its children slept
 (the rose forgives and everything is forgotten)
 countries passed by and knew me
 immortal residents
 oh the trace of your steps the fog and the stars of your guns
 I go towards my brother with words that have been renounced
 like the name of the day and many such days
 of gods without demons and demons devoid of gods

there was a bird, my brother spoke of it sometimes

(18)

already

the dawn is going to fetch the dawn
 on the wrong side of our roads,
 in the outburst of its praise
 the day brings weddings painted
 for a feast

we have discussed it with the poets
 in the pampered and devoured towns,
 we have talked about the hills and the water
 above all about the transparency one can hear
 I am the stone desiring the stone
 the nights will have to leave you
 they must never be unmindful of me

the suns will issue from me
 without their arms without their empires
 with fire and with festival,
 fire the lost child
 victim of the great trees
 of their men's tales

(19)

conquest

the sea was entrusted to us as a torrent
 a crazy act to liberate the sand
 our homeland: gong of the forests
 adores sand knees and hands
 O gasping to our wooden wits
 we thought of the sea of its body of its groove
 we dreamed of it lying down in coils
 ravaged by a torrent

(22)

to inscribe
 a walker
 a tracer
 a landmark
 a zero
 walled up in the infinite
 in a word

from Part II: *La porte des traîtres*

(1)

speaking writing: there you are, you
 you are a king
 and a people
 in your own place

between a heavy river
and stairs of stone
in another abode
behind your gate
and before you

portal of a tower
all the regal and all the rabble
on the widest and the least wide courtyard
like the ground and like the air

gate that is never passed through twice
gate of the face-to-face and the tête-à-tête

(5)

my king vanquished
by me
my song

I nourish him with all my might
the fire of the cold the fool of the sky
animals chased from surfeited lands

(6)

tower perched on the highest tower
poetry is prison for ever
speech would be
speech or treason
perched on the highest tower
speech could be betrayed
and poetry would be
could be
treason of treason
contradiction of contradiction
torture of torture
oh the outcry the writing

(7)

you are, bits of the dream
 bits of meat and of music
 no partial truth
 and that which is not true is veracious

the dream says
 no one denies me
 I am the dream
 the exile the treason the rape
 our numerous tongues
 our timid tongues
 our spiteful tongues
 our unknown tongues
 our foreign tongue
 in our naked tongue

(13)

take away the dukes, convey nightbirds
 close the iron, a staircase, an escalade
 and the nightbirds will be your black birds

he comes from the river
 trembling
 because, O earth, of the river water
 he walks with a firm step he has the easy gait
 of the firm mad unreal and hard earth

the unreal our bread our daily memories
 us: a powerful art, the fragile and the strong
 jostle it and remain
 place in the place and the other place
 time within time and the other time

from Part III: *amoureuse obéissance et croyance*

(3)

sometimes the flowers are strangers, sometimes life is sweet, and death sweet also, sometimes we wish for an immense misfortune, a reconciliation with death, sometimes I like to say it in cadence, addressing myself to music, addressing myself to those who hear so exactly the will of words, their refrains, across the frontiers and the musics of the nations of poetry, and I love, above all I love to say: I love you because God has willed that I love you. He, serious as a tender and respectful child, has kissed your cheek and says to your lover: 'oh breath, oh breath of breath, you are his friend, his husband, his lover, as yet it's only raining on the country of the image' music listens so attentively . . . God does not wish to destroy, God breathes

(7)

oh, tormented by hands
she lays hands, perhaps yours, on the meadow
among the shadows of the sun
it is the desert its thirst the amorous landmarks
and then the lightning and then the storm

to offer you drink, oh rain
I'm athirst of quenching you as
the snake-charmer of the lightning
renders to gentleness blow for blow

then the star teaches the dark
the friendship of a peril: the air

(17)

you keep close to the rampart of inspired things,
to the walls that are the dream's muscles you
dare to say: only sleep dies

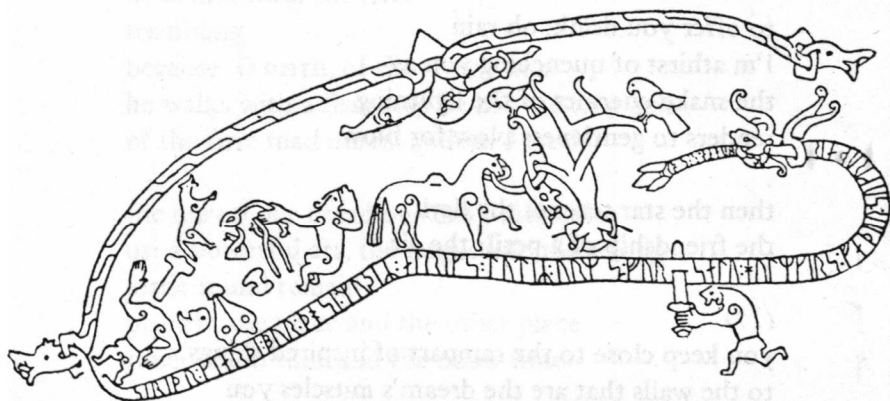
the dream stammers: poetry poetry and truth
 God must absolutely must breathe
 in words which roam over the earth
 of the wild sun and moon
 infinite infirm unthinkable always

(18)

to Clorette

laugh, we see no reason to
 in the flames of paradise
 I advance slowly, our irreality
 I approach the reality of dreams
 when approaching walls
 I love you, you are frail, God is the frailest
 oh curtain of poetry
 God is the most frail

Translated by David Gascoyne



DINING WITH ISAIAH

On the early novels of Patrick White

JEAN MAMBRINO

The Prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel dined with me, and I asked them how they dared so roundly to assert that God spoke to them; and whether they did not think at the time that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition.

Isaiah answer'd: 'I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing, and as I was then perswaded, & remain confirm'd, that the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God, I cared not for the consequences, but wrote.'

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell William Blake

What a delightful surprise to discover a great writer, one of the greatest of his time; and the more so when this writer comes from the other side of the world, from a continent of whose vast territories we know so little, and whose history, by the nature of its settlement, is so new. Patrick White comes from a family settled in Australia since 1826. Although by the accident of a visit of his parents he was born in London (in 1912) he lived in Australia up to the age of thirteen. He was then sent to school at Cheltenham College and afterwards went to Cambridge, where he took his degree in modern languages. He then spent a number of years working as a cattle-man on the family estate in Australia. Driven by his irrepressible vocation to become a writer, he returned to London, travelled in Europe and the United States, and at the outbreak of war enlisted in 1940 with the R.A.F., later being promoted to a commission in the Intelligence Service, where he held a post in the Middle East. There he spent four years, which gave him the opportunity of exploring the whole of that area. He then spent a year in Greece. We can imagine

how much these journeys and stays added to his experience as a man, and therefore to the richness of his work as a writer. At the end of the war he settled at Castle Hill, in New South Wales, where he took up gardening, breeding dogs and white goats (the most intelligent of animals, he considers) while continuing to write. He now lives in Sydney. His work includes novels, short stories, poems and plays; he was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1973.

His distinguishing mark is a clarity, a precision (sometimes bordering on cruelty) in his approach to the real, but with it a radiant compassion. He is indeed the novelist of the Beatitudes, yet there is a pitiless satiric vein in him which spares no mediocrity. At the same time he has a deep love of human souls, a sense of the inner life which might almost be called mystical. He sees beyond appearances, and it is the most diminished, the most denuded whom he understands best and whose mysterious riches he invites us to share. The astonishing cast of characters he has invented all pulse with an inimitable life whose special flavour I shall try to communicate through a number of quotations before going on to develop those hidden themes which give unity to all his stories: an intense love of human life and of human love, embracing human solitude also, as by way of some terrible experience of evil the way is prepared for Redemption and the encounter with God. Thus at the end of the journey, as at every instant of life, in the very midst of human misery there burns a merciful and transfiguring light.

Because the Jew must understand the essential mystery and glory which Mrs Jolley and her like could never recognize. Yes, glory, because decay, even in the putrid human kind, did not necessarily mean the end. (*Riders in the Chariot*, Penguin edition p.94; hereafter RC.)

'Every visible object has been created in order to be loved, and even the stones are made smoother by the dust.'

The impersonal splendour of the earth provides a kind of back-cloth to Patrick White's vision as a whole and to the detail of each

of his stories. A strange beauty removes us to an unfamiliar world; the most ordinary people are reclothed with a majesty imparted by landscapes of endless dawn:

An eternity of days was opening for the men, who would wake, and scramble up with a kind of sheepish respect for their surroundings. Dew was clogging the landscape. There were those last, intolerably melancholy stars, that cling to a white sky, and will not be put out except by force. (Voss, Penguin edition p.194; hereafter V.)

Human suffering is not, as we might expect, in any way diluted in the cosmic immensity, but rather magnified, as it were sacralized, yet at the same time bathed in an incomprehensible peace. Thus a very ordinary couple and their anguished niece are 'caught' together under the fantastic brilliance of a comet:

In that blaze, they were dwindled to mere black points, and as the light poured, and increased, and invaded the room, even Laura Trevelyan, beneath the dry shells of her eyelids, was bathed at least temporarily in the cool flood of stars. (V.376)

But to discover this poetry there is no need to climb to the bounds of the universe; it burns under our feet at every moment, above all at those most ordinary moments when time flows by like a current without history: the pebbles of a stream have at such times the brilliance of precious stones, as to the eyes of childhood they appear as a matter of course. On a peaceful farm at the edge of the desert, Voss the explorer is dazzled by a simple spring:

It was, indeed, as seductive as the lesser jewels . . . Looking at those wet pebbles over which the water was welling, Voss could have put one in his pocket, as if he had been still a boy. (V.149)

Flights of birds are full of mystery, bearers of a meaning beyond themselves. There is a poignancy in their sweetness, their fragility:

Birds plunged songless through the leaves in heavy flight. Dark

birds, mostly. It was strange that such soft things could explode the silence, but they did, most vehemently, by their mere passage through it. (V.143-4)

The radiance of roses where bees are working with the energy of the sun itself is too bright to look at:

She bent to reach others, till roselight was flooding her face, and she was forced to lower the lids of her eyes against the glare of roses. (V.159)

The earth abundant with fruits is like fragrant flesh; Laura is overwhelmed

by the scent of ripe peaches, throbbing in long leaves, and falling; they were too heavy, too ripe. Feet treading through the wiry grass were trampling flesh, it seemed, but exquisitely complaisant, perfumed with peach. (V.163)

An intimacy almost sensual can insinuate itself between us and living creatures, like that which binds the mare to her foal:

He put his hand on the horse's neck, something almost emotional in his touching the muscular neck, a tautness in his body, a tautness also in the horse that arose from the conjunction of skin and hide. He wanted to rest his head against the horse, and close his eyes that were no longer brown and gentle, but brown and sharp. (*Happy Valley* p. 31; hereafter HV)

So, even an old maid (but gifted with how Franciscan a soul!) can feel the palpable life of the world

in a crushing scent of crushed grass, in a mercilessly gentle murmuring of doves. (RC.56)

And the old Jewish mystic is so deeply merged into the foundations of the universe, like a spider in its web, that the very traces of the birds seem to him palpable as light:

The river glistened for him. The birds flew low, swallows

probably, almost on the surface of the water, and he held out his hand to them. They did not come to him, of course, but he touched the glistening arcs of flight. It seemed as though the strings of flight were suspended from his fingers, and that he controlled the whirring birds. (RC.205)

The opacity of matter is as sensitive as spirit. There is a sort of warmth of consciousness, a quiver of soul, in the solidity of stones:

. . . he would interpret the needs of all men, the souls of rocks, even. In that more tender light the bare flesh of rocks was promisingly gentle. (V.191)

All things seem to point to an invisible end, beyond themselves, foreign to their nature, inaccessible yet exerting a fascination.

Pointing to somewhere always just beyond his reach, the lovely quivering of rapt needles was more delicate than that of ferns. (V.181)

Just the smoke rising from a house-roof at night can for a child be a revelation of irremediable solitude, of the body's precariousness, of Time which falls in ashes:

The smoke wreathed up against a star. You stopped breathing because it suddenly caught you, death. You knew what it meant in the yard in the dark. (HV.258)

There are perpetual transitions, passages from one to another level of reality; yet to speak of 'reality' and 'dream' would lead us subtly astray, since dream is itself the opening up of new vistas within appearances themselves. We have but to see over a green moist field, with its 'good scent of rich, recent, greenish dung', a flock of palpitating butterflies:

Nothing had been seen to compare with their colours, opening and closing, opening and closing. Indeed, by this pair of hinges,

the world of semblance communicated with the world of dream. (V.259)

Thus it is we penetrate the sacred depths of the world; to purified hearts paths open on all sides:

Each pool would reveal its relevant mystery, of which she herself was never the least. Finally she would be renewed. Returning by a different way, she would recognize the Hand in every veined leaf, and would bundle with the bee into the divine Mouth. (RC.61)

We are indeed shown a sacred temple where the humble heart for ever prostrates itself in adoration, even in moments of horror and under the dark wings of death. So it is with the old Jew Himmelfarb who flees into the forest from his Nazi torturers:

He walked on, and could have continued gratefully, if he had not come to what was by comparison a clearing, in which stood a band of virgin forms — young birches, they might have been — their skin so smooth and pure, he fell down against them, and lay crying, his mouth upon the wet earth. (RC.186)

How much more when he reaches his ancestral Promised Land:

. . . he got upon his knees, amongst the stones, in the smell of dust, unable to restrain his longing to touch the earth. (RC.191)

But even less than that, the mere brushing of leaves against his face, is enough to make the proud explorer perceive as it were a benediction:

He would have expressed that gladness, but could not, except by letting the smooth leaves lie upon his stubbly face, except by being of the stillness. In this way he offered his praise. (V.203)

Not surprising that in the same praise the little music-teacher plays his flute from the sheer delight of living and breathing in the midst of this creation with its splendours and miseries.

Exquisite, pearly, translucent notes would flower on that unpromising wood, and fall from the shadows as they faded, causing bullock-teams to flick their tails, or some drunkard to invoke Jesus Christ. (V.30)

Everything becomes silent, withdraws into itself, and the absolute nestles in the innermost recesses of creation. Thus the poor half-caste Dubbo, who has a sort of genius for painting, discovers in painting the wings of an angel in the middle of a biblical scene the essence of the divine. A buried memory of childhood has inspired him in his sleep:

. . . a little boy on a molten morning had held a live cockatoo in his hands, and opened its feathers to look at their roots, and become involved in a mystery of down. (RC.360)

In this inimitable intuition White's whole art is revealed, his penetrating observation, his intense love of the concrete.

This love is manifest in his attachment to details, to those myriads of minute particulars hidden within the splendour of the world, and which constitute its very texture, its density. He hears the twigs that crack in the darkness for no apparent reason, as if under the weight of time; or, softer still, the mere rustle of paper illuminates Dubbo's heart. The 'abo', in the public library

. . . running his thumb down a handful of pages to hear them rise like a flock of birds. (RC.343)

He notes the maid's starched cap as she stands at the door in the evening;

She might have been some species of moth . . . poised on magnolia wings before huge, flapping flight. (RC.242)

Or the simple sound of 'a red apple from which a little boy was tearing the flesh with noisy bite'. Sometimes these details are fringed with humour, as when he evokes the rather silly girl whose 'dress had little holes in it, which the bees began to investigate.' (*The Solid*

Mandala Penguin Edition p.49; hereafter SM.) Or the old lady's advice to Laura when she was looking too pale at a reception, that as she went in she should drop her handkerchief 'so that the blood would rush to her cheeks as she stooped to pick it up.' (V.54)!

These details can become poignant, as when Oliver (*Happy Valley*) leaves his house for ever and, all the furniture gone, there remains only the shape, the dusty shadow of the old clock on the wall-paper; or, in another mode, the emotion of the girl, lying on her bed, who hears with beating heart her first lover undressing in the dark and the sudden rap of his belt against her virgin bed. In her room that has only heard the 'sound of silk'

. . . a second shock, first the sound of leather, and now the motion of a stranger getting into her bed. (HV.33)

Sometimes a detail is so trivial that tragedy is deepened by contrast. Thus in the midst of the smoke of an appalling bombardment the intense crimson bordered with blue reminds Himmelfarb of a cigar smoked in the days of his happiness:

He was reminded suddenly and vividly of the long, blue-grey, tranquil ash of an expensive cigar he had smoked somewhere. (RC.184)

Worse, the woman who cries because she has lost one of a pair of woollen gloves while she is boarding the train which will take her to the stinking cattle-trucks and the death-camps. Yet beyond everything there remains a sort of trust, the perpetual springing-up of life, in which all these scraps of reality appear secretly transfigured; like the evocation of Anthea, that insipid girl, who is yet capable of a gesture full of spirit and grace:

Suddenly Val had thought of something. 'I know —', she said, 'who'd like to feed the possums?'

There was an immediate bargaining of little boys as they ran for stale crusts.

'What about you, Anthea?'

Anthea Scudamore remarked: 'I don't think I've ever touched a possum!'

But got up, though, a grinning girl whose hockey stick might have been standing in the hall.

The Burnt Ones p.21 (Dead Roses)

'You should look at people when you pass them in the street, even when they are only strangers to you.'

No writer looks at human beings with a more penetrating eye than does Patrick White; an unsparing look which no folly, no mediocrity escapes. Amy, the placid Chinese half-caste, has a passion for objects, which she collects endlessly:

Amy's passion was things . . . she had a number of things, the lids of scallop-shells and a Chinese dressing-gown . . . She lay on her bed on a Sunday afternoon and smelt the smell of incense and looked at the picture of the Virgin Mary . . . there was a strangely beautiful atmosphere that was bound up with the Virgin Mary and her things. (HV)

She seems gentle but is in reality pitiless and hard, for she is self-sufficient.

Because there was a core of hardness in Amy, as in most people who are self-sufficient. She could close up. She was a piece of stone. And there is no pity in stone. (HV)

Alys Brown (with a *y* 'to distinguish her from others!') reads the Russian authors, Tolstoy and Turgenev. *Anna Karenina* is rather difficult and she has stopped reading:

She liked to sit down at tea, and take off her shoes, and read a chapter of *Anna Karenina*, though sometimes she found it a bit of an effort and lapsed to the *Windsor Magazine*.

She had spilt a tea-stain on page seventy-two:

It gave the book a comfortable, intimate appearance, and she

liked it better after that, as if she had always had it with her and had read it several times. (HV.43)

But it is the Doctor looking at her (she is secretly in love with him) which has made her aware of her inadequacy as a piano-teacher. She is thinking this at the precise moment when she is listening to Margaret, her little Chinese pupil, making a mess of a Beethoven sonata; and the child in her turn is trembling with the fervour of her admiration for the beauty of her teacher, that endless well of experience. That evening, at home, the doctor muses on her too, thinking of the authentic woman under the artificial one. So already, under that lucidity, much sweetness is already shown in this interwoven texture of relationships and exchanged looks.

A single observation sometimes suffices to define a character. Clem Hogan solemnly repeats a phrase several times just for the pleasure of hearing himself speak. Mrs Moriarty, in a moment of impatience, drops a remark à propos her native servants:

These girls, she said to Amy, you can't call them servants at all. (HV.33)

The portraits of mediocrities in his work are without number.

Mediocre, animal men never do guess at the power of rock and fire, until the last moment before these elements reduce them to nothing. (V.61)

Stupid people are often evil as well. There is the unforgettable Miss Docker in *A Cheery Soul*, whose massive stupidity is further enhanced by her assurance and her ill-natured sprightliness, which drives her unwilling host to silence. Then, commenting on the piece of steak her hostess has reserved for her hard-working husband,

'Ah, the men!' Miss Docker said, 'One day I'm going to tell you all about the men in my life. There are some will not believe, but I am not forcing anybody to accept the truth. It is like religious faith. Take it or leave it.'

(*The Burnt Ones* Penguin edition p.158)

Showing a 'photo' of herself as an infant, she informs the company that she used to wet her bed:

'Somewhere I read, I believe in a medical journal,' she had grown very grave, 'that bed-wetting is a sign of parental discord.' The old heads shook in disbelief.

'But the funny part of it,' Miss Docker began to explode '— if it isn't a joke you'll tell me — I was a, I was a *norphan!*' Here she fairly shrieked. (*The Burnt Ones* 178)

Her bottomless stupidity (she talked to her host dying of a stroke about the mechanism of digestion, because you must 'humour the sick,' Miss Docker said, 'Keep their interest alive.' [ibid. 171]) passes quite naturally into pure cruelty; to the shattered widow she throws out:

'You can depend on me, dear,' Miss Docker assured. 'At all times. Even in the middle of the night you can give me a tinkle on the 'phone. That is what the alcoholics do.' (ibid. 175)

But that is not the worst; above all, there is the horrible Mrs Jolley (who literally tortures poor Miss Hare with her perfidious innuendoes) flanked by the still more redoubtable Mrs Flack. The conversations of these two abominable old prudes are a positive feast of slander, hypocrisy and malice; with an added touch of Molière which stirs us to vengeful laughter. After some insinuations about the doctor who would have 'pulled her quite close' (one may well ask why!) Mrs Jolley goes on:

'Ttst, ttst! The doctors! And to think that a lady, on some occasions, must submit to an examination by such hands!'

'Ho, an examination! I have never had an examination, and do not intend to. No, never!'

'There are the lady doctors, of course.'

'Ah, the lady doctors!'

'Do you suppose the lady doctors ever attend to gentlemen?'

'I do not know. But they would not attend me, never. I have

my own ideas about the lady doctors.'

Mrs Jolley would have liked to hear, but etiquette did not permit. (RC.75)

But that amiable lady is no match for Mrs Flack, who one day told her of a remarkable dream:

'They were carrying out your late hubby on the stretcher. See? I was, it seems — if you will excuse me, Mrs Jolley — you.' Mrs Flack had turned pink, but Mrs Jolley grew quite pale.

'What do you know!' the latter said. 'What a lot of nonsense a person dreams!'

'I said: "Good-bye, Mr Jolley," I said,' said Mrs Flack.

Mrs Jolley pleaded her lips.

'He said to me: "Kiss me, won't you" — then he mentions some name which I forget; "Tiddles", was it? — "kiss me before I set out on me last journey." I — or you — replied: "I will do it voluntary for the first and last time." He said: "Who killed with a kiss?"'

(RC.226)

In another episode in the same novel, the old Jew Mordecai goes to visit his employer Rosetree, a German Jew who is likewise an emigrant (his real name is Rosenbaum), simply to share with him the joy of the Passover. His destitution notwithstanding he does not go to ask for anything at all. Rosetree, and still more his wife, find this inconceivable, and Mordecai is rebuffed by the couple in a scene whose blending of egoism and malice, stupidity and meanness, is staggering:

'Har-ry! Whaddaya know? It is that old Jew. At this hour. Now what the hell? I can't bear it! Do something quick!'

....

Shulamith Rosenbaum struck herself with the flat of her hand just above the breasts. Too hard. It jarred, and made her cough. 'I'm gunna be sick, Harry, if you don't do something about that man.'

Because she had learned to suffer from various woman's ailments, she added:

'I'm not gunna get mixed up in any Jews' arguments. It does things to me. And packing still to finish. I will not be persecuted. First it was the *goy*, now it is the Jew. All I want is peace, and a nice home.'

(RC.383)

These vitriolic portraits notwithstanding, White on the whole looks at human beings with a kind of calm precision, without virulence in the satire, *as they are*. So he sees the parents of Waldo and Arthur in *The Solid Mandala*, each of them so pathetic in their shabbiness and imperceptiveness, images of an abortive destiny, the ailing would-be *lady* and the little bank-clerk with intellectual pretensions! Or Dulcie's father, the sceptical, rationalist Jewish *bon viveur*. He has kept the little skull-cap (used for prayer) which he calls 'one of the accessories of the big circus act', and he puts it on his bald head so as not to catch cold. 'There couldn't be a more practical use', he adds with a laugh. There it is, a simple sketch without exaggeration. There are Jews like that. Turner, an ex-burglar born in the depths, makes friends in the depths of the desert with the brilliant young Angus (formerly a rich land-owner) when both of them have reached the last stage of destitution. They lament their mediocrity and arrive at a strange pathetic understanding which White *shows* without any trace of contempt:

Ralph Angus, who had been so glossy, whose whiskers in normal circumstances were a gallant, reddish curl — he was, in fact, the colour of a chestnut horse — would have been amused at Turner's friendship if he had not been grateful for it. They could speak together, he had discovered, of little things. They would talk about the weather and the state of their stomachs, and end up feeling quite elevated by conversation. They would sigh like dogs and enjoy the silences.

(V.52)

We have already seen that the incisive outline in which White depicts in silhouette so many characters is tempered by a refreshing humour.

Indeed this humour crops up everywhere, whether he is concerned with the mother who calls her son *Clay* because she herself had never been able to try her hand at pottery ('I may be artistic') (*The Burnt Ones*, 116) or the remark in passing

She was a tall girl, who would be married off quite easily,
though for no immediately obvious reason. (V.58)

Waldo's mother whose insular affectation stands out in crude Australia is deliciously evoked in the phrase 'She was what people called vague, or English.' (SM.32) Sometimes we have 'black' humour, as with the cremation of Mrs Brown in the so-called 'Haven of Peace', or in the brief Ionesco-like exchange

'Do you have any family, Mrs Dun?' Mrs Poulter asked with a formality which made it unobjectionable.

'Got a niece,' Mrs Dun said.

'Ah' said Mrs Poulter, 'A niece is nice'. (SM.20)

When the young German Jew Mordecai, in the midst of the Nazi persecution, discusses being a Jew with his Christian friend (an Aryan youth of pure race, blond with blue eyes), their still recent childhood illumines that humour with affectionate freshness. They are walking in a forest, cuffing one another amiably, and Sunday at that moment becomes more radiant for the young Jew than the Sabbath.

'Tell me,' Jürgen asked, 'about the Passover sacrifice.'

'When we kill the Christian child?'

'So it seems!'

How Jürgen laughed.

'And cut him up, and drink the blood, and put slices in a *Brötchen* to send the parents?' Mordecai had learned how to play.

'Ach Gott!' Jürgen Stauffer laughed. (RC.104)

But a deadly shadow may be discerned in that same humour when our Mordecai, who has grown old and lost everything, says with a sad smile to that dear Mrs Godbold who is thinking only about her washing,

'You know,' he could even joke, 'we Jews are suspicious of such crude soap since we were rendered down.'

So compassion moves nearer and nearer, and it is in reality compassion which bathes to the heart all that crowd of characters so representative of burdened humanity. That same second-rate Waldo who from his youth has forced himself to write because he is revolted by his parents' insignificance, reads only in secret so as not to humiliate his father, supposedly the only reader in the family. 'He was always reading books, but because Dad was the reader in the family he did most of it furtively.' (SM.81) And Dulcie, to judge by appearances a sulky and insipid young girl, expresses in the only way she can, at the piano, her obscure thirst to embrace Beauty:

At the same time she held out her arms, not to him, but in one of the ugly gestures with which she had fought Beethoven, again in an attempt to embrace some recalcitrant vastness.

(SM.139)

In her painful last illness Waldo and Arthur's mamma, who has reached the last stage of helplessness, remembers the dresses of her youth and we see her then with the same sweetness as does Arthur, who is nursing her. Palfreyman, terrified though he is, prays for his unfortunate hunch-backed sister who has taken down all the mirrors in the house, 'for her reflection is a double that she has grown to hate.' (V.263); and Mrs Bonner, discovering its empty interior, remembers that she had been pretty in her youth. Later, in a burst of laughter which lights her up, she actually recovers that beauty for a moment.

The precision and delicacy with which certain very humble beings are evoked is of the rarest quality. So good kind Mrs Poulter, so utterly humble and insignificant, had dreamed once of getting a place in a big house and of waiting at a brilliant reception where all the ladies were wearing 'fashionable gowns covered with jewellery.' She would have waited on them, passing the plates without anyone paying the slightest attention to her, and then, suddenly,

'... while I was offering the vegetables at table, there would be one man of some importance, a bank manager, say, or a doctor, who would look up into my face and realize I was different, I'd be waiting for him when he came to fetch his coat, and we'd walk off together to catch the tram.' (SM.264)

Isn't that marvellous? But White's compassion (sometimes reminiscent of Bernanos) deepens with the horror of situations. I think of the horrifying scene in which a wretched schoolmaster, baited by his pupils, sees out of the window his wife riding past on the pillion of her lover's motor-bike. Or Rose, the black servant-girl in her overwhelming simplicity, who killed her natural child so that it should not suffer!

'I loved my little boy that was given me, but I would not have had him suffer.'

She paid for that by long years in prison, and everyone regarded her as a monster, but she is a simple woman:

'How am I to show you what I am? I am not an educated person. I am just a woman.' (V.74)

Doctor Oliver, (HV) for his part, well understood that beneath such violence there is a pitiful weakness, 'The extreme humbling to which man can be subjected'. (HV.63)

— and so does Mrs Godbold who, after the death of her drunken bully of a husband weeps for all humanity:

She cried, rather, for the condition of men, for all those she had loved, burningly, or at a respectful distance . . .

'One can learn anything, even to love a human being'

We must now bring into focus a few of the great figures of these novels among the multitude of minor characters. It is these, in all their variety, who together compose the unity of Patrick White's work considered as a whole. Through them we also come to a more

precise understanding of three of his finest novels, *Voss*, *Riders in the Chariot*, and *The Solid Mandala*. In these works we find no attempt at any technical innovation in the art of the novel; White presents no problem of style but, like the greatest (Pasternak, Malcolm Lowry, Bernanos, Kazantzakis, Solzhenitsyn) he imposes from the outset his 'voice', the *tone* proper to himself, and, almost without effort, makes us believe in his stories and in the creations of his imagination. They come to inhabit us, in all their complex singularity, never to be dislodged from our memory.

Voss is an extraordinary story of passionate love, situated in nineteenth-century Australia, at a time when that continent was still for the most part unknown territory. Voss is a German whose proud wild spirit is haunted by the enigma of those virgin regions marked in white on the map. He is a born explorer, a conqueror of solitudes. His purpose is to cross the continent from one side to the other with a little group of volunteers, to be the first to conquer the terrible central desert. He has a taste for danger, is never really alive except when he is at risk. He is a solitary; words bore him. On one occasion he narrowly escaped being crushed by an enormous block of falling rock detached from a mountain:

Deadly rocks, through some perversity, inspired him with fresh life. He went on with the breath of life in his lungs. But words, even of benevolence and patronage, even when they fell wide, would leave him half dead. (V.18)

He loves, he understands, things of the earth, he has a gift for path-finding. And yet for all that, at bottom he is *lost*, perhaps in his inner dream; 'his eyes . . . cannot find their way.' Elsewhere it is said of him that he is lost in the blue of his eyes like birds in the sky. He has a sense of almost intolerable beauty,

but never did such experience crystallize in objective visions. Nor did he regret it, as he lay beneath his pale eyelids, reserved for a peculiar destiny. He was sufficient in himself. (V.15)

His expedition is a pure act of will: he would have liked to go

'barefoot and alone'. (V.69) An immense pride possesses him, he disdains God because He is not made in his own image! And yet there is something magnificent in him; like Christopher Columbus he is a born discoverer. In his own way he is a labourer in the harvest of God's earth. To an old German minister he said:

'I begin to receive proof of existence, Brother Müller, I can feel the shape of the earth.'
(V.49)

He meets, in the course of the preparations for the expedition, a woman, radiant and young, but no less proud and secret than he is himself. This encounter is to transform his existence, and slowly, almost insensibly, kindle him until his whole being is pure conflagration. Laura resembles him in many ways (though Voss is ugly, almost puny.) She, like him, is in love with the earth; she delights in plants, roots, the sun. She is fascinated by

the inquiring mouths of blunt anemones, the twisted roots of driftwood returning and departing in the shallows, mauve scum of little bubbles the sand was sucking down.
(V.62)

But with this goes a supreme detachment, a kind of proud indifference, almost disembodied.

She would have liked to sit upon a rock and listen to words, not of any man, but detached, mysterious, poetic words that she alone would interpret through some sense inherited from sleep.
(V.63)

This is the more striking, since all her life she has felt for all the realities of the world, from the smallest to the greatest, an almost physical and sensual attachment:

The little girl was falling in love with an immensity of stars, or the warmth of his rough coat, or sleep. How the rigging rocked, and furry stars.
(V.13)

She is fiercely independent, and her critical, positive mind quick to see through the feebleness of the religious instruction she received

from a succession of governesses. And so, little by little, she has slipped into rationalism:

She was suffocated by the fuzz of the faith. She did believe, however, most palpably, in wood, with the reflections in it, and in clear daylight, and in water. (V.9)

Like Voss she remains shut up in the castle of her soul, with only solitude for companion; and yet a profound *awaiting* opens her secretly towards the day:

Yet in spite of this admirable self-sufficiency, she might have elected to share her experience with some similar mind, if such a mind had offered. (V.9)

They never declare their love while they are in one another's presence. They do not even realize that they love, and their conversations reveal both a boundless freedom and a no less vertiginous solitude. They are walking on the shore with a friend, the young girl Ulla, who praises ecstatically a big house of dressed stone, full of beautiful things. Laura replies 'I would not want to marry stone.' Ulla laughs, embarrassed:

Though what she did want, Laura did not know, only that she did. She was pursued by a most lamentable, because so unreasonable, discontent.

'You would prefer sand?' Voss asked.

He stooped and picked up a handful, which he threw, so that it glittered, and some of it stung their faces.

Voss too was laughing.

'Almost', said Laura, bitterly now.

She was the third to laugh, and it seemed with such freedom that she was no longer attached to anyone.

'You will regret it,' laughed Voss, 'when it has all blown.' (V.68)

The same liberty is expressed in her extraordinary portrayal of him, with an impassioned intuition and a freedom from restraint in which she expresses herself completely.

'You are so vast and ugly,' Laura Trevelyan was repeating the words; 'I can imagine some desert, with rocks, rocks of prejudice, and, yes, even hatred. You are so isolated. That is why you are fascinated by the prospect of desert places, in which you will find your own situation taken for granted, or more than that, exalted. You sometimes scatter kind words or bits of poetry to people, who soon realize the extent of their illusion.'

And she goes on to say that nothing flatters him more than the hate he provokes, or the simple irritation of those weaker than himself.

'Do you hate me, perhaps?' asked Voss, in darkness.

'I am fascinated by you,' laughed Laura Trevelyan, with such candour that her admission did not seem immodest. '*You are my desert.*' (V.87-8)

Going beyond themselves, their conversation about God betrays them and their future course still further, and with blazing violence; Laura, an atheist but oriented towards love and sacrifice, Voss, a believer who hates humility.

'Atheists are atheists usually for mean reasons,' Voss was saying. 'The meanest of these is that they themselves are so lacking in magnificence they cannot conceive the idea of a Divine Power.'

He was glittering coldly. The wind that the young woman had promised had sprung up, she realized dully. The stars were trembling. Leaves were slashing at one another.

'Their reasons,' said Laura, 'are simple, honest, personal ones. As far as I can tell. For such steps are usually taken in privacy. Certainly after considerable anguish of thought.'

...

'I feel you may still suspect me,' he continued. 'But I do believe, you must realize. Even though I worship with pride. Ah, the humility, the humility! This is what I find so particularly loathsome. My God, besides, is above humility.'

'Then I will learn to pray for you.'

(V.89-90)

All this did indeed come about. She was to enter into God quite naturally by way of her human love itself. She was to be broken, and, in a sense, lose God in order to be *found*. That was at the end of Voss's terrible Odyssey, in whose course they were united, as passionate lovers, in *distance*. We will return to them when in considering White's themes we come to speak of human love.

Riders in the Chariot (probably its author's masterpiece) is a novel of even greater complexity and abundance. At Sarsaparilla, a small town near the outskirts of Sydney, a shabby lower middle-class suburb, the destinies of four characters, than whose encounter nothing could be more inherently improbable, are interwoven, and predestined to bring about a subterranean upheaval in the life of that human microcosm. Miss Hare, an old maid, ugly and simple-hearted, only descendant of a formerly rich colonial family, lives withdrawn, in the company of plants and animals, in the domain of Xanadu, which is falling into ruin. Up to the day, that is, when she meets Mordecai Himmelfarb, a German Jewish refugee in this lost backwater, and now working in a factory that manufactures bicycle lamps. He tells her of his past as a former University professor, of the concentration camps he had known (his wife had died far from him in another camp) and of his exile, after the war, with the name of the Living God as his only riches. Alf Dubbo, for his part, is a half-caste brought up by a second-rate Christian minister, who has run away from his tutor's house. Sheltered by a prostitute, he runs away again, to find another protectress, at Sarsaparilla. His outcast state is illumined by his gift for painting. Mrs Ruth Godbold, last of the four, a former maid, with a pure heart, now married to a drunkard, makes a living for her brood of little girls by taking in washing; in a spirit of devotion of which she is herself unaware. It is she who brings among the shadows of all the meanness, indifference and cruelty an ultimate compassion and tenderness.

Dumpy Miss Hare, her skin blotched with red patches, and her

short arms, walks among the leaves and brambles of her garden run wild, whipped by the little strands of sarsaparilla vine 'of which she could have drunk the purple up', her heart full of a tender merri-ment near to worship.

At one stage she fell upon the knees of her earth-coloured, practical stockings

not caring about what anyone might think of her. Here is a nature mysterious, free, totally indifferent to herself. When she was young, far from being saddened by her ugliness, she was, at brilliant recep-tions, too full of delight in the splendour of the gathering and the 'revealing faces of men and women'. Towards her father, who attempted suicide in her presence, she manifested a gift of spiritual intuition, a lucidity and firmness, remarkable in so fragile, so humble a being. She read his mind — he could never forgive her for it nor for the fearless innocence of her insight —

'Oh, yes, you can twist my arm if you like!' she blundered, through thickening lips, for his accusation was causing her actual physical pain. 'But the truth is what I understand. Not in words. I have not the gift for words. But know.' (RC.36)

But she always remains humbly concrete; at that moment she would have liked to touch and breathe familiar things.

If she could have touched something — moss, for instance — or smelled the smell of burning wood. (RC.36)

To that horrible prude Mrs Jolley (whom we already know!) who has come to live with her, and who torments her, she replies

'Oh, there is a great deal that I truly, truly love!'
'Are you a Christian?'
'Ah,' sighed Miss Hare. 'It would not be for me to say, even if I understood exactly what that means.' (RC.58)

Marvellous!

We have already seen how she recognised the handiwork of God

in the smallest veins of every leaf, even while her heart was heavy with all the misery of the world. She spied the poor Black, Dubbo, as he was skirting the garden.

Once she had entered through his eyes, and at first glance recognized familiar furniture, and once again she had entered in, and their souls had stroked each other with reassuring feathers, but very briefly, for each had suddenly taken fright.

(RC.62)

And, needless to say, she had already made friends with the poor washerwoman Mrs Godbold, whom she visits regularly, to the great scandal of Mrs Jolley.

'I would not have thought that a lady like you, of Topnotch Hall, and all, would associate beneath them. Mind you, I do not criticise. It is not my business, is it? Only I cannot truly say I have ever been on any sort of terms with a lady living in a shed.'

But by now Miss Hare was too rapt to have been acquainted with any other.

'Ah, but she,' she told very humbly, 'she is the best of women.'

(RC.64)

But her encounter with Himmelfarb is the most profound, at once bringing to her life a new dimension, and enabling the old Jew, who confides in her at length, to relive all his past. In the shade of a magnificent plum-tree at the bottom of Miss Hare's garden these two *anawim*, these two poor servants of Jahweh, exchange a look in which they 'recognize' one another at first glance, in all simplicity, by an obscure impulse of the heart.

'I mean,' he continued, 'I am a Jew, and centuries of history have accustomed one to look inward instead of outward.'

'Oh,' said Miss Hare, 'there are others who do that!' (RC.92)

The whole of their first conversation is of great tenderness, full of diffidence yet of a surprising freedom. They assume no roles,

wear no masks, say all they have in mind with innocence and gravity. Mordecai, accepted by this candid soul, can open his own and slowly unfold his story. How admirable is the evocation of his family in pre-war Germany, his youth already thirsting for God, his marriage, his University career, a whole human and religious atmosphere in which breathes all that is best in the millennial Jewish soul. Later we shall speak of his relations with his wife, the special quality of their love; here only of the heartbreaking conversation in which she feels that the mystical life of Mordecai is beyond her, and foresees with terror the coming catastrophe in which she is herself to be engulfed:

'You!' she cried, choking, it seemed, with desperate blood.

'Much will be made clear to you! But to us, the ordinary ones?'

'There is no distinction finally.'

...

'When the time comes,' her dark lips began to blurt, 'you will be able to bear it. Because your eyes can see farther. But what can we others hold in our mind to make the end bearable?'

'This table,' he replied, touching it gently.

Then his wife put down her knitting.

'Oh, Mordecai,' she whispered, 'I am afraid. Tables and chairs will not stand up and save us.'

'God will,' he answered. 'God is in this table.'

She began to cry.

'Some have been able to endure the worst tortures by concentrating on the Name,' he heard his voice mumble.

And it sounded merely sententious. For he knew that he himself could do nothing for the wife he loved. At most, he could cover her with his body. (RC.142)

He was to meet Mrs Godbold too, who as she irons, surrounded by her little girls, sings in a warm mezzo-soprano, a little tremulous especially when she works the iron into the difficult corners of a shirt. Her daughter Else once said to her mother that her voice made her think of melted chocolate. And all her brats are in ecstasy!

Her favourite themes are death, judgment, and the life to come; she loves above all

I woke, the dungeon flamed with light,
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.

She was a little alarmed at the idea of a Jew living in the shack next to her own, but even so she called on him (to offer to do his washing) and surprised him at prayer with the fringed shawl, the phylactery round his brow and the other wound round his arm down to his bandaged hand. She withdrew in silence, stupefied, while he remained in adoration: 'as he stood exposed to the gentle morning, he was carried deeper into the bosom of God.' (RC.220) But when a little later he went out, he found a new-baked loaf on his step, still warm and powdered with flour, baked by the woman herself; overwhelmed, she had furtively left it there. What Biblical splendour!

Her delicious band of little girls (they are like little bits of Al-yosha!) are from now on to be the link between their mother and old Mordecai, whose washing she now does for him, over and above all her other work, and not giving a thought to the trouble. She lives, moves and has her being in the tenderness of God, and her little girls run in bringing news of Jesus as if he were a neighbour, which infuriates her drunkard husband, who beats her black and blue. Moaning quietly, she picks herself up to prepare the evening meal of Irish stew: 'She could have been offering up the essence of her being in unstinted praise.' (RC.245)

She meets Dubbo the poor Black in a sordid brothel where she has gone in search of her husband. Dubbo too is drunk, and in the seventh heaven, and announces, beaming with happiness, 'This is no visit. This is a mission', and, to the stupefied company, adds, 'A mission of love.' (RC.278) He is there by chance, he sings the Passion of Christ, then collapses, vomiting blood. Mrs Godbold (who has been told that her husband has already left) kneels down and wipes the blood like a mother, while Dubbo, in his state of collapse,

talks to her with mysterious authority about his paintings, in which he tried to express the hidden face of things. This reminds Mrs Godbold of a wonderful moment in her girlhood when she had entered a cathedral and had experienced a revelation of the essence of music, a sense of the infinite, as she listened to the organist playing (of course she did not know it) Bach. They exchange memories of childhood; and yet again in all simplicity she asks the question:

'Are you a Christian?' Mrs Godbold asked quickly to get it over. Even so, she was mortified, knowing that the word did not represent what it was intended to.

'No,' he replied, 'I was educated up to it. But gave it away. Pretty early on, in fact. When I found I could do better, I mean,' he mumbled, 'a man must make use of what he has. There is no point in putting on a pair of boots to walk to town, if you can do it better in your bare feet.'

This delights Mrs Godbold, who lights up in a smile:

'Yes,' she smiled, once more beautiful; her skin was like fresh pudding-crust. (RC.285)

At the bicycle factory where he works as a labourer Mordecai meets Dubbo, employed there as a sweeper. A silent friendship grows up between those two who are as it were the rejects, the refuse of the factory. They are a little shamefaced in their negative understanding but 'How they would lay balm on wounds every time they passed each other.' (RC.309) Tamed little by little, Dubbo tells the former *Herr Doktor* of his wretched childhood. Son of an unknown white and an aboriginal mother, Alf was adopted by a cultured but deliquescent minister, Mr Calderon, to be educated into an 'ideal pupil', with the help of pious readings and Latin verbs (working also, incidentally, as a servant). But the child was interested only in the river, and in painting, and one fine day ran away, retaining only a pale and sugary impression of the gospel that had been preached to him. Despised by all, more than alone in the world, rescued, protected and loved by only one person, Hannah the prostitute, he discovered the absolute at last, with unspeakable joy and consolation,

in painting. Later, re-opening the Bible which an old rag-and-bone man had given to Hannah, he read the psalms with exaltation, and himself composed a Canticle of the Creatures in the margins of his great painting *The Fiery Furnace*:

And wires of ariels, and grey, slippery slates, praise, praise the Lord.

Mountains and hills: fruitful trees, and all cedars: and the grey ghosts of other trees: and the soles of the feet on wet leaves: and the dry rivers, praise the name of the Lord. (RC.353)

He was to be the only person to pick up Mordecai's belongings at the foot of the gibbet to which the racist workmen fastened him one Good Friday, while others set fire to his cabin. There Miss Hare entered the flames to save her old friend, as if the fire that burned inside her worthless bodily envelope rendered her invulnerable. 'When all was said she would remain a sandy little girl.' (RC.71) Thus are interwoven the fates of all these 'poor in spirit' of God, where Mrs Godbold watches, in the cool of the evening, among ordinary things. 'In the course of her life, she had developed a love and respect for common and trivial acts. Did they, perhaps, conceal a core, reveal a sequence?' (RC.478) And she sends out her children and grandchildren like arrows in the darkness. 'She could have offered more love than was acceptable.' (RC.490)

The Solid Mandala tells the story of twin brothers, Waldo and Arthur, from childhood to old age. This disastrous 'couple' presents a mingling of hate and love, of the cerebral and of ignorant tenderness, of despair and sanctity. The book is in two parts, many of the events shown twice. The first part is seen from Waldo's point of view, the second from Arthur's, but each time in a subtle way, without our being aware of it, without the use of subjective monologue at any point. And it is Arthur, the imbecile, the stay-at-home, with his simpleton's face, his thick dribbling lips, a new Myshkin, prince only for the angels, idiot for mankind (his mother first among them), Arthur 'at most an animal, at least an object' (SM.305), who

is the soul of this consummate book, a radiant soul absolutely unknown to itself. Waldo is all our shabbiness, a dry and sterile heart, pettiness thirsting for greatness, pretentious intellectuality which reality always eludes, false assurance with anguish at heart, without the power to live and to love. He despises his poor brother (with whom he is indissolubly linked) without realizing that it is the slobbering simpleton who protects and upholds him, justifying his life and even perhaps his horrible death. There are no symbols in this novel (apart from those marbles, *mandalas* whose interior spiral patterns are enlightenment for Arthur), which nevertheless creates, through a multitude of detail, two unforgettable characterizations of which one above all — that of Arthur — is of overwhelming depth and complexity. Here we can give only the briefest outline.

The most transparent thing we can say about this Arthur is that he is absolutely *transparent*. He has no mask, we can read his soul all the time. He for his part, without effort, sees everyone to the heart.

'Well,' he said carefully, 'if you ask my opinion,' and sometimes Mrs Poulter did, 'simple people are somehow more' — he formed his lips into a trumpet — 'more transparent,' he didn't shout. This sort of remark maddened Waldo. He could have thrown away the fat parcel of his imbecile brother's hand. 'Yes,' said Arthur. 'I mean, you can see right into them, right into the part that matters.'

(SM.29)

He finds it hard to express himself, difficult to find words, 'but when he did, they stood, solid and for ever.' (SM.25) He uses them on occasion with exquisite freshness — never more so than when speaking of earthy things. He loves shaping the pats of butter; he has a particular gift for it. Once Arthur, who was watching the buttermilk gush out from between his fingers, laughed and said: 'It's my vocation, isn't it, Mother?' (SM.35)

As a boy he wanted to write a 'Greek tragedy' about the yellow cow that had lost her calf! To the embarrassment of the family he mimed, as if from within, 'the tragedy of all interminably bleeding

breeding cows'. (SM.230) But cruelty was beyond his ken:

'I don't understand how they can nail a person through the hands.'
(SM.58)

He has a whole secret life, protected because of its very simplicity, and which no-one ever thought of entering. At the City Library Waldo was to discover with a sort of disgusted hatred that his degenerate of a brother read Shakespeare and the Upanishads! Neither his parents nor his brother for a moment guessed at the delicacy and complexity of his thought. Without bitterness he, who from childhood had dreamed such visions as Rimbaud's, ('The moons of sky-blue ice fell crashing silently down to splinter into glass balls which he gathered in his protected hands'), renounced the expectation of being understood.

And with all that such spontaneity, such refreshing naturalness! On their way to the house of their Jewish neighbours, on the Sabbath, ' "We came all right" he called from the top.' He discussed the prayer-cap gravely. His artlessness made the daughter, Dulcie, usually so affected, natural in her turn: she went so far as to discuss (before the scandalized Waldo) the difference between the word 'love' and the French 'amour.' When he visited people he always opened the cupboards and drawers, and one day when he visited (I don't remember for what reason) the bank-manager, he went upstairs and took the manager's wife unawares as she was quietly walking about in her night-gown although she was said to be a bed-ridden invalid! He had a chat with her, very full and candid, and did not open any cupboards that day; but told her, smiling and dribbling, that Waldo, with double-entendre, had remarked that the bank-manager's wife had to stay in bed because she was 'a pressed flower.' Arthur in his innocence found in her hand 'the dry cool scratch of clean writing-paper or pressed flowers.' (SM.219) With the same tranquil frankness he said on another occasion to his employer's wife 'You are not all that mathematical, Mrs Allwright'. (SM.233) (Arthur was very strong on sums!)

Nothing disgusts him; his gusto for life is immense.

Waldo decided in later years: Arthur is an unconfessed voluptuary. Arthur liked that; it sounded in itself voluptuous. (SM.234)

He delivered the orders from the grocery, and customers would feed him cherry conserve, or peaches in brandy, or if he could get there early enough, voluptuous slices of boiled ham. ' "I shan't forget how to live, eh?" With difficulty he forced it out, through his stuffed mouth, past his fatty lips.' (SM.234) In polite society he knew how 'to lick his buttery fingers with the daintiness required' (SM. 245) but the lightest allusion in a conversation to a distant land opened to him a world of dreams. He is gifted, too, with a mixture of good sense and intuition that enables him to see clearly into people. He well understands the difference between Mrs Allwright, full of intrigues and moods, and her straightforward husband whom he compares 'to grain in wood, to bread broken roughly open, to cow-pats, neatly, freshly dropped.' (SM.227) With Waldo, because of his humility, he is absolutely lucid:

'Afraid,' Arthur was saying, and now he did begin to feel a kind of terror rising in him. 'Like our father. I mean Dad. Not the one they pray to. But Dad putting Dostoyevsky on the fire.' (SM.284)

His natural clumsiness does not worry Dulcie, when he tries to play the piano, because music flows from him; like his tenderness with a prostitute who accosts him, or the lovers in the parks. He is the only person in whose presence Dulcie is not embarrassed by her pregnancy, and when she decides that the baby shall be called Arthur, nothing could be more beautiful than his confused emotion. But he does not want to accept, because he does not want the child, later, to be ashamed of his name.

'What about when this boy gets to know whose name he is saddled with?' he asked.

'It will not be his only name,' Mr Saporta said, and his glance

hoped he had found an acceptable solution. 'We shall also call him "Aaron". That will be his Jewish name. But for everyday purposes — "Arthur".'

Arthur was relieved to think he might be blamed less bitterly. 'Aaron.'

After trying it out he was tolerably content. (SM.276)

When his mother is operated on for cancer of the breast the subject is tabu for both Waldo and the patient; the word itself is forbidden. Only Arthur, with his tender innocence, speaks naturally.

'Our mother has lost one of her breasts.'

'That need not be so serious,' said Mrs Poulter, herself a serious and kindly woman.

'But a breast!' he said, wrinkling up.

He could not help looking at their neighbour, so full and firm.

'I expect women are pretty attached to their breasts,' he said.

Mrs Poulter looked the other way. She began to tell about her sick turkey. (SM.256)

Marvellous Arthur! He is irresistible. He is at his poor mother's bedside until the end, sustaining her slow decline, which terrifies Waldo to the point when he does not want to know anything. Arthur lets her drink, brings her bottles of sherry (which she has drunk in secret for many years) plays cat's cradle with her, himself passing the string between her fingers. ' "Doesn't this entertain you?" he asked. "Infinitely," mother said.' (SM.273) After her death, returning quietly from the cemetery, he regrets that she was not cremated because there is nothing so beautiful as rising smoke, so light as it loses itself in the transparency of the sky. Towards the end of his life he begins to write poems himself (following the example of Waldo) as simply as he breathes. 'He wrote the poem of the daughter he had never had, and of the wives he carried inside him.' (SM.290) But at the same time, 'there was the butter-making besides, and bread. Arthur used to clean the lamps, an activity he associated with that of churning or baking, the outcome so lucid.'

(SM.290) His last poem, written on an old scrap of paper that fell from his pocket, roused poor Waldo to such fury, such an access of hate (for he himself had just burned all the manuscripts of his abortive works) that he died of it. Yet that poem was perhaps but a celebration of their common suffering in the heart of the suffering of the universe: 'all Marys in the end bleed . . . they know they cannot have it any other way.' (SM.293)

Journeys implied a promise, as he had been taught, and known . . .
(RC.382)

If there is a hidden link between all the stories Patrick White has told us it is the theme of the Journey, conceived as a progress, a painful and ardent quest, one might say an initiatory ordeal which involves a passage through fire; and often unknown to the pilgrim, whose infinitely simple soul perceives nothing of the work which is operating upon it. Strangest of all, interminable as that Odyssey may seem, everything is, in a sense, given at the outset, whether we call what is given grace, or a star, or a vocation . . . A sign, an impulse, a decisive orientation burns on the brow of certain chosen ones, even when they are for others an object of derision, insignificant, despicable even. These always have about them a radiance, the kind of limitless freedom which surrounds the setting out of Voss's expedition towards the desert in a light 'greyish-green, or blue-grey, the blue of smoke or distance.' (V.154)

A passage through fire, and even apparent annihilation; yet an intense love of life manifests itself at every instant, like that burning at the bottom of Belle's heart: 'It was that she had been made drunk by life, and the mysterious wine that spilled from the souls of those she loved, but whom perhaps she would never know.' (V. 116) The two aborigines who accompany the expedition, no less than the radiant young white girl, tremble with pleasure at Voss's modest gifts. Old Dugald, who receives a brass button, charges it with all the mystic power the 'white man' wants to give him. And the younger, Jackie, when Voss offers him his pocket-knife, 'was

shivering with awful joy as he stood staring at the knife on his own palm.' (V.171) Miss Hare, who, to be sure, has a richer and deeper soul (fruit of the long way she has already travelled), gives her love to inanimate things which neither expect anything from her nor can respond. 'She liked animals, birds, and plants. On these she would expend her great but pitiable love, and because that was not expected, it ceased to be pitiable.' (RC.18) Hers is a love capable of *receiving* life; in the same way Laura (who is never to be a mother) offers herself in her adoption of Rose's (her humiliated maid-servant's) baby: 'Let us receive this poor child into the world with love. This is argument enough. Or I will love it if necessary. As if it had been mine.' (V.225) The simplest food becomes sacramental for Mrs Poulter, who 'had faith also in food'.

That, too, she tried to turn into a mystery.

'Making a sacrament of food. "Take eat" is what she would like to say,' said Dad, laughing at his own joke . . . (SM.160)

And in death itself there can be a mysterious ecstasy of life, like that experienced by Laura after Rose's death:

'My understanding seemed to enter into wind, earth, the ocean beyond, even the soul of our poor, dead maid. . . . I was destroyed, yet living more intensely than actual sunlight, so that I no longer feared the face of Death as I had found it on the pillow.' (V.239)

The many evocations of the world of childhood in White's work are also a privileged form of that love of life in the midst of the ruins of existence. The scenes in which children appear always present a particular vibration of gaiety, of a happy exuberance, an atmosphere of careless, uninhibited freedom. In them the indestructible part of the universe expresses itself in the face of the mechanisms of sterility and destruction. They seem always ready to build on the foundation of the world in a crazy festival, a bonfire of gestures, voices, glances, a temple for a goddess:

'We are going to build a temple,' Belle called.

...

'What temple?' some screamed.

Boys were pressing.

'Of a goddess?'

Sand flew.

'We shall have to decide,' Belle called over her shoulder.

A great train of worshippers was now ploughing the sand, making it spurt up, and sigh. Some of the boys tossed their caps in the air as they ran, and allowed them to plump gaily upon the golden mattress of the beach.

'Belle has gone mad,' said Willie Pringle . . . (V.65-6)

When dear Mrs Godbold calls her past to mind it is a scene of her youth that shines most clearly in her memory. As an older sister she was already kept busy with a string of younger brothers and sisters. One day she took the unruly crew into a cathedral (in England, before she emigrated). Respectful silence fell on all these intimidated little kids, until they found a hound carved in stone at the feet of a recumbent duchess! Then they exploded in yells of delight, and scattered at full speed, those yelling brats, into every corner of God's house. Arthur had needed even less, content to laugh with happiness, quite quietly, in class, when he heard pronounced the words 'Frizzy fennel'!

Then, in the distance between the window and the street, their two souls were at their most intimate and loving. (RC.140)

Within the scope of that tenderness for life in all its forms, how great is the power taken on by the evocation of human love! Patrick White sets about that depiction with a way of seeing unlike that of any other writer, whose *quality* seems to me unique in the modern novel. It is never indeed a question of describing 'passionate love' or all that is signified (rightly or wrongly) by the term 'romantic love.' It is the mystery of the *couple*, the overwhelming union of passion and tenderness between two beings who have recognized one

another and vowed themselves to one another *to the end of the journey*. This is the mystery that White attempts to illumine, even in his sketches, his outlines, or those apparent breaks when the lovers must live partly or totally separated. White is not concerned with the relationship of that 'enduring love' to the institution of marriage. His harbingers of love may be married, or may be separated by the law, by life, by death. Sometimes they fulfil themselves in an immense and total plenitude, sometimes only in the exchange of a few words, a few exchanged looks; (a simple dance, ridiculous and sublime, unites Arthur and Mrs Poulter for ever); but always the same indestructible love is in question, at once carnal and luminous, like the music of eternity within the shadow of time.

When Alys (a woman in years although she has the body of a young virgin) gives herself for the first time to Oliver (himself in middle life) after the first moment of fear at the contact of this body of a *stranger*, she unites herself to him in a pure act of tenderness, as to the source of a sacred revelation. 'Her whole body seemed fragmentary with the tenderness that she could not give him in the measure she wanted to give.' (H.V.) And Oliver, who has lived through the long dead years of his marriage has the sensation of waking from the long sleep.

'I have been asleep', he said. 'It is like waking . . . The others are asleep, perhaps will never wake . . . If you could go down among the sleepers and open their eyes . . .'

(H.V.)

He, at least, has found himself, whatever the world and its laws may think. But the small town of Happy Valley, immersed in its moralities, its hypocrisies and lies, is not the world; through that love the whole universe is now given, and reveals itself to Oliver with a splendour which opens him to the universal awaiting:

'I stand here, and it is cool, the stars are cool, and the rain which will soon stop. It is a long time since I have been conscious of these things, felt their significance, conscious of the many veins . . . one water flowing into one water from the

North Sea to the Pacific, no longer constrained by maps, and the people walking with upturned faces, looking for something that they do not find in themselves, always with faces upturned.' (H.V.165)

The plenitude of that love reminds him of having listened to a Bach fugue, years ago, in Paris . . . And if the lovers must finally separate (so as not to destroy the lives of Oliver's wife and children) their love retains its indestructible character in Oliver's wonderful letter of farewell:

'I can't take any other view after what we have experienced, you and I. I tell myself it will still be there, that this is something which no passage of time or external pressure can destroy. Perfection is never destroyed.' (H.V.294)

But the mixture of tenderness and humour with which Mrs Poulter describes the birth of her love does not seem to me essentially different. When Arthur, with his habitual innocence, asks her why she married her husband, she laughs; and then after reflection,

'Well', she said, 'there was his hands. Bill had lovely hands. A man's hands, mind you,' she said.
Arthur looked at his own.

'Of course,' she said, 'he's mucked them up by now. Couldn't help it. A working man. Times when he worked on the roads, too. But I must have fell for Bill's hands.' (SM.257)

Later she tells how it melted her to look at them;

'What of it, if you love a person? That was what the Bible told you. It was only with the ministers that sin came in, but they didn't always understand.' (SM.297)

The love of Voss and Laura is certainly not as simple as that. It is much more mysterious; a passionate love affair, of a sort, but lived at a distance; I know of nothing comparable in any literature. We know our two lovers; what is difficult to account for is the manner

in which their love increases, little by little, step by step with Voss's penetration of the Australian desert, although at the time of their meetings they had not become aware of the strength of feeling which sealed their souls. Even in the midst of countless hardships Voss writes to Laura, long letters from his untamed heart, and all bathed in a strange and consummate sweetness. While no apparent intimacy has ever existed between them, he yet addresses her as 'my dearest wife' and avows to her that she may perhaps be beginning to find in him 'a little of that humility' which she so much admires and had tried to communicate to him. He unites her, with an overwhelming naturalness (he, by vocation a solitary), with each of his adventures, his sufferings, his exploits. 'So we are riding together across the plains, we sit together in this black night, I reach over and touch your cheek (not for the first time). You see that separation has brought us far, far closer.' (V.216) He tells her that in an enclosed letter he is officially asking her hand of her uncle.

Laura, for her part, who had such a horror of human contacts, is transformed by this distant love. She puts her arm round her pregnant maid and buries her face in her dress. What is beautiful is that her own lover (that unbending man whom no-one has ever been able to win or bend) is for ever (and how far!) beyond the reach of her arms and her heart; but the effect of that love is shown by an infinitely tender bodily gesture towards a black maid hitherto repellant to her. Later, in a letter in which she tells of poor Rose's death (at the birth of the child), she penetrates to her maid's very heart, to the secret of her devotion and her endurance; and beyond that she begins to espouse and to comprehend the whole vast land in which she lives. Thanks to Voss, whose image and whose fire burns her to the very depths of her being,

her bones continued to crave earthly love, to hold his skull against the hollow where her heart had been. It appeared that pure happiness must await the final crumbling, where love would enter into love, becoming an endlessness. (V.235)

While Voss, now irretrievably lost, draws ever nearer to his death,

Laura sinks into a mysterious agony at once physical and spiritual. The interlacing of the two stories, the two beings who respond to one another with a perfect and unbroken native simplicity, is admirable.

Once in the night, Laura Trevelyan, who was struggling to control the sheets, pulled herself up and forward, leaning over too far, with the natural result that she was struck in the face when the horse threw up his head. She did not think she could bear the pain.

...

When she was more controlled, she said very quietly:

'You need not fear. I shall not fail you. Even if there are times when you wish me to, I shall not fail you.'

And again, with evident happiness:

'It is your dog. She is licking your hand. How dry your skin is, though. Oh, blessed moisture!'

(V.358)

Later the union deepens, an exquisite sweetness that underlies the horror, in which Voss's pride is little by little consumed away. And Laura perceives that she on her side must make an ultimate sacrifice, because he — in the course of those mysterious overlappings they share — fears to lose her if he loses that *force* which is all his pride. And looking towards her, he sees her as she actually is, thousands of miles away, shorn of her beautiful hair which has had to be cut in the course of the severe illness which she endures for his sake.

Then he looked at her, and saw that they had cut off her hair, and below the surprising stubble that remained, they had pared the flesh from her face. She was now quite naked. And beautiful. Her eyes were drenching him.

(V.367)

She even gives up Mercy, her dear Roses's little girl, whom she had accepted as her own child, confiding her, with a rending of her heart, to good neighbours.

In his ultimate agony Voss, broken, shattered, is in the end completely *inspired* by Laura. With the simplicity of a little child he

renounces all hope, and discovers, through that renunciation, trust in God. He converses with his last companion, who asks him

'What is your plan, then?'

'I have no plan,' replied Voss, 'but will trust to God.'

...

He sat humbly holding a little leaf.

'If you withdraw,' Le Mesurier began.

'I do not withdraw,' Voss answered. 'I am withdrawn.'

'And can give us no hope?'

'I suggest you wring it out for yourself . . . ' (V.380)

Then, shortly before his death, the body of an old native woman with her slack breasts, as she leans over him, is transfigured in his eyes and merges into the radiant body of the woman he loves and which he has never seen. They kiss, healing their wounds, uniting mysteriously in an ineffable light whose tenderness gives off a strange fragrance of Paradise:

. . . the greyish skin was slowly revived, until her full, white, immaculate body became the shining source of all light.

By its radiance, he did finally recognize her face, and would have gone to her, if it had been possible, but it was not; his body was worn out.

Instead, she came to him, and at once he was flooded with light and memory. As she lay beside him, his boyhood slipped from him in a rustling of water and a rough towel. A steady summer had possessed them. Leaves were in her lips, that he bit off, and from her breasts the full, silky, milky buds. They were holding each others' heads and looking into them, as remorselessly as children looking at secrets, and seeing all too clearly. But, unlike children, they were confronted to recognize their own faults. (V.383)

And Voss's last consolation, his last vision at the moment of death, are the words of love which he can now slip into the mouth of his beloved like a sacramental food:

But of greater importance were his own words of love that he was able at last to put into her mouth. So great was her faith, she received those white wafers without surprise. (V.393)

And Laura, at the same instant, at the other side of the desert, in her sick-room, is in communion with Voss's last breath: ' "O God," cried the girl, at last, tearing it out, "It is over. It is over." ' (V.395) But to the end of her life, in a majestic peace, she carries within her, an inexplicable fountain of light, their love and their secret.

After such a conflagration how marvellous it is to enter the deep freshness of the love of the young Mordecai for his Jewish fiancée, Reha. Like him, she is a little short-sighted, and before their engagement risks a joke about 'the blind leading the blind.' He is a young man of burning faith, and the minutest details of his religion fill him with limpid fervour. 'To touch the fringes of his shawl with his lips, was to drink pure joy.' (RC.125) His proposal of marriage and their conversation, so modest and so tender, takes place in the very light of Eden. She has hoped for that proposal without venturing to say a word, and bursts into tears:

'I must try very hard. Forgive me,' she cried. 'That I should behave like this. Just now. I am afraid I may fail you also in other ways.'

'Reha, darling!' he answered rather lightly. 'In the eyes of the world a provincial intellectual is a *comic* figure.'

'Ah, but you do not understand,' she managed with difficulty . . . 'And I cannot express myself. But we — some of us — although we have not spoken — I know that you will bring us honour.'

. . .

'Reha, Reha! If you only knew!' he insisted, I am the lowest of human beings!'

But it did not deter her from taking his head in her arms. It was as though she would possess it for as long as one is allowed to possess anything in this world. Yet she did so in humility,

conscious of the minor part she would be given to play.

(RC.125)

He became a famous professor, a respected scholar, and their love, little by little, spread subtle and deep roots in their souls. Their life was quiet, 'boring and easy' work, the leisurely publications of the *Herr Dozent*, 'the impression of peaceful permanence, strongest always in the mornings, when the feather beds lolled in the sunlight on the upper window sills.' (RC.131) And in the evening, at the time of prayer, Mordecai's mystic's heart was restored by Reha's simple faith. 'Watching his wife Reha one evening as she lit the Sabbath candles, Himmelfarb would have said: "Of all people in this world, Reha is least in doubt." They had only one sorrow: they had no children; and this made the neighbours gossip. The duties of *Rabbanim*, one of these declared, does not begin and end with books; while Reha Himmelfarb simply maintained: "Who are we, Rifke, to decide what a man's duties shall be?"' (RC.132)

Between these two hearts there is an exchange, an ineffable understanding. Gentle Reha remains, in appearance, outside the high meditations of her Mordecai, but in reality she *knows*, she shares everything, just as he takes her always with him on his long, solitary walks.

Returning from a walk he would catch sight of her standing at a first floor window. Looking. Then she would notice, and lean out, and wave, with her rather dark, plump hand, breathless, it seemed, with happiness and relief that she had not been called away before he had returned. Then, in the distance between the window and the street, their two souls were at their most intimate and loving. (RC.140)

But in Hitler's Germany, where the hatred of Jews was increasing, Reha has the presentiment of the irruption of an abominable apocalypse. And it is pure horror when Mordecai, returning home one day, finds his home ransacked and empty. He runs through the empty rooms, calling in a voice of dismay, in the extremity of

despair, the wife of his bosom.

'Reha! Reha.'

And it returned from out of the house.

Always he had imagined how, in the worst crisis, she, his saviour, would come to him, and hold his head against her breast.

But she did not.

So he went blundering and crying.

He called to God, and it went out at the windows, through the bare branches of the trees, so that a party of people a street away burst out laughing, before they took fright. (RC.152)

He never saw her again; she is lost in the hell of the camps, but the innocent and gentle soul continues to inhabit and enlighten the soul of Mordecai. She, who in her humility thought she could never follow her husband, goes before him now, leading him into the profoundest depths of the divine compassion. At the height of the war and the universal destruction, she appears to him one night (a dream? None knows, only God knows), to turn his suffering being towards the multitude in which she is herself merged.

Then his own wife came and took his hand, and together they stood looking down into the pit of darkness, at the bottom of which was the very faintest phosphorescence of faces. He longed — oh most intolerably — to look once more at the face of Reha Himmelfarb, but it was as though she were directing his vision towards the other, unknown faces, and might even have become unrecognizable herself. The tears were flowing faster, from the unseen eyes. Of blood, he saw, on the back of his hand. The voices of darkness ever swelling. So that the quick-lime of compassion, mounting from the great pit, consumed him where he stood. For Reha Himmelfarb had withdrawn; she already knew the meaning of what they had just experienced together. (RC.167)

True solitude is only possible when there is serenity.

If human love (through what shattering crucifixions!) can lead to a mysterious solitude of light, it is because an inverted shadow of that solitude is already present in the human heart. Nearly all Patrick White's characters share that secret, with its vertiginous shadow. Some resemble the innkeeper in the depths of rural Australia under snow, who tries to keep the doctor from leaving (Oliver, whom we already know) by talking platitudes to postpone the moment of his departure, so great is his thirst for human contact. But the doctor himself is alone even in the company of his wife. One day, in giving her a light kiss on the nape of her neck, he becomes overwhelmingly aware that he knows nothing of her but her scent.

. . . there seemed no words in which to express compassion for a human relationship . . . There ought to be so much that two people could say. But they were like strangers standing on the railway station waiting for the train to go . . . He kissed her on the back of the neck very lightly, conscious of the scent of her neck which he knew so well, the scent and the shape, sitting on a seat in the Botanical Gardens, when he thought he knew everything. And now he knew nothing, or at least he did not know Hilda, nothing more than the scent and shape. (H.V.78-9)

And however great this tactful consideration he can bring to his patients only *the illusion of help*. So with the poor schoolmaster:

'But I oughtn't to leave the school for more than a day or two.'

'We'll have you right pretty soon,' Halliday said.

To say something to Moriarty, this poor misery, taking my word, depending on me, when I can't offer more than the illusion of comfort. (H.V.124)

Doctor Oliver would have liked to give so much more than his mediocre remedies, he knew very well that Moriarty's malady was above all loneliness — like all of us in this world — and could not forgive himself for being unable to remove that terrible barrier.

He must send medicine to Moriarty, though more, he could not send more, he could not give him more, he wanted to give him more, he wanted to give so many people the impossible through the existing wall that somehow the human personality seems to erect. (H.V.127)

And Palfreyman, the minister, who spends his life listening to, and giving consolation to all who come, only becomes more aware of his own solitude and perhaps the uselessness of all these confidences. Therein lies his temptation to despair:

He suspected he would not become involved with any human being, but was reserved as a repository of confidence, until the final shattering would scatter all secrets in the dust. (V.108)

But sometimes, at the very limit of suffering and deprivation, certain people (the most commonplace even) succeed in overcoming the solitude, to glimpse, in a moment of insight, a mysterious participation that is nevertheless possible. There is, for example, the scene in which Judd (ex-convict) and Harry Roberts (formerly rich young squire) dying of hunger in the far solitude of the Australian wilds, *commune* by means of a ball of resin.

'There you are, Harry,' he said, and offered his closed, hairy hand. 'There is a present for yer.'

...

'What is it?' asked the boy, advancing his own hand, but cautiously.

'No,' laughed Judd, blushing under dirt. 'Open your mouth, shut your eyes.'

Then, when his suggestion had been followed, he popped a little lump of gum into the lad's open mouth.

'Ach!' cried Harry, wrinkling up.

'No,' insisted Judd. 'Go on.'

He was putting into his own mouth a similar knot of gum, to demonstrate his faith in the token, or else they would both die of it. (V.245)

This prepares us to understand that there is a spiritual solitude, far deeper, but of another order, and which may become a source of fecundity, love, and life; a solitude which, in self-forgetfulness, in consent (even face to face with God) never to give way to despair, attains a kind of transparence, lightness, an indescribable deliverance, in the face of all this world's 'realities'. So Mordecai's mother, in appearance so austere and silent (but utterly tender-hearted), had in her little boy built up the delicious gaiety which was, however, defaced by ordeals and tears, to reappear in the old man. 'But it was out of the mother's silence and solitude of soul that the rather studious, though normal, laughing, sometimes too high-spirited little boy had been formed.' (RC.99) She herself too overflowed in secret with the sweet gaiety of the humble, her eyes always sparkling with mischief and tenderness, like a reflection of the divine innocence.

Alone with her son, she would often unbend, even after he was grown. She would become quite skittish in her private joy, with the result that the boy was sometimes ashamed for what appeared unnecessary, not to say unnatural, in one of natural dignity.

'Mordecai ben Moshe!' she would refer to him half-aloud, half-laughing. (RC.102)

He much resembles her when, at the end of his road, an exile in Australia, he has lost everything: his wife, his country, his social standing, comfort, simple security. He is despised and baited in the factory where he works as a labourer, and the racism which surrounds him makes it impossible for him to have any friend (apart from the wretched Dubbo, as we have seen, with whom he exchanges silent looks). The foreman presses him in a tone half-jocular, half-threatening:

'But a man stands a better chance of a fair go if he's got a mate. That's all I'm saying. See?'

Himmelfarb laughed again — the morning had made him rash

— and replied:

‘I shall take Providence as my mate.’ (RC.308)

So the old Mordecai rediscovers, almost unawares, his dear Reha’s smile (after so long!) of the early days of their engagement, in another life . . .

The simple actions we have learned to carry out every day are the best protection against evil.

But, as we have seen, he has had to pass through the fire. The theme of Redemption beyond evil in all its forms runs through White’s entire work, and from one book to the next takes on an ever-growing importance. More and more we see that the *bumble* carry and redeem the evil of multitudes, often without evoking, or even knowing, the traditional Christian beliefs. Although they do not in any way use a religious language, they none the less live the realities the language embodies. Thus Arthur, or Mrs Poulter who in her merciful heart associates Waldo’s awful death with all the atrocities of the world:

She knew now. The flat faces of all those Chinese Guerillas, or Indonesians, it was the same thing, dragged out across the dreadful screen. All those Jews in ovens, that was long ago, but still burning, lying in heaps. Lone women bashed up in Mosman, Marouba, Randwick, places you went only in your sleep.

(SM.302)

But it is in the context of the *Riders in the Chariot* that White has gone farthest in his exploration of this vertiginous mystery. The essence is perhaps contained in a long conversation between Himmel-farb and Miss Hare, soon after the Jew has described to her the horrible scene of the removal of his wife by the Nazis in his absence. He has the sense of having betrayed not only his beloved wife, but also his people, by going and concealing himself, one evening, with friends. ‘When all of them had put their trust in me . . . It was I, you know, on whom they were depending to redeem their sins.’

Miss Hare doesn't understand what people mean by the word sin.

'We had an old servant who often tried to explain, but I would fail as often to grasp. Peg would insist that she had sinned, but I knew that she had not . . . Just as I know this tree is good; it cannot be guilty of more than a little bit of wormy fruit. Everything else is imagination.' (RC.154)

Then how account for evil? asks the Jew. She explains nothing. She knows that evil exists but thinks it will destroy itself. 'Oh, yes, there is evil!' She hesitated. 'People are possessed by it. Some more than others! she added with force. 'But it burns itself out.' (RC.154) She does not believe directly in a saviour, she believes in a mysterious resurrection of life, of which nature perpetually shows us the image. But Mordecai presses her, speaking of the mysterious Chariot of which all the elect of this narrative (even poor Dubbo) have at some time, in one way or another, caught a glimpse. What does that symbol signify and what exactly have they seen? We can never know. The symbol is so rich that I would not myself venture to elucidate it, leaving it rather to blaze on the soul's horizon in its fitful brightness. It remains true that for those who have seen it, it evokes, certainly, the possibility of being carried to the very heart of an adorable conflagration in which all the misery of existence is finally consumed,

'And the Chariot?' he asked, 'that you wished to discuss at one stage? Will you not admit the possibility of redemption?'

(RC.155)

Something in her rejects the word *Redemption* (though not its reality) but she can't deny the Chariot. Indeed she has seen it, she humbly avows. And finally it is he who is at last overcome, as if he saw it, but without riders, 'I cannot visualize, I do not understand the Riders.' And her reply is sublime — a reply in which it is clear that her heart, which does not understand evil, is illuminated by God: 'Do you see everything at once? My house is full of things waiting to be seen. Even quite common objects are shown to us

only when it is time for them to be.' (RC.155) She reminds us of Julian of Norwich, who interrogated God on evil in the midst of the sufferings and abominations of the terrible XVth century, and who heard in her soul the ineffable reply, 'All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well.' Then Mordecai, in a transport of joy, says

'It is you who are the hidden *zaddik*!'

'The what?' she asked.

'In each generation, we say, there are thirty-six hidden *zaddikhim* — holy men who go secretly about the world, healing, interpreting, doing their good deeds.'

She burned, a slow red, but did not speak, because his explanation, in spite of reaching her innermost being, did not altogether explain.

'It is even told,' continued the Jew, stroking grass, 'how the creative light of God poured into the *zaddikhim*. That *they* are the Chariot of God.' (RC.155)

Dear Mrs Godbold is even simpler than Miss Hare. In her innocence she cannot even conceive of evil, she can only submit to it, recognizing it only when it literally hits her; as Mordecai notes, a little slyly,

It could have been, within her scheme, that evil was only evil when she bore the brunt of it herself; she alone must and would deflect, receiving the fist, if necessary, between the eyes. He rather senses this, but could not accuse her innocence. Besides, he suspected it of being a vice common to Christians. (RC.222-3)

Her intuition is extraordinary; 'It could be that some are forgiven for something we ourselves have forgotten.' (RC.223)

After Himmelfarb has been turned away by the Rosetrees, he finds at his door, when he returns in the evening, kind Mrs Godbold with a plate of lamb which she has brought him for Easter! A lump in his throat, he forces himself to adapt to her, to the idea he

imagines Christians must have of Easter.

'You will be glad. Not that it will be, well,' he chose with some care, 'a holiday, exactly. For you, I expect. But for what it signifies.'

'Oh,' she answered, 'I am always glad at Eastertide. Because, then, suffering is over. Or so they tell us. For a little.'

And she recalls the delicate splendour of Easter in England, with the scent of all the flowers, 'The narcissies. And the white anemones we would pick if we cut across the woods.'; adding in trumpet-tones, 'But on Easter Day we would know Our Lord had risen.' (RC.394)

Then the Jew hung his head.

But she saw, and at once she touched him with her voice, saying:

'You must forgive me. I must not waste your time. You will not be up for work. The lamb is nothing, but you are welcome to it — only if you would care.' (RC.394)

It is he, finally, who takes the place of the Lamb, who during a long horrifying scene suffers the Passion, half lynched by the mindless drunken crowd, then hoisted on a sort of post, where they spit on him.

'It is the foreigners that take the homes. It is the Jews.

Good old Bluey! Let 'im 'ave it! I'll buy yer one when the job's finished.' (RC.410)

Poor Dubbo, watching him from the foot of the gibbet, *sees* the mystery of evil, enters into the truth of the Blood, which had seemed an unreal falsehood in Mr Calderon's pious picture with which the minister had stuffed his childhood. 'So he understood the concept of the blood, which was sometimes the sick, brown stain on his own pillow, sometimes the clear crimson of redemption.' He was blinded and choking at the revelation that 'knowledge would never cut the cords which bound the Saviour to the tree', that

knowledge is not enough. 'Not that it was asked. Nothing was asked. So he began to understand the mystery of acceptance.' (RC.412-3) All the perverted forms of love he had known from childhood, forms of putrefaction, ugliness, perversion. But he also recalls 'the blandest experience of love: the milky light of morning poured out unadulterated over his naked shoulders.' (RC.413)

And it is he, when Mordecai is taken down, with loud embarrassed laughs (in an atmosphere of panic and sneaking shame) who picks up and puts back in the little fibre case the Jew's few poor possessions, the phylacteries, the shawl a little stained with blood, timidly accompanying Himmelfarb as he totters towards his shed, glad not to be any longer an object of scandal and a cause of derision. But other louts have set his shed on fire, so Mrs Godbold takes him in and puts him to bed in her beautiful white sheets; for the lynching has finished him. Now he could see

the rightness and inevitability of all that his wife Reha had been allowed in her simplicity to understand . . . It seemed to him as though the mystery of failure might be pierced only by those of extreme simplicity of soul, or else by one who was about to doff the outgrown garment of the body.

And now for the last time he finds his dear wife in an infinitely tender communion:

In the meantime, as he prepared, or rid himself of minor objections, he had agreed unreservedly that Reha should become his voice and hands. They had seldom enjoyed such intimacy of spirit as when, in the course of the afternoon, a wind got up from the sea. (RC.427)

Miss Hare too is there, her face and hands burned (for she had gone into the burning shed, thinking Mordecai was inside). In her sorrow to see him dying she gently rubs the cold feet of the only friend she ever had in the world. And little by little to his swollen face comes a peace that shines over all that poor gathering.

The softest matter her memory could muster — the fallen breastfeathers, tufts of fur torn in courtship, the downy, broken crooks of bracken — was what she now willed upon the spirit of her love. (RC.438)

Then Mordecai stiffened and died. A few moment later the big alarm-clock (which Mrs Godbold's little girls have been tinkering with) 'went off before its usual hour, with a jubilation of whirring tin to stir the deepest sleeper.' Mrs Godbold turned towards the mantel and said,

'Mr Himmelfarb, too, has died on the Friday.' (RC.439)

The Name! Remember they cannot take the Name! (RC.184)

Thus God is not finally to be attained, at the end of the journey, save in the spirit of the first Beatitude. Known, in a sense, from the beginning, his most secret, his purest light is nevertheless not to be unveiled save to those who have lost everything. Not that God seeks to hide anything of himself, but that he is totally, absolutely, *bidden* (absconditus), because he is mysteriously at the extremity of weakness, of despoliation, of transparency. Voss and Laura must go on a long journey to discover this because so rich in themselves, so involved in pride and arrogance.

We remember their first conversation about God, Voss's 'faith' so much less pure than Laura's atheism. Voss, at bottom, is walled up in himself, in his real yet ambiguous greatness. Laura's face, for him the resplendent face of beauty, is to open into his being a breach of light, to be enlarged to the degree to which his dream of conquest loses itself in the sand. Which is not at all to say that dream was valueless. That expedition is the long and necessary course he must traverse in order to enter the order of love. 'It is the woman who unmakes men, to make saints,' (V.188) he murmurs at the time of his first difficulties. But he hardens himself. When he is a human skeleton, his teeth chattering in the shadows, prayer pours from him like a spring of water. From that time 'he could endure it, and

that because at last he was truly humbled.' (V.389) The prayers of both intermingle like a single song of love. Laura Trevelyan is prostrate on her bed, stricken with that strange illness (for which puzzled doctors — it was in 1845 — prescribed the application of leeches to her whole body), consumed by fever and thirst, is living the agony of her beloved thousands of miles away in the desert, and her prayer becomes like the rhythm of her breathing. "Dear God," she cried, gasping for breath, "it is so easy . . . Who will love him when I am gone? I only pray that God will. O lord, yes," she begged, "Now that he is humble." (V.386)

Dr Kilwinning had to tear at the leeches with his plump, strong hands to bring them away, so greedily were they clinging to the blue veins of the sick woman.

'That is clear, doctor?' she asked.

'What?' he mumbled.

The situation had made him clumsy.

'When man is truly humbled, when he has learned that he is not God, then he is nearest to becoming so. In the end, he may ascend.' (V.386-7)

To which Voss, far away, responds in his native language: "O Jesus," he cried, "*rette mich nur! Du lieber!*" (V.390) At the moment of death he forgets his own suffering in empathy with that of the screaming horses and mules as they are massacred by the aborigines of the escort. And we no longer know whether the prayer is his or hers, 'Ah Lord, let him bear it.' (V.392)

Miss Hare and Mordecai have always known these things. Being poor, they know God in their compassion for the poor. Miss Hare has not been to church this Sunday (to the great scandal of Mrs Jolley). She has met the wretched Dubbo among the bushes, who has spoken to her a few simple, kind words (the only words they were ever to exchange) and from that time they are to communicate in the exchange of looks.

'Pooh! Some dirty abo bloke! I would not have an abo come

near me. And in the bush. They are all undesirable persons. And in the bush! You will run into trouble, my lady. Mark my words if I am not right.'

Though she had to smile, and not to herself.

'I am told the aboriginals *are* a very dirty lot. And drunk and disorderly.' Miss Hare had to admit.

But it was she herself who felt dirtied. Mrs Jolley had dirtied her. (RC.64)

The proximity of death was to give Mordecai a yet more direct experience of God, one night when the bombs were falling so close to his house, so close that for a second the furniture changed shape.

The Jew rocked in his attic, but knew himself at that moment to be closer than ever to his God, as his thoughts clung to that with which he was most familiar. As the moonlight filled with the black shadows of wings, and all the evil in the world was aimed at the fragile lichened roof, he was miraculously transported. (RC.165)

And in the concentration camp of Friendensdorf, naked, at the heart of the horror, near the gas-chamber to which they were dragging a poor Jew, he was definitely established in the bosom of the Ineffable:

' . . . brought to his knees by sudden weakness, tearing them furiously upon the pebbles, calling to her across the same gulf, shouted through the stiff slot of his mouth: 'The Name! Remember they cannot take the Name! When they have torn off our skins that will clothe. Save. At last.' (RC.184)

But the case of Arthur is perhaps still more mysterious; we do not see him in any experience of God, direct or indirect. He lives in such self-effacement that he never places himself before him, never pronounces his Name. When the stupid Mrs Musto holds forth on the Word, Arthur suddenly becomes silent and literally disappears into himself.

'... in the beginning was the Word. Which sort of proves, don't it?'

She had a snub nose you could look right up.

'In the beginning was what word?' Arthur asked, seated on that beaded stool, looking up Mrs Musto's nose.

'Why,' she said, 'the Word of God!'

'Oh,' said Arthur, 'God.'

He might have started to argue, or at least to wonder aloud, but fortunately stopped short, lowering his thick eyelids as if to prevent others calculating the distance to which he had withdrawn. (SM.85)

This is surely the extreme limit of abasement and dereliction. Terrified at Waldo's death (for which he holds himself responsible) he runs away, anywhere, to collapse finally in a sordid dead-end. Black night on the world and in his heart. Two drunks urinate close to him. He dreams of his childhood; 'He would have liked to be a little boy, staring at the sky through hydrangea leaves.' (SM.306) He clasps in his hand his last spiral marble (he has given away all his other *mandalas*) and later, as he passes in front of a shop, a mirror shows him his 'interminable face in shrivelled kid in what wasn't even a fun-fair mirror, he was sorry about it. For being the cause of everybody's shame. If he could only have revealed himself glistening in a sphere of glass.' (SM.307) All the delicacy of his soul is there, inhabited by God unawares. After wandering about for some days he finally returns to Mrs Poulter's house. Their sublime conversation in all its simplicity is continuously bathed in an invisible Presence:

'I don't think, Mrs Poulter, I could live without my brother. He was more than half of me.'

'Oh no,' Mrs Poulter said. 'No more than a small quarter.'

She was breathing hard, holding his head against her side.

'I was the one who should have died,' said Arthur. 'In the beginning. They never told me.' (SM.310)

In an irresistible impulse at once of tenderness and veneration 'she slid down painfully on her knees, along his side, until by instinct she was encircling her joy and duty with her arms — ritually, as it were.' (SM.311) So Sergeant Foyle found them when he arrived to take Arthur to an asylum named Peaches-and-Plums! He is secretly moved, and the scene reminds him of certain sacred moments in his childhood;

And as she half-turned, rising half-sighing upon a probably needle-riddled foot, taking the weight off her numb knees, he was reminded of a boyhood smell of cold, almost deserted churches, and old people rising, transparent and hopeful, chafing the blood back into their flesh after the sacrament.

(SM.313)

And she bears witness: 'This man would be my saint,' she said, 'If we could still believe in saints. Nowadays,' she said, 'we've only men to believe in. I believe in this man.' (SM.314) Arthur only asks her, a little anxiously, to come and see him at the asylum every Tuesday (visiting day) and to bring orange jubes. And she can no longer restrain herself from crying out, 'Oh yes, I'll come! I'll come, my pet! You needn't worry! I'll come, my love!' (SM.314) But his own last words, still informed by an inimitable naturalness, have the simplicity we look for in the children of Paradise: 'By Tuesday I'll have plenty to tell. We'll walk about the grounds together. That's how time passes. In little attentions.' (SM.315)

Such is the climate of the Kingdom.

He felt himself freed by this journey, as he had rarely been by prayer.

In his *Australian Letters* (1958) Patrick White has confided certain things about himself to his world; that throughout the war in the Middle East he was pursued by the longing to revisit places he had known in childhood; which is, after all, the purest source of creation. I think that he is really speaking of a certain interior country, whose reflection is everywhere to be sensed in his pages, 'the

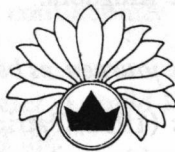
pestilential human decrepitude' notwithstanding. Sarsaparilla, the imaginary suburb of Sydney, in which he has situated many of his stories, is (like Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha county) a microcosm of our refractory planet, where by the gift of poetry he has caused to emerge all our benightedness conceals of the light in certain radiant and mutilated beings. 'I have tried to uncover the extraordinary concealed behind the ordinary – the mystery and the poetry which alone enable such beings to support their lives.' *Without poetry life would be unbearable*, as Teresa of Avila has said.

Long after Voss's death, Laura Trevelyan, invested, in her old age, in an inexplicable serenity, said: 'Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes by death by torture in the country of the mind.' Only certain people understand these things, she says; 'Some of you, at least, are the discoverers.' (V.446) This is the whole meaning of that Quest whose course I have traced; 'Every moment that we live and breathe, and love, and suffer, and die.' (V.448)

Freeing of captive souls!

With acknowledgments to *Études*

Translated by Kathleen Raine



END-STOPPED POETS
Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes

THOMAS BLACKBURN

'Old men,' as Eliot writes, 'should be explorers,' and Yeats 'Grant me an old man's frenzy, Myself must I remake.' Both poets stem from the tradition opened up by Wordsworth and Blake, who regarded life as a difficult but exciting journey through people, events and natural phenomena which continually hint that as the journey traces its surface way, it reaches down, and so do the creatures it travels through and with, into unfathomable heights and depths of unparagraphed meaning; energies of supra-normal significance which offer clues as to the nature of the goal. Above all, neither poet is end-stopped by death for, like Wordsworth and Blake and Robert Browning, they regard it as the ending of one mode of being for the beginning of another.

This attitude is shared by most of the younger poets who follow these masters as well as by such illustrious but less ample contemporaries as Edwin Muir and Robert Graves; although the latter does not explore the gateway and quality of death he yields to his love a kind of resonance which seems not only to penetrate the quick of nerves of dying but to pass through into its first fires. Poets of real talent and, I suspect, durability follow on the tradition of Yeats and Eliot. The close cleaving to nature of Vernon Watkins and Dylan Thomas, although as in incantations they summon up through their trappings in words certain imaginative responses from deep within us, never lose the reality of the object which is the essence of the spells they make. Thus Vernon Watkins, while writing about a wreck's débris on the sea cliffs of his native Gower, although he touches us into mysterious surmise, yet keeps the reality of a sea cave or tidal erosion:

Under the stupefying wave
A limpet grips their slippery grave.
Flat ghosts in sackcloth crawl through the cave.

...

Fingers picking the holes of the coast,
Riddling water, their needle is lost;
They hover about us, ah haunting host!

This marriage between nature and man in which they are co-partners, an under and overness of the environment meeting similar if not greater depths and heights within humanity, receives its first full expression in Wordsworth; though, of course, there are aspects of it in countless other poets, particularly Shakespeare who, whether it is a question of the heaths of Lear and Macbeth or the daffodils of Perdita and the zest she shared with these early flowers, throws out passage after passage celebrating this union. So (and it is one of his main themes) does the significant and curiously neglected poet, Vernon Watkins; his work, again non end-stopped by death, sees over the dark margin of temporal life in poems like *The Death Bell*.

Vernon Watkins makes nature an accurate expression of his turbulence and zests and nostalgia, and yet keeps, or rather traps, in his best and extremely accurate poems some essence of the birds and clouds and seas he writes about, so that they do not merely mirror a mood within the poet but some essence of themselves. We respond with a sense not only of insight into the poet's being but also into the life of nature which lies around us and to which he has given an articulate and, in our response, verifiable language. Nature and his interior being are linked together in an equal marriage.

Listen. The minstrels sing
In the departed villages, the nightingale,
Dust in the buried wood, flies on the grains of her wings
And spells on the wind of the dead his winter's tale.

Look. And the dancers move
On the departed, snow bushed green, wanton in moonlight
As a dust of pigeons. Exulting, the grave hooved
Horses, centaur dead, turn and tread the drenched white
Paddocks in the farms of birds. The dead oak walks for love.

There is not only the marriage of nature and man here, but, particularly in *The Ballad of Hunt's Bay* (and I find this a probable truth), the sense of the co-presence of the dead and the living. Thus the dead drowned sailors are still ready to be summoned back into time. Both for Vernon Watkins and his friend Dylan Thomas, the point is not only that the difficult psyche rests on a basis where it touches down into eternity, but that although the poet may expand his tensions into the phenomena of nature around him, nature is always herself and his use of her creatures an extension of our vision of them. Here is Dylan Thomas.

Who is the light of old
And air shaped Heaven where souls grow wild
As horses in the foam:
Oh, let me midlife mourn by the shrined
And druid heron's vows
The voyage to ruin I must run,
Dawn ships clouted aground,
Yet, though I cry with tumbledown tongue,
Count my blessings aloud:
Four elements and five
Senses and man a spirit in love
Tangling through the spun slime
To his nimbus cool kingdom come
And the lost, moonshine domes,
And the sea that hides his secret selves . . .

The sea, the horses, the ships echo Thomas's mood of almost triumphant dereliction. At its very least, nature is our sounding board, but a sounding board which both utters sound and elicits a response.

When we come to two other poets with whom I shall be especially concerned, Sylvia Plath and, in his later poems, Ted Hughes, we find nature not revealed so as to make us feel, 'Yes, that is what a bird or flower implies though until now I have missed that point,' but used as mere material to body out the poet's moods without any accurate evocation of herself, so that we do not feel, 'That is nature,' but how interesting, or more often how terrible to feel like that about nature. But for a moment I must leave these two poets, important though I suspect they will prove to the run of this argument, in order to glance at another contemporary poet whose work is, in my opinion, of the greatest importance.

The duality is carried forward by the Welsh poet, R.S. Thomas, though with him it is often more a question of people, particularly his mountain parishioners, both being themselves and reflecting a mood often of tough but Christian endurance in the poet himself. Thomas sees behind the persistence and weather-worn being of his parishioners which, though he keeps accurately to their human presence, is larger than the individual life.

It was not the dark filling thy eyes
And mouth appalled me: not even the drip
Of rain like blood from the one tree
Weather-tortured. It was the dark
Silting the veins of that sick man
I left stranded upon the vast
And lonely shore of his bleak bed.

Obviously the poet could not write like this about the dying man if some union had not occurred between him and the other, some togetherness in the depths of the psyche. But one notes the way Thomas brings his death into the sense of a passing through rather than the end-stopping of a brick wall or perpetual mist by linking the bed with a shore, that region of oversea departures.

Tensions and conflicts are the human lot, if there has not been some voluntary or conditioned anaesthesia of feeling; any good poet has his share of these. If they are suffered and outgrown they

become a fruitful impasse. But for the poets Sylvia Plath and, to some extent, Ted Hughes, the tensions are enjoyed with a totality which is not unassociated with mental illness of an irreparable kind. Certainly in the first poet there is no spectator, who like the groundswell under an agitation of waves remains detached beneath the personal torment, even if all the detachment amounts to is hope that the present predicament is not everlasting, or even 'Wait without hope, for hope would be hope for the wrong thing', a patience which is willing to endure.

Enough is known about the tragic life and even more tragic death of Sylvia Plath to make any biographical details unnecessary. Indeed, it is an interesting comment upon our own age that a large and comprehensive volume has already been written on the life and death of this woman, making one think with some irony on that statement by a Jacobean, 'And the right happy and copious industry of Masters Webster, Dekker, Marston and William Shakespeare.' But perhaps her life, like that of a somewhat different personality, Byron, may, when the chatty froth is swept away and its bitter current more accurately, indeed more clinically, delineated, appear as one of her more interesting works if not the most significant. It is hard to deny that she had an extraordinary sensitivity to language and could arrange words with that extreme accuracy which trapped her particular vision. That she communicates what many people find of significance, the great immediate popularity of her work (particularly among the young who are perhaps her widest public) bears witness. She was and is a poet, as this particular and serene statement about a new-born child makes evident in its stripping away of all irrelevance and conventional sentiment to leave a sparse but moving expression of the primary contact of a mother and her child.

All night your moth-breath
Flickers among the flat pink roses. I wake to listen:
A far sea moves in my ear.

One cry, and I stumble from bed, cow-heavy and floral
In my Victorian nightgown.

Your mouth opens clean as a cat's. The window square

Whitens and follows its dull stars. And now you try

Your handful of notes;

The clear vowels rise like balloons.

One can note in this passage, as is usual with this poet, it merely presents; although the thought is implicit it is never stated. This gives her some kinship with the Imagist poets of the late Twenties, though she is doing far better what they strove to attain. But there is a sense in which feeling is always striving to become thought, or, to put it in psychological terms, striving to become conscious of itself in the daylight of an ever-enlarging ego. That does not imply preaching, dry cerebration, but a progression from one unknowable to a further, as the unknowables attain not only statement but an at least partial understanding in the luminous self. This process, and it is the hallmark of a great as opposed to a good poet, is what implies maturation. It also implies a species of safety since only when feeling, particularly destructive feeling, comes home into the daylight of the mind, which expands to meet it, does it become tolerable and an addition to the creative drive of the individual. Sylvia Plath, as is obvious in the movement from *The Colossus* to *Ariel*, forged her fine, sparse style at an exceptionally early age and it undoubtedly communicates feelings which are intense and significant, and visions of the world about her of acute apprehension, of hyperaesthesia. But we do not find, and this is one reason for her tragic but so sought-after death, that the feelings are soaked in any consciousness of their intention, roots and significance. They merely are, and feelings that merely are (without eventually being brought into daylight) may easily become intolerable and turn against their own origin. The point I am trying to make here is that Sylvia Plath felt and observed with a singular intensity, but unless such observation is made from a self strong enough to bear the voltage of these energies they will eventually turn against their owner, and from the

darkness to which they have been condemned become a destroyer. No doubt many people have such capacities for feelings; this is more than suggested by the popularity of Sylvia Plath, but they either repress or (and this is the significance of the literature of ordeal and journey as well as the analyst's couch) little by little make their ego or self strong enough to bear greater and greater voltages of feeling and observation so that their consciousness is enlarged and they can take into the daylight those energies which when so illuminated cease to be destructive and instead nerve creativity. The tragedy of Sylvia Plath, and it resembles that of Dylan Thomas, is that she opened herself with a somewhat terrifying courage to a voltage of energy which her untutored and undeveloped ego was unable to bear, lighten or sustain. Consequently in her poetry, in work after work, we note this energy turning in against her and a statement of a pain which was so great that it sought the relief of self-destruction. A first example might be of the almost orgasmic satisfaction expressed, after cutting her thumb, in the poem *Cut*:

What a thrill —
My thumb instead of an onion.
The top quite gone
Except for a sort of hinge

Of skin like a hat,
Dead white then the red plush.

How you jump —
Trepanned veteran,
Dirty girl,
Thumb stump.

As one would expect from Sylvia Plath this is very well done indeed and many would say it is a new insight into what it records. A new insight but into what a child who is freshly discovering the landscape of his own body feels about such an incident. The curiosity, the sense of guilt — Dirty girl — which accompanies such a flux of

blood. Plath is wholly identified with the experience which is not childish but essentially of childhood. This identification suggests to me that although a brilliant scholar, an efficient lecturer and housewife and for all I know wife and mother, she had basically maintained into her thirties, underneath the grown-up façade, the ego of a young child. In this lies her vulnerable predicament; she had kept the child's intensity of novel vision, she had even strengthened that vision and capacity for seeing and feeling by the energies appropriate to an adult, but she had not developed an ego strong enough to deal with this immense voltage, but in her thirties confronted it with the personality — one can scrap the chic, the poise, the bun of neat hair — of a young child. Her native talent encouraged her to go with her enlargement of feelings but they gradually turned into an energy to destruction and their awareness is often a sense of acute pain.

I have suffered from the atrocity of sunsets.

Scorched to the root

My red filaments burn and stand, a hand of wires.

Now I break up in pieces that fly about like clubs.

A wind of such violence

Will tolerate no bystanding: I must shriek.

The moon, also, is merciless: she would drag me

Cruelly, being barren.

Her radiance scathes me. Or perhaps I have caught her.

You see what I mean: here is a woman of sensibility suffering her intensities of experience since in some sense she has maintained the selfness of a child (I.Q.s do not count here) as an extremity of pain. Her feelings, assaulting an ego which has remained infantile, subject that ego to a kind of breakage. One must also note the statement about the moon since it shows that projection onto an indifferent object of a hatred which is self-generated and then turns back from the object to attack the self who sought protection by sending her hatred outwards. It tells us nothing about the moon, it does reveal Sylvia Plath's state of mind, but in one's fascination at its tormented

intensity there is no need to forget that it is sick. It might be objected that Shelley in his moon poem is also projecting his own feelings onto the moon, but he does so with a duality which both comprehends some reality of the external moon and himself, and also the emotion which the moon solicits — nature plays on our minds like a skilled pianist on his keys — to elicit a similar music, a common human experience.

Art thou pale for weariness
Wandering companionless
Among the stars which have a different birth
And ever changing like a joyless eye
Which finds no object worth its constancy.

Sylvia Plath's last book is one of the greatest clinical statements of a self-induced form of dying. This acute statement from *Elms* sums up her predicament: since she cannot allow feelings to become what they seek, consciousness and knowledge, they regress and become persecutory.

I am incapable of more knowledge
What is this face
So murderous in the strangle of branches?

Its snaky acids kiss.
It petrifies the will. These are the isolate, slow faults
That kill, that kill, that kill.

She does, for her poetic sensibility is indeed genuine, give us occasional brilliant enhancing glimpses of the reality of phenomena. But even this enhancement is so soaked in private emotions that the total poem slithers down into the vision of one disturbed mind soaking itself into the real and both altering its intention and more accurate significance. It is interesting that like calls to like. Alvarez, a deeply disturbed critic who has himself attempted suicide, but, one hopes, sublimated his death intention into the knowledge which went into his book on the sickness, *The Savage God*, was the first

and most enthusiastic supporter of Sylvia Plath's poetry. His criticism, assisted by no inkling of himself or his subject's malady, has been a series of uninsighted hyperboles and an effective blockage as to the real, if clinical, quality of her work. Indeed, his influence on the immediate directions and growth of poetry has been so without inklings of the wider, non-pathological significance of English verse that it would have been disastrous, if it was not already proving itself ephemeral.

But to return to Sylvia Plath, and her soaking her own psychic conflicts so deeply into the ostensible theme, that the theme disappears, leaving only the statement of her own state of mind. *Daddy* is an obvious example and one wonders, so obvious is its infantile fixation, whether she could not have been helped to solve some of her conflicts by many sessions on the couch of a first-rate analyst with a love of poetry. The love-hate expressed is so direct as to give the poem, despite its economical language, a merely clinical interest.

An engine, an engine
Chuffing me off like a Jew.
A Jew to Dachau, Auschwitz, Belsen.
I began to talk like a Jew.
I think I may well be a Jew.

I have always been scared of YOU,
With your Luftwaffe, your gobbledygoo.
And your neat moustache
And your Aryan eye, bright blue.
Panzer-man, panzer-man, O You —

Not God but a swastika
So black no sky could squeak through.
Every woman adores a Fascist,
The boot in the face, the brute
Brute heart of a brute like you.

Bit my pretty red heart in two.
I was ten when they buried you.
At twenty I tried to die
And get back, back, back, back to you.
I thought even the bones would do.
...
There's a stake in your fat black heart
And the villagers never liked you.
They are dancing and stamping on you.
They always KNEW it was you.
Daddy, Daddy, you bastard, I'm through.

The ambivalence, completely without insight into her actual malady, is obvious enough in those quotations. What is remarkable is the capacity of Sylvia Plath's talent and sickness to invest such innocent creatures as flowers. Thus the tulips someone has brought to her hospital ward

Are too red in the first place, they hurt me.
Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe
Lightly through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.

Her own unsolved energies which denied insight have turned into aggression

Soak into the poppies in July:
A mouth just bloodied.
Little bloody skirts!

There are fumes that I cannot touch.
Where are your opiates, your nauseous capsules?

If I could bleed or sleep! —
If my mouth could marry a hurt like that!

As a statement — I will not say exploration, since that implies insight — of what Freud calls the Death Wish, Sylvia Plath's poems will travel through time and may be of incalculable interest. As a revelation of phenomena other than herself they are without

significance, so saturated are the themes she chooses in her own conflicts and confusions. They are not poems about anything but one person's state of mind, Sylvia Plath's, and that mind is extremely sick. That people of all ages in an advanced state of temporary or chronic adolescence take her poems as a veritable statement of a world other than the mind, lymph, heart of one intensely suffering human creature shows that they only know the first early reaches of what saints and mystics and the greater poets know as the Dark Night of the Soul, and whose travelling and endurance should if undertaken by a more mature personality lead not to the blank wall of suicide but to a resurrection into renewed joy and zest. It is necessary to set against her pathological studies and avidity for death the sparse words of a poet who knew a great deal about death and psychic conflict but emerged from it with a new delight and energy. Eliot said, 'we are only undefeated because we have gone on trying'.

From his first two books, *The Hawk in the Rain* and *Lupercal*, Ted Hughes gained a justified reputation. His taut, muscular, at times violent verse was controlled by novel but meaningful rhythms and rhyme. It often entailed an insight into what strikes the reader as a verifiable daemon of a bull or a jaguar as accurately as D.H. Lawrence recorded for us his communion with a snake, a bat or a mountain lion. One could sense the nervous violence of Hughes vitalising the creatures he wrote about. But in these books it was a marriage, as with Lawrence, between the poet and his subject, both reflecting and enhancing the image of the other. And sometimes as in *A Dream of Horses* his verses expanded into another dimension of his theme akin to magic and the mystery of fairy tales.

The tall palace was so white, the moon was so round,
Everything else this plunging of horses
To the rim of our eyes that strove for the shape of sound.

But in *Wodwo*, that strange mixture of dull prose story and a selection of somewhat unrelated poems, something began to grow wrong.

The violence in Hughes, and I gain a sense of at times sadistic violence from his later poems, is vital, near-creative violence steadily increasing until it reaches its climax in *Crow*.

The trouble in *Wodwo* is that it swamps the object, so that as with his late wife, Sylvia Plath, the feeling many of his poems in this volume arouse in us is not how terrible the creatures which he presents really are, some revelation of real but unguessed-at ferocity of their being, but how terrible, or to say the least, uncomfortable, to feel like that about such creatures. It does not matter so much in the fantastic, comic-strip world of *Crow*, a curious, unsuccessful attempt to write a creation myth. It does matter in the poem *Skylarks* in the earlier volume *Wodwo*. It deviates from the norm, not in the interest of an enhancement of a vision of what is latent but as yet unperceived in a lark, but as a state of mind so deviant as to be pathological. With all that we know or can perceive about larks, even the exploration by naturalists and biologists who have examined the structure of this little creature, we are not shocked by Hughes' description, but astounded that anyone who has observed its easy, effortless if strenuous soaring, nerved by a daemon of vitality as uncircumscribed as it is incredible, could so abuse an actuality of its being so accurately described and painted by William Blake. But Hughes makes its prodigious soaring from the great hand of zest that thrusts it skywards a matter of tormented anguish of effort, and a barrel-load of exceptional muscles, such as no biologist has ever observed. Moreover its delicate head is a bullet:

The larks begin to go up
Like a warning
As if the globe was uneasy —

Barrel-chested for heights,
Like a man of the high Andes

But leaden
With muscle
For the struggle

Against
Earth's centre
Leaden like a bullet
Life from its centre
...

II

Crueller than owl or eagle
A towered bird, shut through the crested beak
With the command, Not die.
...

V

All the dreary Sunday morning,
Heaven is a madhouse
With the voices and frenzy of the larks,
Squealing and gibbering and cursing,
Heads flung back as I see them,
Wings almost torn off backwards, far up
Like sacrifices set floating
The mad earth's offerings.
...

VI

Like those flailing flames
That lift from the fling of a bonfire
Claws dangling full of what they feed on
The larks carry their tongues to the last atom
Battering and battering, their last speech out
at the limit
And maybe the whole agony was for this
The plummeting dead drop
With long cutting screams like razors.

The writer always distils some element of himself into his object. But here, as in most of the later work of Sylvia Plath, as I have already suggested, the object of the poem — a skylark — has completely ceased to exist as itself, and has been replaced by some figment of Hughes' imagination, suffused as that imagination is, at least in this poem, by that cruelty and willed, almost enjoyed suffering we label sado-masochism. It is an entirely private vision except for the insight it gives into the clinical working of one man, Ted Hughes. The poem is as much a subject for psychopathology as the later work of Sylvia Plath, though in the case of Hughes the aggression has turned outwards into the external world to create an image of suffering and cruelty quite alien to its ostensible object. Luckily for the poet, the aggression has not as with Plath turned on to himself, and if he is lucky may never do this, so that he may be able to continue making interesting public declarations of his private state of mind. They reveal to us, despite their ostensible violence, not how savage and cruel the world is; it is, but the need is for some objectivity of examination. The cruelty and suffering is in the mind of Hughes so that our response, granted a certain degree of maturity, must be how terrible to feel like that. We feel the same as regards Cyril Tourneur and to some extent Ford and Webster.

And *Wodwo* abounds in such images of cruelty unrelated to an object. Only the adolescent who has never read any of Tolstoy's great works but who delights in debunking, because of that innate insecurity which comes from unproven potencies, could find satisfaction in the inane and wanton distortions of the *Kreutzer Sonata*, a great work of serene art and a real revelation of our human predicament, unbiased by an author's uninsighted psychological quirks. But in the verses on this book which follow, it is difficult not to think that Hughes is wilfully debunking a work for the popularity he may win from the teenagers for whom he is becoming an idol, and who are too young to realise that his words are self-generated verbiage without an object, and nerved only by his spleen and what Freudians would no doubt suggest was an unresolved Father-figure hatred:

Vile copulation, Vile! — etcetera.
 But now your dagger has outdone everybody's.
 Say goodbye, for your wife's sweet flesh goes off,
 Booty of the envious spirit's assault.

A sacrifice, not a murder.
 One hundred and forty pounds
 Of excellent devil, for God.
 She tormented Ah tormented you

With that fat lizard Trukachevsky,
 That fiddling, leering penis.
 Yet why should you castrate yourself
 To be rid of them both?

...

Rest in peace, Tolstoy!
 It must have taken supernatural greed
 To need to corner all the meat in the world,
 Even for your own hunger.

In *Gog* Hughes writes a significant line though its suggestion is soaked into many of his poems, 'I do not look at the rocks and stones, I am frightened of what they see.' It is true that the words come from some mythical entity called Gog, but they express the other side of his violence; and the obverse of that emotion, as Plath knew to her cost, is always fear, fear of the outgone violence turning in against the self, however apparently serene, even gentle, the mask of the creator.

But Hughes is running hard, and in *Crow* creates a figure bereft of conflict or sensibility and, no doubt, to some extent a satire on the mask-stripped, actual amoral go-getting of so much in humanity. But Crow's extreme violence, by the very intended or unintended comedy of his behaviour, is a projection of some element in Hughes' deeper being which finds relief in imagining freedom from fear and conflict, in a creature of motiveless and uninhibited outrage, capable of weathering any sling or arrow of this outrageous world with

savage impunity. He is the cultural equivalent of the Dan Dare, Batman, and the now defunct Morgan the Mighty of the comics beloved by adolescents and psychopaths, a fact admitted, with a breathless hush as to the maestro's intrepidity, by those critics who say Hughes has assimilated in this poem the art of the Comic Strip. Far from assimilating the convulsions of Nazism or the concentration camps (that takes compassion) I suggest that many of the perpetrators of these never to be forgotten horrors (I mean many a Gauleiter) would find *Crow* excellent light reading and I wonder, I do not know the poet, whether he affects the dark garb of the protagonists of that movement.

When Crow cried his mother's ear
Scorched to a stump.

When he laughed she wept
Blood her breasts her palms her brow all wept blood

He tried a step, then a step, and again a step
Every one scarred her face for ever.

When he burst out in a rage
She fell back with an awful gash and a fearful cry.

There is something childish in the 'awful' gash and a 'fearful' cry. These are the infantile fantasies of certain energies of a very young child but apparently unleavened by any insight into their pristine origin. The poem Hughes tells us is a creation myth but there is a delight in the violence of the images which suggest they have not achieved any real degree of consciousness. If that consciousness awaits Ted Hughes and, as I have said before, feeling is always striving to become thought, it may well imply a new and more compassionate development of his art and, if such consciousness is not available, that dead end called breakdown. For his art is impelled by the Death Wish and though the Death Wish can be an ingredient of the movement to the Dark Night of the Soul, it can be infinitely destructive, particularly to its protagonist. The Death Wish as a goal is fostered by this poetry, and the uncritical adulation given to it by

those critics from whom one might have expected a further degree of self-consciousness and maturation. For both Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes are in their later work profoundly immature.

One cannot say the same about another popular poet whose work, one imagines, is more the diet of the disillusioned and comparatively self-conscious and mature, Philip Larkin. I place him here not because his work is in any sense unredeemed by the uninsighted violence characteristic of the two previous poets, but because he suggests a maturity beyond violence where the poet faces up to the fact of his dying, but unlike Eliot and Yeats has no inkling of that apparently blank wall being a way out into another dimension of being. He is determined not to be fooled by any such, to him, escapist panaceas as revealed religion. His beautifully constructed poem, describing here I imagine a home for geriatrics, though its nature is deliberately not directly stated, expresses the fact of dying which so much human activity is designed to avoid.

Here is the final stanza of Larkin's *The Building*:

All know they are going to die
Not yet, perhaps not here, but in the end
And somewhere like this. This is what it means,
This clean-sliced cliff, for unless its powers
Outbuild cathedrals nothing contravenes
The coming dark, though crowds each evening try
With wasteful, weak, propitiatory flowers.

Listening to that voice after Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes is like hearing a cool, serene, sane note ringing out clear after the stridencies of a madhouse. Larkin is making the same quality of statement as Eliot made in *East Coker*:

O dark, dark dark. They all go into the dark,
The vacant interstellar spaces, the vacant into the vacant,
The captains, merchant bankers, eminent men of letters,
Industrial lords and petty contractors, all go into the dark . . .

Both passages make an extremely important statement of our human predicament, and one which is far more mature in its severe resignation than a wilful courting of aggression, self-destruction or the destruction of others nerved by the death wish. The fact that Eliot is able to go on where Larkin stops does not imply any failure of nerve on the part of the latter but rather his honesty about what he actually knows and actually feels. One may well wonder whether such patient waiting and brooding on the reality of death may in the end imply that gift, which both Yeats and Eliot were granted and which leads to an opening, and the final statement of *East Coker*:

Old men should be explorers
Here and now does not matter
We must be still and still moving
Into another intensity
For a further union, a deeper communion
Through the dark cold and the empty desolation,
The wave cry, the wind cry, the vast waters
Of the petrel and the porpoise. In my end is
my beginning.

The goals of these outgoing energies are associated with death and if they are blocked of love and recognition by some intransigence of our humanity they turn back either to attack innocent phenomena outside the individual (*sic* Ted Hughes and Cyril Tournear), or to attack the individual himself, causing in extreme cases that caricature or symptomatic expression of the death instinct we call suicide. They may also, turning back from outgoing, so load the human ego with the charge of their blocked power as to cause in tolerable instances acute anxiety — anxiety is often associated with unused energy — in extreme cases a complete breakdown. This breakdown, and particularly so with those who have known the poetic ecstasy, may be a refusal to accept the variations of temporal life.

It is a necessity for any poet, indeed for any person of sensibility, to accept 'the flats' of everyday existence in which each mountain

journey must end. For example, Peter, James and John, on descending the Mount of Transfiguration, had to meet in its valley the possessed boy they were unable to heal. This some people never learn to do.

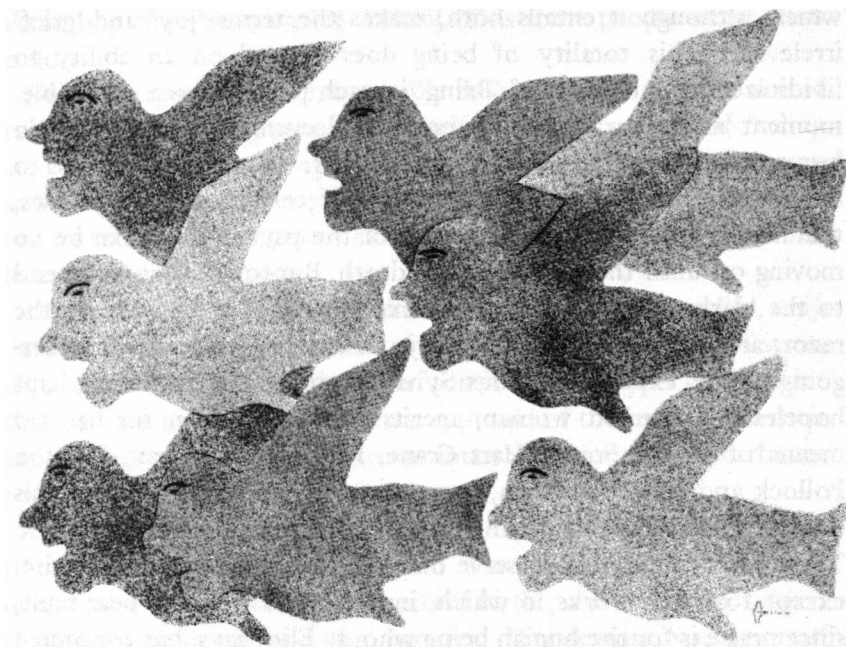
But that mythical and unreachable Snark, 'maturity', is, in one of its aspects, the ability to open oneself to a great voltage of feeling and thought and be strong enough to remain serene. It is also concerned with enduring the polarity of the intense heights of existence and its bread and butter ordinarieness, and derive both joy (and incidentally grief) from both.

Obviously the failure to libidinise death is, even in later life, only a cause, though a common one, of the innumerable periods of stress which must be the lot of anyone of sensibility. It is part of the price they pay for the acuteness of their appraisal of themselves and their environment. The most effective armoury against mental disturbance is good solid stupidity.

What is disturbing is not the necessity experienced by many people of undergoing what was once called 'The Dark Night of the Soul', an essential stage towards that 'second birth', which was the subject of Christ's night talk to the practical Nicodemus. No, we must travel that dark road, if it is our destiny. Nor can we be certain (Eliot stresses this in his *Quartets*) of a happy outcome to the journey. After all, if Christ had not uttered the words 'My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me,' but had been certain throughout his mission of its validity and his continual contact with the divine Father, he would not, except in the outward show of the experience, have suffered the agony of his Crucifixion. No, what is disturbing is not 'the dark night', the extent of its anguish, or even the uncertainty of ever returning from that terrible landscape so well described by Robert Browning in his *Childe Roland*: it is the tendency to think of the Depression not as an experience to be endured without reassurance, but endured as an end in itself. We tend to sever the psyche from its archetypal roots in mankind, and in consequence lack the sustaining knowledge that others have been our way and mapped the journey. Moreover, that any number of these spiritual

explorers record the end of their infernal experience as a gradual or sudden return, or rather new entry, into a species of serenity which, although it entails both, makes the terms 'joy' and 'grief' irrelevant. This totality of being does depend on an ability to libidinize the intention of 'Being' in each present, even if terrible, moment as if, paradoxically, one could even libidinize pain. No human experience need be an end in itself, though one is forced to realize after meeting patients, victims of certain mental diseases, that from some disastrous working of the psyche there can be no moving on until the outgoing into death. But for all that, as an end to the 'dark night' the gas jet, the excessive dose of barbiturate, the razor, are by no means satisfactory, and far from the fullest undergoing of this experience. Thus Sylvia Plath, a talented but perhaps hopelessly disturbed woman, merits our compassion for her sad means of dying. So do Hart Crane, Ernest Hemingway, Jackson Pollock and John Berryman, to mention just a few casualties of this Armageddon of the soul, all — it is not irrelevant — from America. These men and women deserve our compassion; but not our praise, except for their works in which, indeed, their lives did bear fruit, since praise is for the human being who, as Eliot says, has continued to traffic with life however terrible, 'who are only undefeated because we have gone on trying'.





THINKING OF FLYING

by I. Avaalaaqiaq

THE SEAL SONG LEARNED BY THE SHAMAN AQUILAQ

TOM LOWENSTEIN

“Here is the song of a seal. Aquilaq learned it. Aquilaq learned it when he went down to the shore ice on the north side of the village. Aquilaq was Tiguatchialuk’s father, and he was a shaman. He heard the song while he was walking on the north side, on the ice. Aquilaq learned this from a seal. I’ll sing it:

uvvani tanii

Here right here

nunagiliugmiuna

I have a good place

puktautaa uqaunni

ice-floe shelter

masagniliugmiuna

lying and enjoying

ayaa aa aaaa aai

yanaa aa yana

This was the seal’s song. I have sung the length of it. The seal was basking in the shelter of a pressure ridge, and facing the sun. Even though there was open water, the seal still seemed to have a breathing hole. But it had strayed from its breathing hole. And when Aquilaq climbed to the top of the pressure ridge from the side where there was open water, he looked down and saw the seal he had heard singing. When the seal used the word *masagni-*, it is talking about the warmth of the sun . . . Then the seal dived back into its breathing hole.”

THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE EVENT: Introductory

Like so many Tikigaaq oral traditions, this song has a specific geography and history to it which the performing singer or storyteller would either assume the audience knew or would sketch in, according to circumstances and necessity. Here, in Jimmie Killigivuk's version, recorded some four generations after Aquilaq (see genealogies below), the explanatory text surrounding the song perhaps contains the main elements of what Aquilaq himself told his original audience (most likely his family) when he first recounted the experience and sang the seal song. Other details of the song's original context, such as ice conditions, time of day, season, I have tentatively worked out myself, using the song, the narrative and conversations with Jimmie as evidence; and it is these elements that we must assume to have been part of the implicit knowledge of an earlier Tikigaaq audience: elements that were embedded, assumed to cohere, in the main facts of the event.¹

As I hope may be clear from the notes that follow, a large part of the 'meaning' of the song resides in the listeners' construction of a mental map of its origin: the place (albeit a 'space' in the ocean, where the ice shifts) and the occasion, Aquilaq's experience, coincide to express an event in the geography. The song and its surrounding narrative are a knitting together of time (the moment in a man's life, as well as season, hour, the light conditions) and location: types of sea ice, relationship of seal to sea-ice features, distance from the village etc., and it is these significant coincidences of time and place that contribute so much to the weight, the accretions of material topography that are almost as much a part of this ancient village as sod houses, graves, and whale bone monuments, and so on: the signs and markers that generation after generation have grasped, changed, passed on, and which are means of mental, spiritual and physical survival.

When he taught the song to others, Aquilaq must naturally have recounted the circumstances of his coming upon the seal, and so to him and other singers, the song would always have associations with,

be rooted in, the spot — more or less precise² — where the shaman found it. This is not only important for an understanding of the song and its place in Aquilaq's experience, but it would be important as a contribution to the living topography of the Tikigaq environment: a topography which was never a settled, finished thing, but a connected series of continually growing sacred and historical places: meaning being added to the landscape and places on the sea ice as successive generations contributed the marks of their encounters there, thus linking space with space, and creating out of space, places, because man, in time, had received some inspiration, or recorded work, or initiation there.

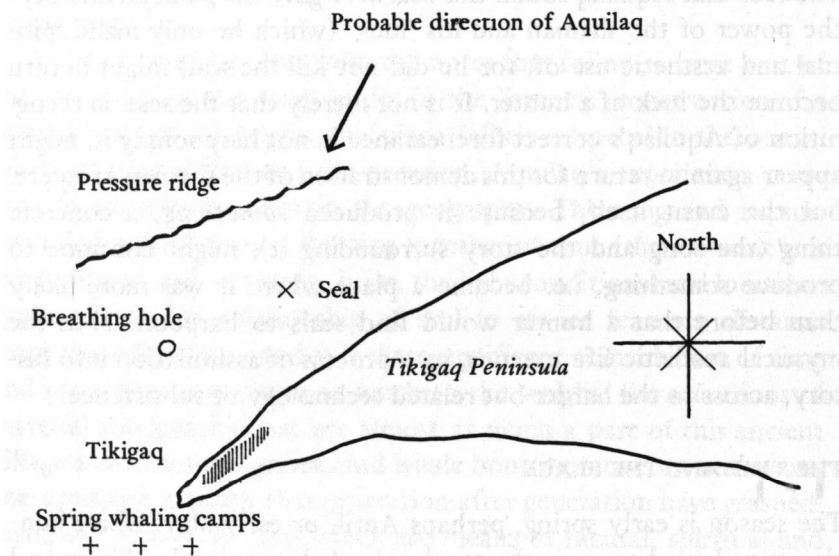
In connection with this, there is also an issue of practical importance. A place which was marked, as this spot on the sea ice was marked by Aquilaq's experience, became in a real sense a *charm* place: a spot where later hunters might find luck or even inspiration. The fact that Aquilaq found this seal *here* gave the place an identity: the power of the shaman and his 'luck' (which he only made spiritual and aesthetic use of, for he did not kill the seal) might in turn become the luck of a hunter. It is not merely that the seal, in recognition of Aquilaq's correct forbearance in not harpooning it, might appear again in return for this demonstration of the shaman's respect, but the event itself, because it produced *something*, a concrete thing (the song and the story surrounding it), might continue to produce something, i.e. become a place where it was more likely than before that a hunter would find seals to harpoon. Thus the mystical aesthetic life extends, by a process of assimilation into history, across to the harder but related technology of subsistence.

THE TIME AND THE PLACE

The season is early spring, perhaps April, or early May. Whale hunting may have begun on the south side of the peninsula. Winter seal hunting is over, and will not start again until June (after the whale hunt) when the sea ice has begun to break and seals bask on the ice floes.

But at the moment of the song, the ice is still anchored to land, and pressure ridges formed by the ice movement during the previous autumn and winter are still mountainous. Close to shore, then, the sea is in its winter aspect. But the sun is high already, and when you're out of the wind (alternating north-east, north and south winds prevail during this period) it can be comfortably warm. Like the seal basking here in the shelter of the ice floe, the whale crews out on the southern sea-ice are similarly sheltered: at their backs are wind-breaking pressure-ridges in addition to man-made wind-breaks made of ice blocks. On a cloudless, sunny mid-afternoon, you can sit comfortably here, providing the wind doesn't touch you.

TIKIGAQ PENINSULA

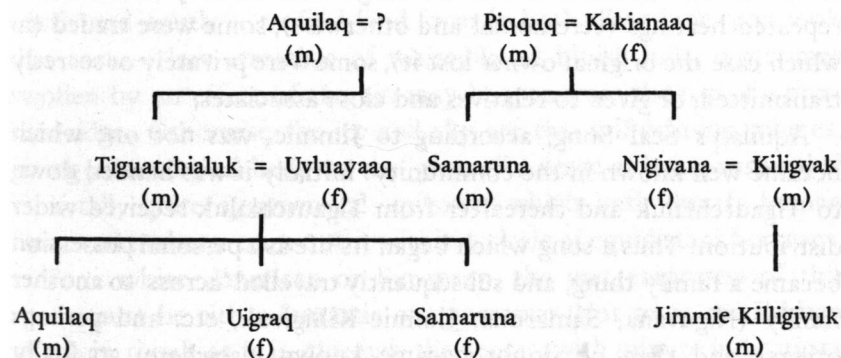


Thus when the seal says 'I have a good place here', it expresses a feeling that men — especially those, *right now*, at spring whale camp on the south side — would recognize and no doubt express in a similar way.³

But Aquilaq is not at whale camp; he is walking, perhaps hunting seal, on the north side: this was and is fairly uncommon, for most sealing is done either west or south of the point, though there *are* basking seals to be found in early spring off the north shore, and there's breathing-hole hunting to be had in this area also.

Since it is still quite early in the year, we must assume that the sun is from the south; since the seal is sheltering from wind and taking the sun, we may assume also that it is a north or north-east wind which is blowing. Thus the pressure ridge would be to the north of the seal (protecting it from north wind) and Aquilaq, coming upon it by the breathing hole, is either on his way out from the village, or on his way in from the north and perhaps looking down on the seal from the sheltering ice ridge.

AQUILAQ AND JIMMIE KILLIGIVUK — PARTIAL GENEALOGIES



THE SHAMAN AQUILAQ AND A PARTIAL GENEALOGY

Aquilaq was a contemporary of Jimmie Killigivuk's grandparents: so he would have been born c. 1850, some thirty years before substantial white American contact. Aquilaq's son, Tigautchialuk, also a shaman, was closely associated with the family of Niguvana (Jimmie's mother) and throughout his active life acted as Niguvana's personal shaman.

The links with Niguvana's family were in fact extensive. Tigautchialuk received his dream of shamanic initiation in the *iglu* of Niguvana's parents, and when he had children of his own named his younger daughter after Niguvana's brother, Samaruna. If there were ties of kinship they were slight and I do not know them: the close relationship between the families perhaps having its strength in social compatibility and later, in the case of Tigautchialuk, in shamanic ceremonial. In other narratives Jimmie describes a variety of contacts and contracts between his mother and Tigautchialuk. 'Tigautchialuk is Niguvana's shaman' he has someone say of his mother.

With shaman songs as with other songs, there were no rigid rules as to lines of transmission: some songs were casually learned over repeated hearings (ceremonial and otherwise), some were traded (in which case the original owner lost it), some were privately or secretly transmitted, or given to relatives and close associates.

Aquilaq's Seal Song, according to Jimmie, was not one which became well known in the community: initially it was handed down to Tigautchialuk and thereafter from Tigautchialuk received wider distribution. Thus a song which began its life as a personal possession became a family thing, and subsequently travelled 'across' to another family (Niguvana, Samaruna, Jimmie Killigivuk, etc. and perhaps others) and then no doubt became known elsewhere, gradually working its way into the general ceremonial/aesthetic life of the village.

In this way we see, in a sense, the personal and sacred occasion evolving towards a communal and (perhaps) more secularized thing: the force of the shaman's interior experience broadening out into

the community that his inspiration serves, and thus strengthening not only his family's reputation and status, but also enriching the cultural life of the village as time makes established the product of his inspired moment.

AFTERWORD

It is not difficult, if you know the ice a little, to be with Aquilaq in the context of his experience, and follow him as he wanders the north side of the Tikigaq peninsula. The 'landscape' of the shaman's view — the sea frozen, an enormous sky — are the contours of ice, smooth only in a few patches, otherwise a tangle of boulders and defiles, broken here and there by pressure-ridges lifted by interlayered tectonic ice plates which have been forced together by wind and currents.

Standing on the ice on either side of the narrow Tikigaq spit, you find yourself at the centre of a vast circle of whiteness and grey. Usually Tikigaq is not visible from here, since the low *iglus* — and today houses — are hidden behind ice formations. Thus the village is at once obscured from and incorporated into a horizon. To the north and south — to find land-form in both directions, you look due east — low stretches of white-blazed bluish hills, sometimes swollen by an effect of the air, may be seen from the top of a pressure-ridge. Otherwise the ice and sky are two self-echoing spheres, giving your vertical body on the 'ground' a sense of being suspended in a tall, quite symmetrical universe, which both dwarfs human form and makes a centre of it within a circle of equidistant horizons.

To a white American or European, the vast emptiness of this space must be either fantastic or oppressive. Not so to the Eskimo mind, in touch as it is, through the senses, with minute indications and step by step particularity. What is 'emptiness' for a stranger, to the Eskimo is a massed web of inter-related detail and suggestion. Yet for the hunter, the word *empty* can be appropriate in another — though related — sense: land and sea are empty when a human enjoys, for the moment, no correlative to his own animation: where

no game 'pops' up, as a friend I travelled with on the tundra exclaimed in awe, when a herd of caribou appeared, after hours of 'nothing', out of nowhere on the monotonous lowland. At ice-camp, likewise, another time, after we'd been watching several weeks for whale and beluga, an older man murmured in contemplative acknowledgement of the unbroken expanse of water in front of us: '*Alianaqtuq tagiuq*, the sea is empty!' — the verb-stem *alianaq* — meaning also 'without life or feature, lonely,' and when applied to humans, 'depressed, depressing, unsociable, humourless . . .'

This void does not close the mind, however, to the fulness of great possibility. Because of the amazing, frequently hypnotic space/time between the appearance of the animals you are waiting for, emptiness gives rise not to despair, but to a meditative expectation, an optimism — which is without anxiety — that your own body will coincide with that of another species in an extraordinary meeting, without warning. Space is incorporated, conforming, even if it is not known, to a known perspective, neither positive nor negative, and when an animal appears, the intensity of its impact on the eye, on the mind, on the function of the body, can be overwhelming. To kill — or be illuminated spiritually by a sudden animal appearance — is the object of the hunter's or the shaman's patience. Nor are the two processes mutually exclusive, self-contradictory.

It is here, then, within the context of anticipation and a certain absence of things, that a hunter's knowledge is tested and asserts itself. Here too the shaman-aspirant or shaman (in Aguilag's case we can't know whether his experience is a crucial initiation) must learn to see into the bones — the molecules even — of nature: its formation, its coherence.

And it is *structure* which to Eskimos is a particular object of perception. To the occidental mind, form is viewed on the whole as contour, the extrinsic properties of phenomena: the Eskimo, on the other hand, sees and is absorbed in how things are put together from the internal dimension. Everything in animated nature is *jointed*, and Eskimos, being careful anatomists, are aware of each detail in relationship. A children's game in the Kobuk River region of

Alaska consists of taking apart the skull bones of a salmon and naming each separately; another game is played among maritime Eskimo children with the metacarpals of a seal's flipper. From infancy almost, in play, in watching work, in beginning to participate, an Eskimo child becomes as familiar with the inside of a large animal's body as with its exterior outline — perhaps more so. And the beautifully socketed, lashed and toggled hunting equipment that men use is in itself an adaptation of this knowledge of what form consists in, how it *works*, internally: a harpoon — or a fish hook even — put together from two, three or four different parts — and with materials sometimes from as many separate animals (baleen from whale, ivory from walrus, antler and sinew from caribou) — is a living thing, a jointed piece of articulated machinery, and part of its beauty resides in its accuracy and correspondence to an animal balance, which like an animated being in itself 'homes' towards game from which some of its parts originate, and eats into the body. Thus when an Eskimo hunter sees a creature in the wild, the view is deep and has penetrating X-ray quality. Ancient figurines of bears and whales showing an incised representation of ribs and spinal column on the exterior or 'skin' of the carving are well known. These are not merely fetishes of a wish-motivated hunting magic: they are sacred replicas of entities whose dimensions are within the carver's view, because the carver has *been* there, and has incorporated within ivory or antler the form of an animal in deep perspective, the thing seen in its essence.

In one of his famous descriptions of Canadian Eskimo shamanism, Knud Rasmussen gives us an account of an Iglulik shaman's initiation which is relevant here:

Before a shaman attains the stage at which any helping spirit would think it worthwhile to come to him, he must, by struggle and toil and concentration of thought, acquire for himself yet another great and inexplicable power: *he must be able to see himself as a skeleton*. Though no shaman can explain to himself how and why, he can, by the power his brain derives from

the supernatural, as it were by thought alone, divest his body of its flesh and blood, so that nothing remains but his bones. And he must then name all the parts of his body, mention every single bone by name: and in so doing, he must not use ordinary human speech, but only the special and sacred shaman's language which he has learned from his instructor. By thus seeing himself naked, altogether freed from the perishable and transient flesh and blood, he consecrates himself, in the sacred tongue of the shamans, to his great task, through that part of his body which will longest withstand the action of sun, wind and weather, after he is dead.

And another shaman from the same group of people says: 'The greatest peril of life lies in the fact that human food consists entirely of souls.' Repeatedly in the Eskimo world one gets the sense that power, illumination, awe and terror emerge from the same fundamental revelation of life's structures. 'Everything that lives,' to adapt Blake's clarion, 'is *seen* to be holy — and dangerous.'

Looking into the nature of things isn't necessarily a shamanic prerogative (besides, as the passages above indicate, it is futile to harden the implied body/spirit dualism into a system, for the two principles, viewed as separate entities on one level, are interchangeable at another). Recently, a friend who teaches at the University of Alaska was telling me about 'sleep dissociation', which is fairly common among Eskimo women. At the moment before sleep, or just before waking, consciousness and body split apart, and the sleeper sees her body from the free-floating perspective of a separate awareness. 'It is then,' said my friend, 'that everything is seen as molecular.'

There are similarities between the experience of an initiate and certain methods of Theravada Buddhist meditation, Vipassana, or 'Insight' meditation, in particular (and the relationship between Eskimo shamanism and yogic and Buddhist practice is something I hope to write about later at greater length). The first of four meditations for the development of mindfulness prescribed by the

Satipatthana Sutta enjoins the contemplation of thirty-two parts of the meditator's own body. Looking into the body — bones, flesh, organs, urine, phlegm etc. — the meditator grows aware of his or her own mortal composition, the separable units, which then may be seen in co-existent oneness and interdependence.

Here then is Aquilaq — in these speculations there can be no conclusions, merely further suggestion — wandering the ice fields north of Tikigaq, alone with his own body and its tackle, in the emptiness of sky and ocean. With abrupt coherence radiating from the ice below the pressure-ridge the shaman has come to, rises suddenly the dark solid of *natchiq* (seal), a dense form answering the man's own skin-clad figure, as sky echoes sea-ice in its blueness or greyness within the intense dazzle. Hundreds, perhaps thousands of such *natchiq* — rising in the water, basking, breathing, butchered, or as ribs and vertebrae scattered on the beaches, seal bone sunk in strata of old *iglus* — the shaman has encountered over his life-time. In children's play, in lamp-oil, in meat, fur gloves, boot-top, parka, tent-skin, skin inflated to make whale float, meat-bag to hold seal and whale meat in the *iglu*, *natchiq* enters, is the centre of the process whereby life *out there* is brought here, to the house, to the village, whereby space is contained, weather is affronted, fire replacing coldness, repletion taking over from the encroachment of hunger. Perhaps never in an entire life-time is the presence — if only in its smell — of *natchiq* absent: even out on the tundra, where caribou and ptarmigan are a hunter's preoccupation, boots, skins, lashings, tent, the face and hands even, are redolent of this staple.

Now here on the sea ice, suddenly, the deeply familiar becomes outstanding, as ever. The heaviness and warmth of the seal's form collapsed in a new sunshine which has come — for the people — to replace what *natchiq* itself has provided — in the lamps — over the long winter, this concentration of pigment and life-energy within the bulge and taper of the seal's contour — this blackness, or brownness, bristling soft-shaded on the coarse ice-shingle is, however well-known, the image of a new dimension.

It is fresh — to both man and seal — an expression of the solstice — and yet the experience is absorbed, *a priori* almost, as a totally understood occasion, whose components, scattered through routines of seeing, feeling, doing of seal-things, are all contained, simultaneous in the encounter, where all seals, all parts of seal, are viewed concentrated at once, seen through fur to *natchium saunina* (seal bone), to organs, meat, fat, blood-flow, all so well charted through innumerable butcherings, propitiations, viewed intact here, at the peak of seal-life's satisfaction, as it basks in the purity of its identity, and sings of this. And of all seals harpooned, eaten, touched, chased, dreamed of, heard about in stories, it is this one here on a fine morning that has breached the emptiness — identical though it is to countless others — which breaks through into the initiatory contact. *Natchiq atuqtuq*, the seal is singing. Aquilaq listens. *Natchiq atuqtuq Inupiatun*, the seal is singing in the language of people. Aquilaq stands on the pressure-ridge and listens. The seal continues singing: 'I have a good place here . . . right beneath the pressure-ridge . . . taking in the sun's warmth . . .'

In the structure of all beings, there are melodies, vibrations that arise from the movement of constituent atoms, a communicative essence, beamed usefully or for the simple pleasure of radiance: from entity to its companion (language of a shared species) or from entity to stranger (inexplicable, mysterious: *natchiq* language/shaman language, *natchiq* speaking human language, human overhearing *natchiq*). And when the 'stranger' — here Aquilaq — penetrates to an essential vision, then he becomes free of his specific boundaries, unlikeness is obliterated by the absorption of his viewing/hearing, and there is an adjustment within the variety of ways that nature is in touch with itself.

A NOTE ON THE 'TRANSLATION'.

I have not tried to make a 'coherent poem' of Aquilaq's Seal Song, because it is syllables and images, indications of place and nowness, music that shakes from the throat, and not a declaration

in even regular Eskimo syntax that comes through to us here. The song consists of things in a musical vibration (the 'here', 'place', 'ice-floe'), and these objects and areas do not require further knitting together beyond the occasion.

Some readers may be familiar with Eskimo song through Knud Rasmussen's versions (from Eskimo into Danish — thence English); and though these are easily the finest and the most authentic translations from Eskimo we have, in order to convey the essence of a song's meaning he has sometimes to body out the brief, allusive original with a paraphrase of what the singer has let him know of the song's conception and context.

Perhaps I should have heeded Rasmussen's warning against excessive commentary — however, I have taken that path. It did occur to me, however, that Aquilaq's *Seal Song* did lend itself to Rasmussen-esque translation, and taking Aquilaq's own commentary, as narrated by Asitchaq, as the basis, one could come up with an 'Eskimo song' like this.

I was walking on the ice
towards land.
It was early spring.
As I came to an ice-ridge,
I heard singing.
This was the song:

*'I have a good place
right here on the ice.
I am sheltered from
the north wind.
The sun is getting higher.
I lie back and enjoy it.'*

ayaa aa aaa aai
yanaa aa yana!

Notes

1. The season isn't mentioned in the text: but this, and most of the other material adduced later in these notes, derives from conversations with Jimmie over the last four years (1976-1979). But (to anticipate a little), if Aquilaq describes the seal basking behind an *ivuniq* (pressure-ridge) on the north side in spring time, then by its own reasoning the audience will deduce the time of year and the likely position of the sun etc.
2. So far as an unchanging place on changing sea ice — albeit close to the village — would be a conceptual possibility.
3. I should emphasise that these periods of true warmth in the sunshine are quite brief interludes in a long, agonisingly cold, hungry vigil; the satisfaction expressed in the remark, 'I have a good place here', should thus be heard in the context of that discomfort: men's discomfort, of course, not, in fact, the seal's except by the empathy of imagination, for the seal lives comfortably in icy waters.



DUCKS PLAYING IN THE SPRING

by Janet Kigusiug / I. (Avaalaqiaq) Tiktaalaq

I SAW MY LADY WEEPE':

The First Five Songs of John Dowland's *Second Book of Songs*

ANTHONY ROOLEY

John Dowland was out of England, at 'the court of a forraine Prince', when the *Second Book of Songs* was published in 1600. The songs had presumably been prepared for this collection during the previous two years or so whilst he was in Denmark as lutenist to King Christian IV. The arrangements with the printer, Thomas East, were handled by George Eastland, acting as a sort of production manager for Dowland during his absence. There was extensive legal trouble between East and Eastland, the full report of which still survives, and it gives welcome insight into music-printing of this time. It is learned, for example, that a production-run of two thousand copies was expected for a volume of this nature, and that Eastland expected to sell at four shillings and sixpence per copy, though this was thought by the printer to be greedy and overpriced.

I do not think that all the legal wrangling and unpleasantness, nor Eastland's handling of the manuscript prior to printing, had any influence on the content of the *Second Book of Songs*, which bears the stamp of Dowland's judicious selection and presentation. Eastland takes a page of prefatory material which has an address to the 'Curteous Reader' and an acrostic verse dedicated to the Lady Lucie, Countess of Bedford, who is the dedicatee for the whole volume. Dowland's choice of Patroness is interesting and most apt. This choice influenced the content of the volume quite considerably.

Lucy Harrington was one of the most influential ladies of the court, becoming the chief patron of learning and the arts after the Queen and Mary Sidney, the Countess of Pembroke. Numerous books were dedicated to her — the first when she was only three years old — and the poets who were encouraged by her include the best names of the time. Michael Drayton's early career was nurtured

by her, Ben Johnson was considerably influenced by her taste for elaborate masques and complex symbolism. Samuel Daniel dedicated work to her and perhaps the most famous patron-poet partnership of the time was with John Donne. Some of his most abstruse poems are linked with her, in which certain obscure references and symbolism are still not fully understood.

She was always described as youthful, witty and having a certain radiance. Light seemed to shine from her. Of course her name prompted many of the descriptions: Lucy, Lucis, Light, the morning star, all arose in this way and provided a convenient catalogue for eulogy. But her natural personality (rather than her symbolic one) seems to have been gracious, alert and perceptive. One of Johnson's several epigrams to Lucy, which was included with *Donnes Satyres*, sums up the respect in which she was held:

Lucy, you brightnesse of our sphere, who are
Life of the Muses's day, their morning-starre

The epigram concludes:

Lucy, you brightnesse of our sphere, who are
The Muses' evening, as their morning-starre.

An uncharted area of Lucy Bedford's symbolism lies in the opposite of the lightness associated with her — darkness and night, tears, woe and shame. This catalogue of misery appears to be another aspect of her imagery. Saint Lucy, whose patronal day was the thirteenth of December, was an obvious link with Lucy Bedford. John Donne's poem 'A Nocturnall upon St Lucies Day' makes the connection for us. Only a week later, in the Church's calendar, St Thomas's Day appears on the twenty-first of December. This week, which begins with St Lucy and ends with St Thomas (doubting Thomas of course), symbolises the darkest time of the year, for it is indeed when night is longest, day is shortest. Life is at its lowest ebb, it is the nether-region of the year when sleep, darkness and misery of the human condition gnaw in the numbed brain. But, though common hope may be seen as a false thing, the longest night

nurtures all future possibilities, just as darkness nurtures the germination of the seed. What appears as a hopeless philosophy, a manual for despair, actually contains all future hope, the unmanifest potential of the human spirit. Lucy came to symbolise all this, I think, and a cult of darkness was generated around this figure filled with light. Donne's enigmatic poem hardly clarifies but extends these ideas:

A Nocturnall upon S. Lucies day,
Being the shortest day.

Tis the yeares midnight, and it is the dayes,
Lucies, who scarce seaven houres herself unmaskes,
The Sunne is spent, and now his flasks
Send forth light squibs, no constant rayes;

The worlds whole sap is sunke:
The generall balme th'hydroptique earth hath drunk,
Whither, as to the beds-feet, life is shrunke,
Dead and enterr'd; yet all these seeme to laugh,
Compar'd with mee, who am their Epitaph.

Study me then, you who shall lovers bee
At the next world, that is, at the next Spring:
For I am every dead thing,
In whom love wrought new Alchimie.

For his art did expresse
A quintessence even from nothingnesse,
From dull privations, and leane emptiness:
He ruin'd mee, and I am re-begot
Of absence, darknesse, death; things which are not.

All others, from all things, draw all that's good,
Life, soule, forme, spirit, whence they beeing have;
I, by loves limbecke, am the grave
Of all, that's nothing. Oft a flood
Have wee two wept, and so

Drowned the whole world, us two; oft did we grow
To be two Chaosses, when we did show
Care to be ought else; and often absences
Withdrew our soules, and made us carcasses.

But I am by her death, (which word wrongs her)
Of the first nothing, the Elixer grown;
Were I a man, that I were one,
I needs must know; I should preferre,
If I were any beast,
Some ends, some means; Yea plants, yea stones detest,
And love; All, all some properties invest;
If I an ordinary nothing were,
As shadow, a light, and body must be here.

But I am None; nor will my Sunne renew.
You lovers, for whose sake, the lesser Sunne
At this time to the Goat is runne
To fetch new lust, and give it you,
Enjoy your summer all;
Since shee enjoyes her long nights festivall,
Let mee prepare towards her, and let mee call
This houre her Vigill, and her Eve, since this
Both the yeares, and the dayes deep midnight is.

His final call is that he will celebrate St Lucy's day, the longest night, for this suits his sombre mood. He will have none of the world of illusion, symbolised by Midsummer's Day. John Dowland was of the same mind, I think, in his settings of poems of worldly grief, summed up by the recurrent phrase 'In darkness let me dwell', which appears for the first time in this book dedicated to Lucy.

John Dowland's dedication is brief but its complimentary tone confirms all those features of Lucy's patronage that have been outlined:

To The Right
Honorable the Lady Lucie
Comtesse of BEDFORD

Excellent Ladie: I send unto your La: from the court of a forraine Prince, this volume of my second labours: as to the worthiest Patronesse, of Musicke: which is the Noblest of all Sciences: for the whole frame of Nature, is nothing but Harmonie, as wel in soules, as bodies: And because I am now removed from your sight, I will speake boldly, that your La: shall be unthankfull to Nature hir selfe, if you doe not love, & defend that Art, by which, she hath given you so well tuned a minde.

Your Ladiship hath in your selfe, an excellent agreement of many vertues, of which: though I admire all, Yet I am bound by my profession, to give especiall honor, to your knowledge of Musicke: which in the judgement of ancient times, was so proper an excelencie to Woemen, that the Muses tooke their name from it, and yet so rare, that the world durst imagin but nine of them.

I most humbly beseech your La: to receive this worke, into your favour: and the rather, because it commeth far to beg it, of you. From Helsingnoure in Denmarke the first of June.

1600

Your Ladiships
in all humble devotion:
John Dowland

Naturally enough Dowland dwells on femininity in this dedication: it has an obvious conceit to follow. He also points out that this book contains his 'second labours'; the first few songs in the book are, uniquely, 'songs for two voices'. Dwelling on 'two' in this way and stressing what 'was so proper an excelencie to Woemen' suggests that Dowland was sorting out the common-place notion that in numerology the number two represents the feminine aspects of creation which contrasts with number three representing the

male aspects. The number two gathers together the related attributes of supporting, being passive, imperfect, tending to darkness. It is the number of duality and, according to William Iugpen, *Secrets of Numbers*, 1624, 'It is the weakest Number of all, because of it selfe, without the help of others, it marketh nothing.' He says it has to be 'coupled' with the ternary and 'is made perfect with the quaterne'. Lucy, the patroness, needs her poets and artists as much as they need her.

Continuing the singing of Lucy's praises, George Eastland follows Dowlands's dedication with this verse:

L ute arise and charme the aire,
 U ntill a thousand formes shee beare,
 C onjure them all that they repaire,
 I nto the circles of hir eare,
 E ver to dwell in concord there,

 B y this thy tunes may have accesse,
 E ven to hir spirit whose floweing treasure,
 D oth sweetest Harmonie expresse,
 F illing all eares and hearts with pleasure
 O n earth, observing heavenly measure,
 R ight will can shee judge and defend them,
 D oubt not of that for shee can mend them.

It is a somewhat pretentious poem based on commonplace notions of harmony and concord, but it makes an attractive addition to the volume. The idea that sounds enter the ear and then into the mind, carrying with them intrinsic qualities, is a curious one but certainly an apt way of describing the effect of music on the listener. The conceit also reflects the tendency to elevate the lady to an almost divine realm, as though there was a power available to the patron to reach heavenward. After Eastlands's worldly little address to the reader, the table of contents lists the songs in the book. There are twenty-two of them; eight for two voices, twelve for four voices and two for five voices. It is the first five songs with which we are

presently concerned: 'I saw my Lady weepe', 'Flow my Teares, fall from your springs', 'Sorrow stay, lend true repentant teares', 'Dye not before thy day', 'Mourne, Mourne, day is with darknesse fled'. They read like a catalogue of misfortune and yet they include some of Dowland's finest songs, and most elevating too.

All five songs can be enjoyed at face value — Dowland's melodic and harmonic skills invite the listener's attention immediately, but the songs can also be enjoyed from other points of view and at deeper levels.

'I saw my Lady weepe' attracts first as a melancholic love song, with a lyric poem of great beauty:

'I saw my Lady weepe,
And sorrow proud to be advanced so:
In those faire eies where all perfections keepe,
Hir face was full of woe,
But such a woe (beleeve me) as wins more hearts,
Than mirth can dow, with hir intysing parts.

Sorrow was there made faire,
And passion wise, teares a delightfull thing,
Silence beyond all speech a wisdom rare,
Shee made hir sighes to sing,
And all things with so sweet a sadnesse move,
As made my heart at once both grieve and love.

O fayrer then ought ells,
The world can shew, leave of in time to grieve,
Inough, inough, your joyfull lookes excells,
Teares kills the heart beleeve,
O strive not to bee excellent in woe,
Which onely breeds your beauties overthrow.

The words and the music are so harmoniously united, that it strikes one as perfection in artistry and craftsmanship. The long vocal lines suit each of the three stanzas, the bass voice echoes and supports the 'cantus' and the lute binds the two together with lovely

idiomatic decorations. Plangent harmonies convey the sweet melancholy of the words.

Although it can be enjoyed as a love song, the poem is not wholly successful interpreted in detail that way. Verse two is particularly enigmatic if read only as a love song; there is, one feels, a more specific context. Dowland carefully placed it in a position of prime importance – the first item of his *Second Book of Songs*. His first collection had been so well received and the favourable impression needed to be maintained, so that the first song of the new book had to be as attractive as the first collection, and yet sufficiently different to draw attention. He succeeded in every way, including making this opening song a eulogy of Lucy Bedford. Enjoyed in this way, the song takes on new meaning.

The first stanza extols her physical beauty, even though 'Hir face was full of woe', whilst the second moves inward to appreciate the qualities of her mind which were described in the dedication. The third verse is cautionary: should such a lady lose herself in worldly grief then her beauty would be threatened: 'Which only breeds your beauty's overthrow'. The common condition of humanity was that of worldly grief elaborated on the 'grounde of woe', but the unearthly beauty of the quasi-divine Lucy should not be allowed to degenerate to this level. Lucy was accustomed to dedications of the most diverse kind, from the most talented poets of the day, but she can hardly have failed to be touched by such a subtle conceit as contained in this first song.

The tendency to deification of individuals leads to a third interpretation of the song. The tradition of personifying qualities and attributes had a long history, reaching beyond the Renaissance and Middle Ages to classical culture. Feminine deities abounded: the three Graces, the nine Muses, the seven Virtues and the seven Liberal Arts. The Lady Musick ('Musica' is the lady with the lute and song-book seated on a cloud in the title page of Dowland's *First Book of Songs*) directs men to the knowledge of the Divine through the study and experience of profound music. The Lady Musick had been a favourite figure in graphic depiction since the twelfth century,

and though of classical rather than biblical origins, she, with her six companions, was a recurrent image in orthodox works. How many of the courtly love ladies in the Gardens of Pleasure found in medieval manuscripts are actually personifications of the Lady Musick? A real Lady, an idealised Lady, and the symbolic ladies of knowledge merge together in a tradition of great richness. The device of personification was so strong that the very word 'Musicke' would recall the tradition; it was a commonplace, the emblem was firmly impressed in the mind of the age.

Several ideas are embodied in the concept of the 'Lady Musick': first, music was a science of Number which is synonymous with divine proportion and universal harmony; second, human music, though coarse and crude, was a pale reflection of the divine music (held in the mind of God) and the music of the Spheres; third, music could, rightly used, temper the human mind and strengthen the individual resolve to aim heavenward; fourth, music was elevating, given from God to Man via Orpheus (or King David), and since it emanated from heaven must return there.

Though these ideas may appear foreign today, all men in the sixteenth century had them as their common unquestioned background of thought.

In Germany at the beginning of the Protestant movement 'Frau Musicke' became an important emblem for Luther in allowing music a worldly place in the divine service. It was often reiterated by musicians that 'the Grave Luther was not afraid to place (Musick) in the next seat to Divinity'. The Counter-Reformation brought countering images and Richard Lockett has seen the beginnings of the tradition of St Cecilia as the patron Saint of musicians as a Catholic ploy to challenge the Protestant Lady Musick.

This vigorous tradition gathered strength in all the Protestant countries, but especially in England, for the country was in a mood to favour feminine-cloaked abstractions. Several lute-songs allude to the femininity of music and particularly call on the Muse whose inspiration is essential for her earthbound servants. Numerous graphic depictions of her made her image commonplace. An English listener

of 1600 on hearing 'I saw my Lady weepe' would at once associate the formal rhetoric, the figure of femininity and the musical embodiment with the Lady Musick and the tendency towards heavenly personification and the archetypal figure of artistic inspiration. As the song unfolded, the listener would identify such give-away lines as 'shee made hir sighes to sing' with the Lady Musick. We, working with a broken tradition, must look for evidence to support such an interpretation; but the educated Elizabethan would simply quietly enjoy a reiteration and amplification of a convention with which he was wholly intimate.

One fact so far passed by is that the song is one of only four in Dowland's whole corpus that are dedicated to particular individuals. At the top of the left-hand page for this song there is the inscription 'To the most famous, Anthony Holborne'. This in no way denies the relevance of the song to the volume's dedicatee, the Countess of Bedford, nor the first interpretation of the work as a love song. But rather it supports the idea of the piece having an abstract musical relevance lying behind the more obvious meanings already discussed.


Holborne and Dowland enjoyed an interchange of ideas and musical conventions, the one frequently parodying or imitating the works of the other. This was not only a mark of mutual admiration but the reflection of a time-honoured practice of borrowing and building on pre-existing musical material, which can be traced through the whole sixteenth century and earlier. In this case it would appear that Dowland established a 'Lachrimae' tradition or convention in the early 1590's, borrowing the four-note motif:



from common stock but making it his own in its new context of the 'Lachrimae Pavan'. Others acknowledged Dowland's mastery and supremacy in the art of melancholic expression which began to

experience a cult fashion in the last decade of the sixteenth century. Anthony Holborne paid tribute in his *Pavans and Galliards*, 1599, by including several pavans which draw on the *Lachrimae* motif extensively. Such titles as 'The Image of Melancholy' speak for themselves and the 'Pavana Ploravit' (Pavan: He wept) probably refers to the creator of the melancholic '*Lachrimae*' convention, John Dowland. This hidden compliment to Dowland appears in 1599, so that Dowland's first opportunity to acknowledge it was in his second book of 1600, the year after. Further evidence of the close musical interplay is available and gives us ample material for appreciating their musical dialogue and mutual esteem.

Both composers had found the richest inspiration from the Lady Musick through the expression of melancholy and tears. They were the accepted masters of the world-weary plaint. The present song tells us the story of exactly why they worked with her in this woe-ful vein — 'such a woe wins more hearts than mirth can do with hir intysing parts'. Sad music is more powerful and memorable than a cheerful ditty, which is enjoyed and then quickly forgotten. Line by line the poem now takes on a new and deeper significance than hitherto. It might be interpreted as follows:

'I saw my Lady weepe': Dowland, and by implication of the dedication Holborne, had frequently seen the Lady Musick weeping: 'And sorrow proud to bee advanced so': referring to the idea that it was unseemly to express personal or individual sorrow, for this is belittling and pitiful, but sorrow expressed (or 'advanced') in art was an elevated thing allowing a distance and thus a strength. As well as the fundamental meaning, 'proud' may be interpreted as 'put forward' or 'expressed'; 'In those faire eies, where all perfections keepe': the eyes of the Lady Musick (often painted as semi-breves  in the madrigal repertoire) are here recalling the belief that the eyes are the window to the soul; in this instance the concept of the Lady Musick (being next to Divinity) allows us to realise that through her eyes we are led to the Divine 'where all perfections keepe'; number is perfection and music is the art which most completely embodies the laws of number and harmony. Although the

lover's eyes are a common image and may have no special significance, there may be another reference to Lucy here. Her name-sake, St Lucy, suffered various atrocities in an attempt to make her deny her Christian faith. One miraculous story was that her eyes were gouged, only later to be made whole again. This caused Lucy, in all later references, to be associated with eyes: they became her device. Since tears well from the eyes also, the link with Dowland's chief image is quite strong.

'Hir face was full of woe': Dowland's striking use of a B major chord on 'full' following immediately from a D major cadence, has a bursting effect so quietly dramatic that we are pulled into the telling suspension on 'woe':

The image displays a musical score for a piece by Dowland, likely 'Hir face was full of woe'. The score is written for voice and piano accompaniment. It consists of two systems of staves. The first system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the phrase 'Her face was full of woe, full - of woe,'. The second system shows the vocal line and piano accompaniment for the phrase 'But such a woe (be - leeve me) as'. The piano accompaniment features a prominent B major chord on the word 'full' and a D major cadence. The score is written in G major (one sharp) and 3/4 time. The vocal line is in treble clef, and the piano accompaniment is in grand staff (treble and bass clefs). The lyrics are written below the vocal line.

Her face was full of woe, full - of woe,

But such a woe (be - leeve me) as

The musical painting responds to this, the central line and central concept of the stanza; and its meaning is self-explanatory:

But such a woe (beleeve me) as wins more hearts,
Then mirth can doe with hir intysing parts.

The last couplet confirms that this sad, soulful music (take Dowland's word for it) is much more powerful than the light conceit. The pun on 'intysing parts' (between musical parts and personal features or accomplishments) confirms that 'Mirth' is also being personified; and Dowland paints this in a seductively enticing cross-rhythm:

The musical score is written for a vocal line and a lute accompaniment. The vocal line is in treble clef, and the lute accompaniment is in bass clef. The music is in a key with one sharp (F#) and a 3/4 time signature. The tempo is marked 'Allegretto'. The score consists of two systems. The first system has a vocal line with the lyrics 'Than Mirth can do with her, with' and a lute accompaniment. The second system has a vocal line with the lyrics 'her entic ing parts.' and a lute accompaniment. The lute accompaniment features a complex cross-rhythm pattern, with the right hand playing in 3/4 and the left hand in 6/8, creating a seductively enticing effect.

So much for the first stanza, whose function is to introduce the concept. The second stanza elaborates on the theme and is wholly self-explanatory. Note especially the last couplet (set to the same 'intysing' music) which so captures the bitter-sweet experiences of the human condition. This is sublime philosophy ('silence — a wisdom rare') as well as sublime art. The idea of edification is made explicit in the third and final stanza. Its function is to draw the theme to a close by pointing a moral. Perhaps the moral can be seen as addressed to the Lady Musick, Lucie Comtesse of Bedford, Anthony Holborne, the lover and to the listener: if the expression of weeping and grief is taken too seriously and too much to heart then the beauty, which is given by Grace to us, will be marred. It is pointing to the truth that the melancholic convention is valuable, beautiful, but only a convention, not to be mistaken for reality. This elevated use of the expression of grief and woe is characteristic of Dowland. He looks beyond the initial appearance of these works to the archetype beyond; he inhabits the Platonic world of ideal forms.

'I saw my Lady weepe' is then an encomium in praise of melancholy music: to lament in music is to move men's hearts more deeply than can the cheerful ditty, which titillates for a brief moment and is then gone, forgotten. Music of a profound, inspired melancholy can change the condition of the listener, can uplift the weary spirit. Music and medicine were thought to complement each other: medicine restores the balance of the bodily elements and the humours; music brings balance and harmony to the soul.

Dowland's 'dedication' song, almost a hymn in praise of melancholy music, states an eloquent case and prepares the way for what is to follow: perhaps the most sublime example of inspired melancholy, 'Flow my teares, fall from your springs', a work which was justly famed throughout Europe, a work which epitomises world-weary grief and transforms it into an ecstatic eulogy. This composition, in both instrumental pavan and song forms, created a whole convention, the convention of 'Lachrimae', based on the musical image or emblem of the tear. Dowland extended and elaborated an

idea which was already about and fashioned a new vocabulary which became the basis for this new convention. A full study of the symbolism in this song must be reserved for some other time. A brief review, making a few assumptions, will suffice for now.

It is generally thought that the instrumental pavan form of 'Lachrimae' or 'Flow my teares' (the two titles are synonymous) came some years before the song version, just at the beginning of the last decade of the sixteenth century. This was the very time when an affected melancholic style was donned by many fashionable young courtiers, and parodies of these narcissists were made in several plays; poems were written by them and love-sick melancholy was all the vogue. An excellent study, *Voices of Melancholy* by Bridget Gellert Lyons, compares the several kinds of melancholy that were portrayed in contemporary literature: the over-studious melancholic who always carried a heavy book; the love-sick melancholic who carried a branch of the willow tree; the mad melancholic who was in some way deranged and kept company with bats and owls; and the buffoon who affected these styles. They all had some features in common: clothing tended to be black, with a black floppy hat being featured; the hair was unkempt, as was the apparel around the neck — all loose and uncared for; the face was thin and pale. The famous portrait of John Donne shows the thin, nervous, pale face of the love-sick melancholic, with the brim of his black hat framing his face.

But there are other kinds of melancholy, as the pages of the famous compendium on melancholy show; Robert Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* is a most exhaustive work, listing and commenting on all manifestations of melancholy. There is one type of melancholy not so much treated by Bridget Lyons, but discussed by Frances Yates in her *Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*. She uncovers the long tradition of 'inspired' melancholy, which is precisely the tradition that Dowland is elaborating in his thirteen songs of worldly grief, with 'Flow my Teares' as a chief example.

As the pavan-form of 'Lachrimae' gathered popularity and wide circulation during this time of fashionable melancholy, it became a

natural focal point, a kind of signature tune, for the trend. It was on everybody's lips. It is very likely that Dowland wrote the words which became the famous song, for it is otherwise difficult to explain the extraordinary unity between newly-written words and previously existing music. The case for Dowland writing his own poems rests on this one song, I think; and the case is strong but not conclusive. The poem is a catalogue of woe; there is no hope, no light but for that which discloses shame. The poem constructs a circle of world-weary plaint which allows no chink of relief from despair. Oddly enough, a performance of this song is a most elevating experience. It is sad and lamenting, yes, but at the final close one feels uplifted, in a way cleansed. Now this, I know, is a subjective experience but it is quite a common one. It does cause one to look again at the poem to see what it is really saying.

'Flow my Teares' is not a great piece of poetry, it moves in stilted couplets which have a terse, epigrammatic quality. It is a condensed text and leaves out almost as much as it has said. Its content is wholly in accord with the view that man enjoyed a pristine nature, fell to the world of sense, forgot his true home, then wakes to the awful condition he is in. Through his own effort he might rise up out of his dark, locked condition and regain his rightful place in creation. 'Flow my Teares' is a statement made from the point of waking from this deep sleep, and making the first efforts to rise. It is a painful time.

This brief gloss gives a background for understanding Dowland's concern with despair, tears, blackness, etcetera, his whole catalogue of torment. Such views of Man's position can be harmoniously incorporated in most of the teachings of the time. Both Protestant and Catholic doctrines delighted in listing, in the fullest detail, all the features of Man's abject misery. The notion that men were weak, sinful and subject to change and decay was commonplace. The common knowledge of this condition was the greatest spur to education, self-improvement in order to fight back ignorance. The study of divine and moral law was the chief weapon in the fight. But there were others, of a more esoteric nature. Platonism suffused

not only lyric poetry, for even some branches of Christianity had been Platonised — scholars like Marsilio Ficino in the early sixteenth century had devoted their lives to that. The loose label 'Neo-Platonism' incorporates a web of variegated philosophies including that known as 'Hermetic', that is, relating to Hermes or Mercury, the messenger of the Gods. A brilliant exposition on the spread of hermetic philosophy in the Renaissance has been written by Frances Yates: *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*. A second work, on England's great hermetic philosopher, John Dee, in a book of that name, is by Peter French. The two books together conclusively show the diffusion of these ideas through the last years of the sixteenth century. French demonstrates the major difference between the two sets of conflicting concepts in Platonic and Hermetic teachings: 'Optimist Gnosis' or knowledge of the Divine through seeing the sensual world as provided by the creator in his benign munificence, and everything in it as a signpost leading back to the Divine; and 'Pessimist Gnosis' or knowledge of the Divine through spurning the world of sense as a most complex and horrid snare which traps and imprisons the soul, the only way back being through a total negation of the sensual world. A philosophy which can combine these two extremes is a force to be reckoned with, and indeed many of the finest minds of Elizabethan England were entertained by it in varying degrees. Dowland was, I think, wholly conversant with both forms of Gnosis, as well as with straightforward Christian thinking. Given a broad mind capable of creative 'gnostic' thought these ideas are not mutually exclusive, indeed they are mutually supportive in many respects, and a 'universal brotherhood', which tolerated and learned from each major teaching, was an aim for which Giordano Bruno died, and to which many other great minds were sympathetic.

Dowland's texts of worldly grief are not Christian, for he never once refers to divine aid, and self-pity is a sin. But nor are these texts fundamentally non-Christian. After all he composes some of the most sublime Christian devotional songs in his *Pilgrimes Solace*. Dowland, like Bruno and many others of his time, seems to want to

eschew religious difference in favour of tolerance. He certainly uses 'Optimist Gnosis'. This image of melancholy, inspired melancholy, became his emblem. The reason a performance of 'Flow my Teares' is profoundly uplifting is that the listener is brought a little closer to 'Gnosis', knowledge of the divine, through masterly use of music and poetry which professes a dark pessimism.

The next three songs confirm this sombre note: 'Sorrow stay, lend true repentant teares', 'Dye not before thy day', and 'Mourne, mourne, day is with darknesse fled'. I will treat them together for they are, I think, a song-cycle. I am indebted to Pamela Coren for first suggesting that the three poems might belong together. Dowland gives no indication that they should be considered as a cycle; it is only internal evidence which confirms the suspicion. The first five songs of Book Two form a *sequence* of songs which unfold in a very satisfying way, whilst songs three, four and five form a *cycle*, that is they exist better together than separately in telling their story:

Sorrow stay, lend true repentant teares,
To a woefull, wretched wight,
Hence, dispaire with thy tormenting feares:
Doe not, O doe not my heart poore heart affright,
Pitty, help now or never,
Mark me not to endlesse paine,
Alas I am condemned, I am condemned ever,
No hope, no help, there doth remain,
But downe, downe, downe I fall,
And arise I never shall.

Dye not beefore thy day, poore man condemned,
But lift thy low lookes from the humble earth,
Kisse not dispaire and see sweet hope contemned:
The hag hath no delight, but mone for mirth,
O fye poore fondling,
Fie fie be willing, to preserve thy self from killing:
Hope thy keeper glad to free thee,

Bids thee goe and will not see thee,
Hye thee quickly from thy wrong,
So shee endes hir willing song.

Mourne, mourne, day is with darknesse fled,
what heaven then governes earth,
O none, but hell in heavens stead,
Choaks with his mistes our mirth.
Mourne, mourne, looke now for no more day nor night,
But that from hell,
Then all must as they may in darknesse learne to dwell.
But yet this change, must needes change our delight,
that thus the Sunne should harbour with the night.

The story is an interesting one. In 'Sorrow stay' the poet, or Dowland, calls on Sorrow to weep true tears with him, for 'no hope there doth remain'. In an immediately effective example of word-painting, Dowland concludes this section with 'Downe, downe, downe I fall, and arise I never shall'. The whole song continues and confirms the mood of 'Flow my Teares', with several ideas and images being elaborated, yet it feels more intensely personal, less distanced. This is the longest song of the trilogy, and the most famous, being one of the favourites for modern performance. 'Sorrow stay' can exist on its own, for the architecture is broad and complete, but the second and third songs, among the least-frequently performed songs of Dowland, feel truncated on their own. They become more enigmatic as independent songs than when used to follow 'Sorrow stay'.

After the intensely personal, self-commiserating 'arise I never shall', 'Dye not before thy day' lifts the mood completely. It is the 'Lady Hope' addressing the poet, or Dowland, and she says that the 'hag', Despair, 'hath no delight but mone for mirth'. This recalls the poem of the first song, 'I saw my Lady weepe', whose first verse ends:

... such a woe as wins more hearts,
Than mirth can doe, with hir intysing parts.

But the Lady Hope is advocating through the persuasion of argument and reason that the 'poor fondling' or 'wretched wight' should embrace mirth rather than melancholy. The unexpected triple section at 'Hope thy keeper' becomes very persuasive and 'intysing', leaving us to wonder how the argument will proceed in the final song. Well, Dowland's confirmed judgement, at this stage, is undoubtedly pessimistic. 'Mourne, mourne' is a curious song of transformations, but it certainly rejects any help offered by Hope. Day is replaced by night; hell governs earth instead of heaven; hell's mists choke our mirth; the sun harbours with the night. And the essential message is, 'Then all must as they may, in darknesse learne to dwell'. Dowland's reiterated message, throughout his life's work, comes through clearly: 'Pessimist Gnosis' is a sure way to avoid the snares of the dark world of sense.

In summary of these five great songs of John Dowland, which make such good companions together, we can see the first song, 'I saw my Lady weepe', as a kind of hymn to the Lady Musick, who inspires most profoundly through melancholy and lamenting music. Number two, 'Flow my Teares', is the most perfectly proportioned example of Musick's inspiration, which brings forward the notion of Gnostic insight through negation of the world. Number three, 'Sorrow stay, lend true repentant teares', is an intensely personal statement, indeed a formalised cry of anguish for 'relief'. Number four, 'Dye not before thy day', offers a hand, the hand of Hope, to the poor man. Finally, in number five, 'Mourne, day is with darknesse fled', the enticements of Hope and Mirth are rebuffed, and all worldly light discounted:

But yet this change, must needs change our delight,
That thus the Sunne should harbour with the night.

A nice piece of 'eye-music' concludes the song: Dowland prints a black semibreve for the final note, on the word 'night'.

FROM THE DARK WOOD TO BRINDAVAN

STEPHEN CROSS

The image of the world as a wood or forest — the 'dark wood' of Dante — has from the time of the Arthurian legends to the present century been important in European thought and literature. It is less well known that during the same centuries a similar image has played a central role in the art and religious life of India. There is, however, a significant difference.

In Europe the forest has been a powerful image of the darkness, the confusion, and the dangers the human soul encounters on its journey through the world: 'So bitter is it,' says Dante at the start of his poem, 'that scarcely more is death.' Such are the tangled forests in which the Arthurian knights meet their strange adventures; in which the children of later fairy tales wander; which are the setting for such stories as that of *Pellèas et Melisande*, and for some of Shakespeare's plays (*Timon of Athens*, *Cymbeline*); which are to be found in Blake as 'the forests of the night' and the 'infernal grove'; and, in the present century, in the work of T.S. Eliot ('Tell me in what part of the wood/ Do you want to flirt with me' in *Sweeney Agonistes*). This 'dark wood' is, in a sense, a negative counterpart of the Garden of Eden; a place of dangers and difficulties and deceptions, even though those within it may also, now and then, stumble upon some happier encounter or some sunlit glade — brief glimpses of that lost paradise for which all are in search. In Indian tradition, on the other hand, the forest is the paradise; not in itself, but because it is transformed into Paradise by the presence of the divine, of Krishna. A great proportion of the arts of mediaeval and modern India, whether in dance, sculpture, music, the painting of the Rajput and Pahari schools, or poetry, is concerned with descriptions of the joys and beauties of this paradise-wood, Brindavan; and it is perhaps not too much to say that the legends associated with it

have constituted the single most fertile source of inspiration for the arts in India during the last thousand years. Here is a typical poem on the theme by the nineteenth century poet, Harischandra:

In the groves of Brindavan, Hari and Radha are walking.
The moon is full and the earth bathed in its light,
It is autumn!
The wind is blowing gently over the fields of flowers,
In the water the lotus blossoms,
O what beauty!
The sacred river Yamuna winds and curls;
Spray is scattered here and there;
This is a night of bliss!
Shri Hari plays His flute,
He draws the maidens of Braj with His melody.
They, leaving all, run towards Him;
Some are fastening their saris awry,
Some carry musical instruments in their hands.
I sacrifice my being at Thy feet, O Son of Nanda.

Harischandra was writing in a long tradition of Hindi poetry which continues to flourish today, and of which the golden age was the sixteenth century. At that time several of the greatest poets India has known were writing on Krishna themes, notable among them being Nanddas, Surdas, and the Princess Mirabai. In this paper, largely for practical reasons, the majority of examples are taken from the work of Surdas, who was contemporary with and may have attended the court of the great Emperor Akbar, and who, in the ancient tradition of bards, is believed to have been blind. All of his poetry is a meditation on the life of Krishna in Brindavan and the surrounding region of Braj, concealing considerable sophistication beneath an apparent simplicity. The following poem summarises his outlook:

The cloud-coloured Lord came to help the world,
He who is the object of the eternal adoration of the Vedas,

Who eludes the intellect of the Sages, yet was born in Mathura
And called the child of Yashoda.

In the depth of the Yamuna, He subdued the venomous snake
Kaliya;

He helped Bhishma to keep his vow in the war of the
Mahabharata;

He became the charioteer of Arjuna, bestowing the nectar
of the Gita on him

And revealing to him His universal form, thus removing all his
doubts;

He inspired the mystic dance in Brindavan with the Gopas and
Gopis;

Surdas has seen this sport of love and describes it with delight.

Returning to our theme, then, we find that in the arts of both Europe and India (with some exceptions) the wood or forest plays a significant role as an image of the world, but that in the one culture it is regarded negatively, as a place of fear and dangers, while in the other it is assimilated to Paradise. Let us explore the reasons for this difference. There are in the first place reasons of an historical nature. Behind the European imagery lies the revulsion experienced by the Greeks and Romans as they confronted the immense, dank tracts of forest (inhabited by the, to them, most savage of barbarians) which stretched discouragingly across the heart of trans-Alpine Europe: Caesar says of the Hercynian Forest that even after sixty days travel no-one reached its end, or even heard where that was. Despite the Celtic and Teutonic inheritance of Europe with its quite different background (in some Celtic traditions the sun was given to the forest in marriage), this attitude carried over into the Middle Ages, and the picture of the paradise garden shutting out with its high walls the forest beyond is well known in mediaeval art: an image of the bright, ordered world of the spiritual life, contrasted with the darkness and turbulence beyond. On the other hand, the Aryan conquerors of India, perhaps because they had come through the desert regions of the Middle East, were strongly attracted by the

forests they found in their new home. People retired into the forest to develop their *sukumar prabitti* (subtle emotions) and powers of concentration, and Kalidas, in his play *Sakuntala*, has left us a picture of a forest *rishi*. It was a part of the Vedic tradition that boys went for several years to forest hermitages, where they received much of their education; and an important part of the Vedic literature, the *Aranyakas* (meaning literally 'belonging to the forest'), and parts of the *Upanishads* were composed in the forests.

But such reasons are not by themselves sufficient to explain the difference in attitude of the two civilisations; for it is not the attitude towards forests which is the crucial factor, but the attitude towards the world and human life as lived in it, which the forest imagery symbolises. For the European, the world — the forest — is dark and dangerous; he feels himself lost in it and his hope is to find a way out; a path that will lead to a happier region, towards that Paradise Lost that forever haunts him: thus the movement of Dante's poem is from the 'dark wood' to the quite other region of *Il Paradiso*. But for the Hindu, the wood itself *becomes* the paradise, and this reflects a profound difference: for the European, felicity is, and throughout the history of Christianity has been, in the world to come — we cannot find it here; for the Indian, it can — and many would say, must — be attained here and now, in the present world (hence the importance of the concept *jivan mukti*, 'one who is released in life'), for the mere fact of death will not of itself improve one's spiritual condition. Consequently, for the Indian, the world — the forest — and the paradise we all seek are to be realised as one; and the Brindavan myths and the arts which have flowered about them are the affirmation and celebration of this unity, a vision of the world as saturated with divinity. But we should notice the forest is not always a paradise; it is made so by the presence of the god, Krishna, by our awareness of the divine. The moment he is absent our experience of the forest changes, as in this poem by Surdas:

The separation from Gopal has made the shady groves our
enemy!

When He was with us, they were cool and green,
 Now they are tongues of blistering fire!
 Vain is the song of our winged companions,
 Vain is the blooming of the lotuses on the Yamuna;
 The humming of the bees is a discordant sound to us,
 The sweet breezes, the purling streams tumbling across the
 lawns,

Are as the scorching rays of the sun.
 O Uddhava, tell Madhava that without Him
 We are as cripples in a burning desert.
 Surdas says: 'Watching for the Lord
 Has made our eyes as red as vermillion.'

This whole world of Brindavan and the god Krishna who haunts it is one that has grown up gradually in the religious thought of India. Krishna is virtually unmentioned in the *Vedas* (as too is the even more important name of Shiva), and first appears in a prominent role perhaps a thousand years later in the *Mahabharata*, the great epic poem of which the antiquity is unknown but which is conventionally assigned to about 500 BC; in its most famous section, the *Bhagavad Gita*, Krishna appears as the charioteer and adviser of the hero Arjuna, and is clearly identified with the god Vishnu. We may sketch the succeeding stages in the development of the Krishna stories very briefly. In the *Harivamsa* (3rd or 4th century AD) legends of Krishna's childhood are collected together and the charming, teasing figure of later stories begins to appear. Around the 9th century AD comes the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* (also called *Bhagavata Purana*), the central text of the Krishna cult, in which not only Krishna's childhood but his sporting with the gopis, or milkmaids, in Brindavan is described. Then in the late 12th or early 13th century comes Jayadeva's *Gitagovinda*, in which the figure of Radha first emerges as Krishna's favourite among the gopis, completing the legends in their main outline; and this is followed by the poetry of Nanddas, Surdas and others in the succeeding centuries.

Besides their use of the imagery of the forest, the Krishna stories

contain other interesting parallels with religious traditions in Europe. Like Jesus (and also like the infant Hercules), Krishna is threatened with destruction at birth. Kamsa, the evil ruler of the land, has learned that he will one day be destroyed by a child born to his cousin, Krishna's mother. Consequently, he too massacres the innocents, destroying the children previously born to Krishna's parents and finally ordering a general massacre of male children; as in the Christian story, it is an image of forces fearful of the spiritual life seeking to extinguish it at its first appearance. Krishna, however, is saved, and grows up incognito in the region of Braj, where the forest of Brindavan is situated on the banks of the great river Yamuna (the modern Jumna). Here he passes his childhood, cared for by Nanda and Yashoda, his foster parents, in a simple village of cowherds (just as it was shepherds who witnessed the birth of Christ), and descriptions of his exploits and unique charm as a child make up a large part of the Krishna literature. Here is a short poem by Surdas on the theme:

His locks plaited, His body besmeared with dust,
Shyama is playing in the courtyard;
How fortunate is the crow who has run away
With the piece of bread and butter from His hand!
Shyama eats, drinks milk and jumps about;
His tender feet leave the imprint of beauty on the earth.
Says Surdas: 'For a glimpse of this beauty,
I would sacrifice millions of suns and moons!'

As we have indicated, the simplicity of such poems is deceptive. Another work, by a nineteenth century poet, Narayana, points more directly to the level at which they are to be understood:

His sport plunges me in the sea of astonishment!
He who is the Creator and Sustainer of the World
Is now called the 'Son of Nanda'!.
He who is beyond all limitations, formless,
And of whom the Shruti says 'Not this, Not this',

Allows Yashoda to hold His fingers in her hand
 And is being taught to walk.
 He whose worship leads His devotees beyond Sansara,
 By whose order the sun and the stars move,
 Who is perfect — today begs Yashoda for butter.
 Narayana says: 'Hari depends on devotion,
 And shows His greatness in love.'

One of the central episodes of Krishna's childhood is his battle with the serpent Kaliya. Kaliya is a mighty snake which lives in the depths of the Yamuna but has taken to marauding along its banks, and Krishna, the miraculous child, does battle with it. At first, wrapped in its gigantic coils, he is drawn into the waters, and — like many a *jiva* — seeming to forget his divine identity he becomes powerless in the coils of the snake. Then, reminded of his divine nature, he suddenly bursts free and easily subdues his enemy. But, unlike the heroes of Western mythology who battle with serpents, unlike Perseus and St George, unlike the Virgin who crushed the serpent beneath her heel, or the infant Hercules, or Apollo who slew the python at Delphi and claimed its role, Krishna does not slay the great serpent. Having subdued it he spares it, assigning it to the deeps of the sea as its ordained place; for it is only when it rises out of the waters, subverting the natural order, that Kaliya becomes a threat.

A second, equally famous, episode of Krishna's childhood is the butter theft — butter is the rich essence hidden within milk, as God is hidden in creation; and the young and mischievous Krishna is inordinately fond of it. In the following poem by Surdas the image of the boy Krishna mistaking his own reflection in the shining pillar for a second person subtly suggests the teaching of classical Vedanta that the cause of illusion and suffering is *atman's* mistaken self-identity as *jiva* (i.e. the spiritual essence of man is confused with the individualised consciousness):

Shyama visited the house of a Gopi, looking here and there;
 Finding it deserted, He entered —

How can the inhabitants of Braj live?
They roam the forests like ascetics
Who have given up their home,
Being caught in the snare of love;
Like lotuses anxiously awaiting the dawn.
Surdas says: 'Without Hari, we are as fish without water!'

In this poem and many others like it, and in the related painting, dancing and music, the thoughts and actions of passionate romantic love, become the language in which the longing of the human soul for the divine is described, as it was with the troubadours and with Dante and others in 13th century Europe. But whereas the use of this imagery forms a fragile episode in the literature of Europe, in India it flowered into an important and lasting movement, not only in the arts but in the religious life of a large part of the people. One of the most celebrated of India's poets is Mirabai, a Rajput princess who like Surdas lived in the 16th century. In the face of fierce opposition from her royal parents (which is traditionally believed to have led to her death), she adopted the spiritual life and the path of devotion to Krishna. In one of her poems she writes:

Nothing is really mine except Gopal!
O My Parents, I have searched the world
And found nothing worthy of love!
Because of this I am an alien amidst my kinsfolk;
I am exiled from their company
Since I seek that of holy men;
It is but there that I feel happy,
In the world I only weep!
I planted the creeper of love
And silently watered it with my tears,
Now it has grown and overspread my dwelling!
You offered me a cup of poison
Which I drank with joy!
Mira is absorbed in contemplation of Gopal;
God is with her, and all is well!

The idea underlying the development of the Krishna cult is that emotion, particularly in its heightened form of romantic love, is so prominent and powerful a part of human beings that it can and must be used positively, for the purpose of drawing closer to the Divinity, and not be placed in a position of opposition to the spiritual life. In one school of thought, the Vaishnava Sahajiyā movement which flourished in Bengal between the 16th and 18th centuries, this was carried to the extreme of sexual union, in which the lovers identified themselves as Radha and Krishna. Risky though this was — and it certainly attracted social disapproval — it seems in the main to have been a genuine spiritual path, in which a clear distinction was maintained between *kama* (physical desire) and *prema* (pure love, the Vaishnava ideal); and it is to be noted that the sahajiyās themselves felt that beyond this stage there was another in which both Radha and Krishna were to be discovered and united within one's own being.

More important than the sahajiyās is the figure of the saint Shri Chaitanya (1486-1533 AD), who in a few years spread the worship of Krishna and Radha throughout north-east India by the example of his passionate devotion; many Indians believe that in Shri Chaitanya both Radha and Krishna were incarnated, and that in him they were perfectly united. He expressed his love of Krishna and Radha in ecstatic dancing and songs which became the hallmark of his followers, and like many other *bhaktis* regarded the caste system as irrelevant to the religious life (though he did not challenge its social role). Shri Chaitanya's influence is still great in India today, and has recently reached the West in the form of the widespread Hare-Krishna movement. As a result of Shri Chaitanya and others, the Krishna cult has penetrated the popular life of India to a remarkable degree: appreciation of major poets such as Surdas and Mirabai is by no means confined to a literary elite, but their works are known and loved — often in the form of songs — by villagers and simple townsfolk throughout the country. Moreover, it would be wrong to think of Shri Chaitanya's school, or of the *bhakti* movement in general, only in terms of religious emotionalism: emotion

is certainly present — as we have seen, its correct use is the essence of *bhakti* — but the movement shows its maturity and wisdom in the way in which it is careful to relate its teachings to older Indian tradition. The *Bhagavad Gita* in claiming that *bhakti* is the best path (because the most practical) links it with *jnana*, the path of knowledge, and with the framework of orthodox brahmanical belief; and in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* there is a consistent effort to show that the teachings relating to Krishna bear out the doctrines of the Brahmins and the fundamental insights of Hinduism. Shri Chaitanya gathered together a group of theologians known as the six Gosvamins, who, writing in classical Sanskrit, produced a major body of work relating his teachings to the metaphysical tradition of the *Upanishads*. It is the interplay between the surface simplicity of the Krishna stories and the metaphysics underlying them which gives the literature its special quality and tension. In the following poem Surdas captures the magic and longing of the enchanted world of Brindavan — that universal longing for the lost paradise — and in the final lines marvellously suggests the subtle metaphysical principle by which God is partly revealed, and yet at the same time partly concealed, by His creation:

Shri Hari is playing His flute;
Having passed the night in Brindavan,
Now He is moving towards the woods
In the company of Subal, Suddama and Radha;
He looks like the moon surrounded by stars.

A herd of gentle milk-white cows
With lovely curving horns,
Wander slowly before Him.

Shri Hari is playing His flute;
The peacock feather in His crown

Is swaying softly in the breeze;
All are singing the *Gauri* in chorus.

Surdas says: 'The dust raised by the feet of the herd
Has settled on His lovely face,
Partly concealing and partly revealing
His world-intoxicating charm.'

It will be noticed that in this poem Krishna's flute is important, and it is in fact his main attribute. It is the sound of Krishna's flute echoing through Brindavan which tells of the presence of the god, and transforms the forest into a paradise:

When Shri Hari sounded the notes of His flute
The ocean and the dry land mingled as one;
Lotuses blossomed in the desert;
Heaven and the firmament were filled with the melody;
The night took on the rhythm of eternity;
The Gopis were filled with extreme delight;
All creatures lost their sense of individual consciousness.
Says Surdas: 'When Hari touches the flute with His lips,
Everything in the world is changed.'

It is in his flute-playing pose, standing upright like a slender column beneath the branches of a tree, the flute to his lips, and one leg swung gracefully across the other, that Krishna is most often portrayed in statues and paintings. It is a pose which reminds us that Krishna is an incarnation of Vishnu, and that Vishnu (like the Buddha) is in turn linked to the ancient and universal concept of the World Pillar, or Cosmic Tree — the Divine Principle running through the centre of our world, supporting it, articulating it, and giving it meaning. This is the ultimate significance of the stiff, upright, frontal pose in which both Vishnu and the Buddha are frequently represented in earlier Indian sculpture, and the idea is echoed in the figure of the flute-playing Krishna standing beneath the kadamba tree. In another brief poem, Surdas captures the suspension of time that comes with the realisation that the centre of the world is here and now;

Listen, listen, O Companions,
Shri Hari is playing His flute;
The Devas and Beings in all the spheres
Are charmed by the music.
The women of Braj run wildly towards the sound;

The water of the Yamuna is stilled,
The birds, the deer and the fishes are motionless,
Like pictures on a canvas.

The gopis, the women of Braj, are the type of the perfect devotee, for so great is their love of Krishna that no worldly duties, no family ties or conventions, can restrain them. Krishna's flute — like the music of Orpheus — draws them irresistibly to him. Nothing can hold them back; some, we are told in the *Shrimad Bhagavatam*, left milk or rice boiling over the fire; some were serving food to their husbands or breast-feeding their babies and simply abandoned the task; some, who were engaged in their toilet, ran towards Krishna with their clothes and ornaments in disorder. It became a matter of theological debate in India whether it was the married or the unmarried gopis who had the greater merit, and it was decided that it was those who were married because they had more to lose and sacrificed all of it for Krishna. Another debate, and one which certainly reminds us of the Courts of Love of mediaeval Europe and the discussions in Dante's *Vita Nuova*, concerned the respective merit of that love in which the beloved was absent, and that in which the loved one was present to the lover. As in Europe, the decision went in favour of love in absence, for it is the acuter form.

But the gopis do not forever remain separated from Krishna. In the famous Tenth Books of the *Shrimad Bhagavatam* the culminating event of the *rasa* or Round Dance with Krishna is described. Krishna's flute sounds softly through the woods, and the gopis run towards him. At first Krishna rebukes the gopis for abandoning their duties, telling them they should go back to their husbands. As to the gopis, we are told that:

Through grief, their breath became warm and quick.
Their faces, with lips red and luscious like bimba
fruits, were downcast. They kept their toes
digging into the ground. Heavily burdened with
grief they stood silent, while tears, collecting

the collyrium from their eyes, washed away the kunkama powder from their breasts.

They plead with Krishna, with a charming directness:

Having seen Your beautiful form which lends grace to the three worlds, who will not deviate from the customs and manners of the Aryas?

Krishna relents; but once the gopis enjoy his attentions they feel pride, and when this occurs the Lord vanishes abruptly. Now the gopis — like those mystics who have glimpsed Reality for a brief moment only, and lost it — lament. They search passionately through the forest, questioning the trees and the flowers, calling for Krishna and singing his praises. At last Krishna reappears, telling them:

I made Myself invisible though I was present all the time.

The joy of the gopis returns:

Just as the yogis overcome the sorrow of the world through the realisation of the Supreme Self as the ever-present Witness, so the Gopis enjoying the festival of the full vision of the Lord got rid of their grief of separation.

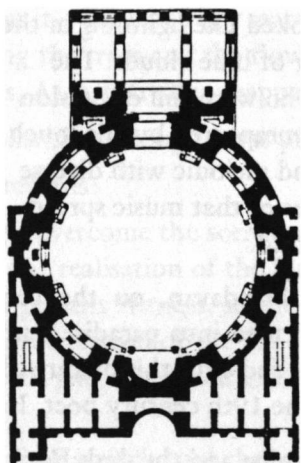
Now the gopis form into a circle and the wonderful *rasa* or Round Dance begins. Krishna multiplies himself into many Krishnas, and dances individually with each one of the gopis at the same moment:

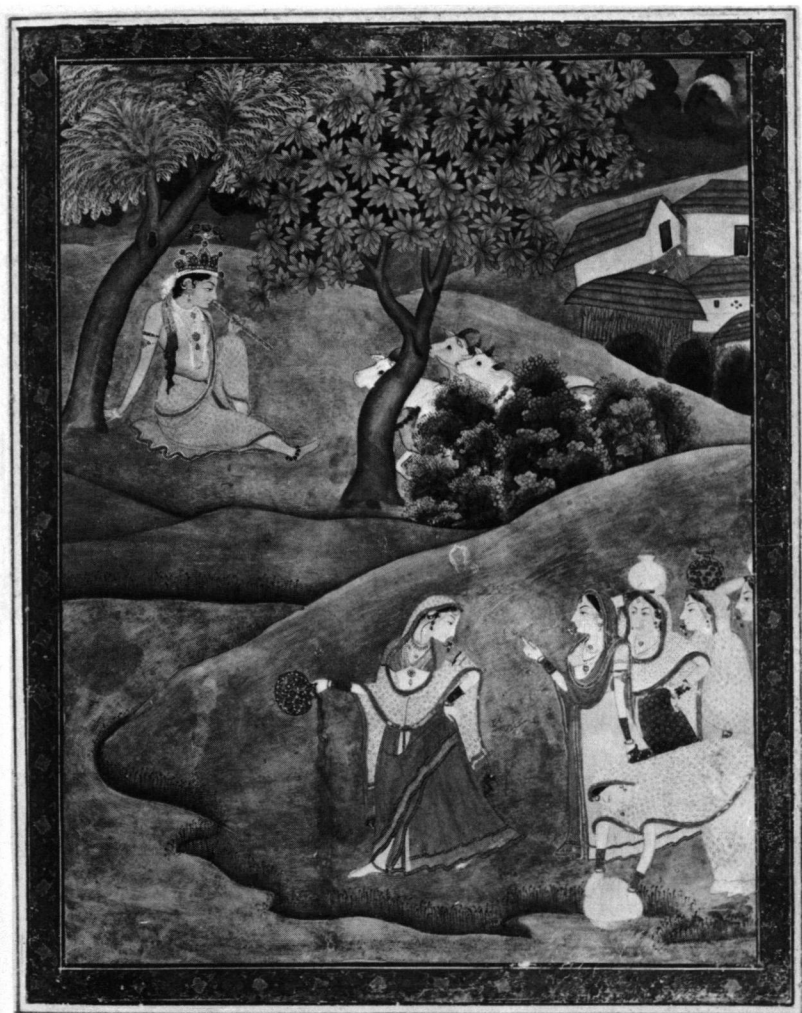
When the Gopis held one another by their hands in the circle, Krishna, the Lord of the yogis, multiplied Himself, and entering between the dual partners, clung lovingly to all. Each Gopi thought that Krishna was hers alone. It was thus that the whole circle commenced the *rasa*-sport. Immediately the sky was filled with Gods and their wives, who came in their aerial chariots eager to

witness the dance. Then the heavenly drums were beaten, flowers showered from the sky and the leaders of the Gandharvas with their wives began to sing the praises of Krishna . . . The brides of Krishna looked superbly beautiful with their rhythmic footsteps, accompanied by graceful movements of eyelashes, hands, waists and bosom with scarves and kundalas waving. Drops of perspiration appeared on their faces, their hair and waistbands became loose. As they danced and sang they looked like lightning in the midst of a cluster of blue clouds. The dancing Gopis, who were full of passion for Krishna and enraptured by His touch, sang songs full and melodic with diverse moods. The waves of that music spread over the entire world.

And so the forest of Brindavan, on the banks of the endlessly flowing river, is transformed into paradise, and each gopi is united with her Lord. We may end with this picture of the union of Radha and Krishna, again by the 19th century poet, Harischandra :

The moon-like Radha and the dark Hari
Are drenched with rain as they stand
Under the Kadamba tree together,
Wrapped in a yellow shawl.
The colour flows with the rain
As they draw closer and closer to each other;
Their locks mingle, letting loose the raindrops;
Singing and laughing, they are amused,
And throw their arms round each other in love.
Rain falls more heavily, the lightning flashes,
Cuckoos call and peacocks dance, the wind blows furiously.
Says Harischandra: 'The picture of Hari and Radha
Drenched with rain will never fade from my sight.'





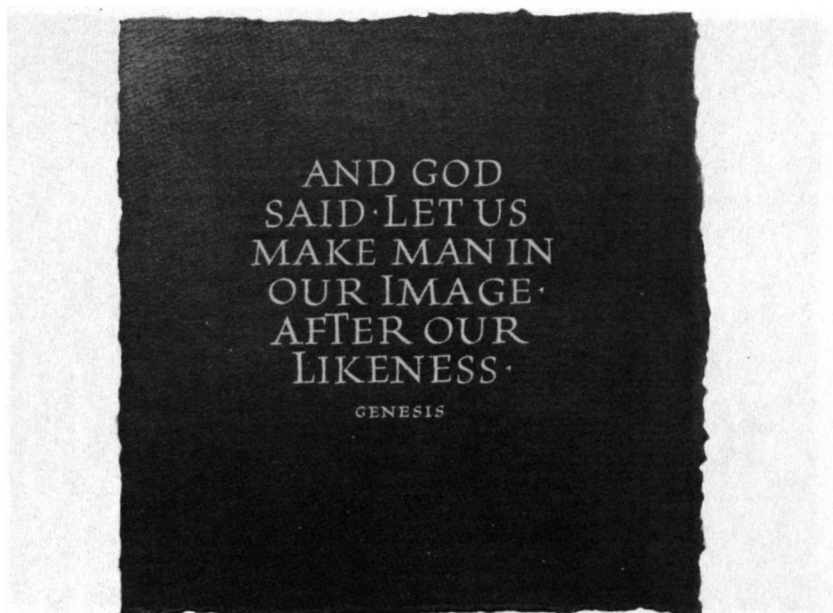
1 KRISHNA AND THE GOPIS
Pahara School — 19th century



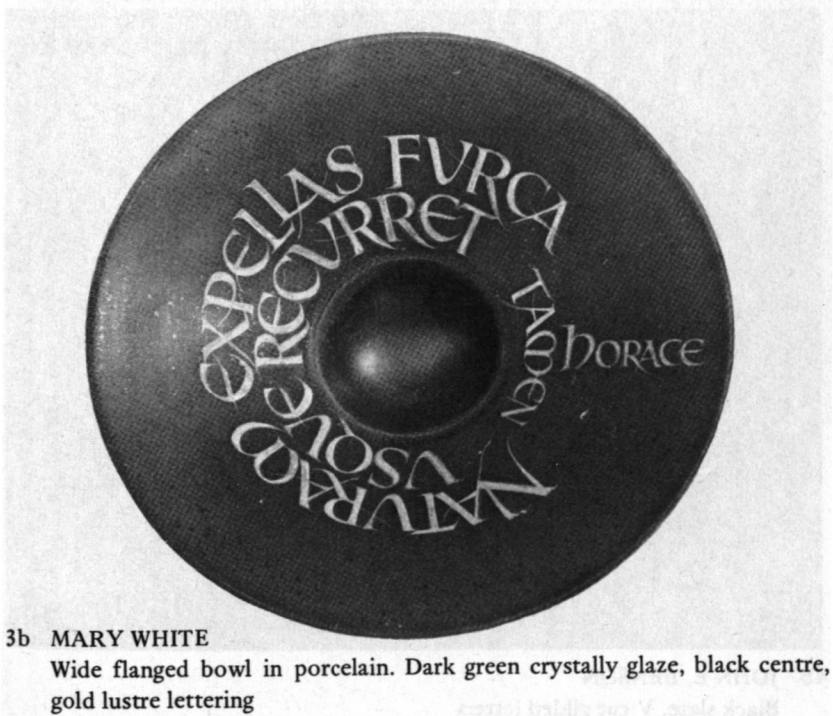
2a KRISHNA AND RADHA IN THE FOREST
Kangra School – c.1785



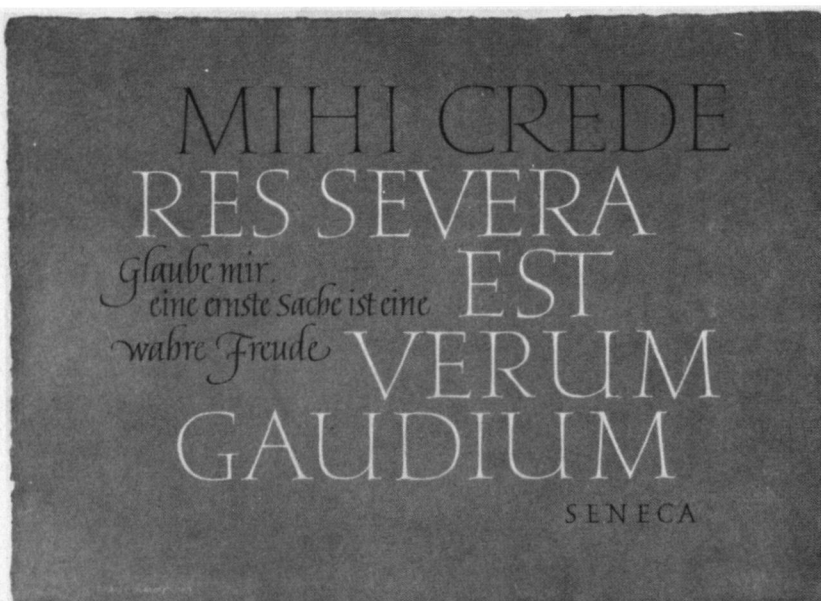
2b THE CHILD KRISHNA STEALING BUTTER
Jaipur School – 18th century



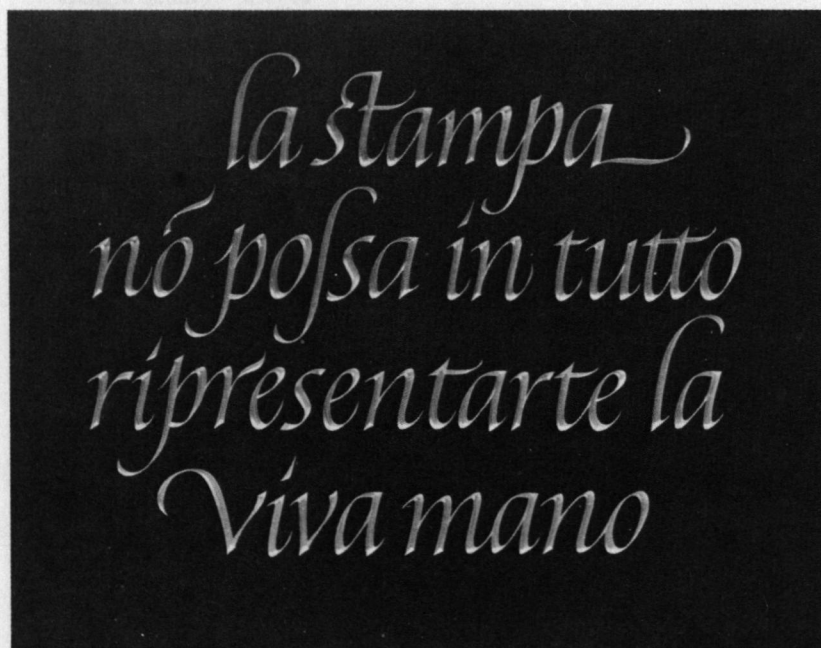
3a JERRY KELLY AND JULIAN WATERS
Quotation written in 23 carat shell gold on blue Fabriano Roma paper



3b MARY WHITE
Wide flanged bowl in porcelain. Dark green crystalline glaze, black centre, gold lustre lettering



4a WERNER SCHNEIDER
Calligraphy on Fabriano paper



4b JOHN E. BENSON
Black slate, V-cut gilded letters

David Mekelburg

Calligraphy · Drawings · Serigraphs 11 March - 8 April 1978

Alphabets and names make games and everybody has a name and

ABCDEFGHI

all the same they have in a way to have a birthday. The thing to

HJKLMNOP

do is to think of names... And you have to think of alphabets too,

OPQRST

without an alphabet well without names where are you and birthdays

UVWXYZ

are very favorable too, otherwise who are you. Everything begins with A.

GERTRUDE STEIN

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- 5 DAVID MECKELBURG
Exhibition poster printed in three colours



6 QVIA PER INCARNATI (1), 1945
David Jones

PWY·YW·R·GUR·PIAV·R·GORON
QVI·EST·VIRO·VI·HABET·CORONAM
DVW·WYN·AI·FRATH·DAN·EI·FRON
DEVS·CANDIDVS·VVLNERATVS·SVB·PECTORE

HOSTIAM·+·PV·RAM·HOSTIAM·+·SANCTAM
ABERTH·PVR·ABERTH·GLAN
HOSTIAM·+·IMMACVLATAM
ABERTH·DI·FRYCHEVLYD

BEIRD·BYT·BARNANT
the bards of the world assess
WYR·O·GALLON
the men of valour: but
SVPER·SELLAM·IVDICIS
NON·SEDEBVNT:
SED·CREATVRAM·ÆVI
CONFIRMABVNT
ET·DEPRECATIO·ILLO
RVM·IN·OPERA
TIONE·ARTIS
and without these: non ædificatvr civitas

- 8 BEIRD BYT BARNANT, 1958
David Jones

REVIEWS

THE INVISIBLE WORD AS LETTER FORM BRIAN KEEBLE

Marc Drogin, *Medieval Calligraphy: its history and technique*

George Prior, 198 pp, £15.95

Johannes Trithemius, *In Praise of Scribes (De Laude Scriptorium)*

translated by Roland Bén Laudt, O.S.B., Coronado Press, Kansas,
111 pp, 8 U.S. dollars

Modern Scribes and Lettering Artists, edited by Michael Gullick
and Ieuan Rees, Studio Vista, 160 pp, £17.50

Nicolette Gray, *The Painted Inscriptions of David Jones*, Gordon
Fraser, 128 pp, £29.50

Although it cannot be said that calligraphy occupies in the Christian tradition the same pre-eminence that it does in the perspective of Islam (the painting of Holy Ikons would be the more or less analogous case here), nevertheless the manifestation of the Divine Principle as the Word is at the heart of Christian gnosis, cosmology and faith. It is said that 'the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, extending even unto the sundering of soul from spirit.' (Heb. IV:12). It is also said that 'man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.' (Mat. 4.4). In the Johannine cosmology the origin of all things is related to the Word that is 'with' God, indeed *is* God. And since man — the only creature who possesses reason and speech — is also created 'in the image of God', with every word uttered the primordial sound mysteriously echoes in the heart, with every word written the primordial meaning reverberates in individual consciousness. Were this not so the spiritual possibilities inherent in the practice of invocation would not be possible.

As the scholar-scribe Father Edward M. Catich put it (in a text beautifully written out in Roman Square Capitals by Jovica Veljovic, in the Gullick, Rees Anthology), 'in the art of calligraphy, as in all

arts, the idea in the mind is the ultimate yardstick by which we evaluate merit in the art-product. The technical pre-requisites — tools, materials, and method of working — though needed, are always subordinate to their mental exemplar. Technique is only a means. Skilfully wrought expressions of inconsequential ideas are more likely to arouse dismay than admiration.' Meaning and values are inseparable from the intended purpose of any artistic undertaking.

It is difficult to appreciate just how the delicate balance of dextrous freedom and manipulative restraint worked in harmony to produce the perfections of medieval calligraphy. The perfection of the scribes' work in so many illuminated manuscripts is one of the greatest artistic achievements of the West. It is no coincidence that, with architecture, this mode of manual perfection should have blossomed as part of the greater flowering of Christian spirituality at its height.

Writing is the bringing into being in formal movement and shape of the spirit of being itself — the archetypal Word is expressed in words, the transcendent rhythm of heavenly being expressed in the movement of life in earthly things. In the perfection of calligraphy is the art of nature in her manner of operation. The clue is in the nature of number. Marc Drogin quotes Isidore of Seville: 'Take from all things their number and all shall perish'. This is obviously a reference to principal, qualitative number — the underlying proportional harmony and informing rhythmic pulse that binds all things together.

So far as the actual practice of calligraphy is concerned, number in the mode of rhythm and proportion is quite literally 'of the essence' — and not only for the calligrapher. As breath implies rhythm so blood implies pulse. Drogin (p.67) gives an example of a verse where nearly all the letters are made with the same stroke of the pen. To achieve this exercise the scribe has to transmit through the pen something like a metronomic beat akin to that of the heart. Breath and blood are linked together to the ratio 1:4. There are 72 heart beats to every 18 breaths. The most basic of all rhythms in music, that of common time, re-establishes the emphasis on every 4th beat. The ratio 1:4 is also an archetype of structure. All the

factors involved in the practise of calligraphy — movement, rhythm, balance, system, concentration, gesture, friction — suggest the necessity of utilizing rhythmic energy in the service of harmonic proportion.

The cosmic law of composition known as 'the Canon', as the 'Rule of all the Arts', was held in secret and practised in the medieval workshops. We know from the researches of Jan Tschicold that such tangible details as the number of letters per line, the number of lines per page, the proportion of the written area of the page in relation to that of the four margins, were all carefully calculated and minutely planned in terms of rhythmic proportion. These laws of composition were carried over from Medieval Manuscript books into the early printed books of the Renaissance, and the archetypal harmonic proportion of the Golden Rule frequently served as the basis for such calculations.

Drogin's book is marked throughout by a practical note that springs from the author's scholarship being based on his skill as a practising scribe. This lends a refreshingly direct tone to much of the discussion, for instance, his illustration of the origins of the serif. Elsewhere Mr Drogin's revivals of certain of the letter styles have the 'colour' but not the 'feel' of their originals. The differences are all but imperceptible yet remain — as, for instance, in his re-working of the 13th Century gothic *littera bastarda*. But to produce a book of 'do-it-yourself' medieval calligraphy inevitably raises questions of another order, particularly when the author's intention is not to teach others to make passable forgeries of the medieval scripts but to learn why and how they may have been written. It is difficult to see how one can 'discover a world of creativity opening' (pxvi) in these scripts if one does not take into account rather more than the author does of the underlying spirituality that was the scribe's daily nourishment. In an age such as ours that prides itself on its concern for communication it is all too easy to assume that, because we have a sense of wonderment at the beauties of these scripts, we are in possession of *the* sense of wonder evidently felt by these scribes who worked 'more to honour God than to educate

(their) flock' (p3). Only when are we in communication with the essential meaning of their craft is our understanding raised to the level of their inspiration. And this is surely what the notion of communication ultimately involves?

Other than the most obvious mastery of the writing instruments themselves, what else contributed to the daily discipline of the scribe's work? To what extent was writing a symbol in action, a rite? Did the writing master involve himself in a form of meditation or with breathing exercises? Was the work preceeded by fasting and prayer as was the case with the Ikon painters? Drogin does mention, in passing, that the scribe 'Often began work with a brief prayer in the upper left hand corner of his first sheet of work' (p12). Drogin reproduces a magnificent 10th Century ivory carving of St Gregory the Great at work on a manuscript. On his shoulder is the holy bird, symbol of divine inspiration, whispering its secrets into the ear of the scribe. In whatever civilisation we study, whenever we find a traditional craft we find underlying it a hidden esoteric dimension. By such means the craftsman had the possibility to rise above the level of mere cleverness and resourcefulness in human skill.

Perhaps the nearest we can get to seeing how the medieval scribe viewed his own craft is through Johannes Trithemius's *De Laude Scriptorium*. It was written in 1494 by an accomplished master to vindicate the scribe's craft at a time when the spread of printing had apparently robbed the scribe of his *raison d'être*. In this little treatise Trithemius speaks of calligraphy as a 'legacy of holiness never to be forgotten' (p69). Obviously the scribe's art was, for Trithemius, the highest form of manual labour since he speaks of the zealous copying of books as bringing the monk close to the perfection of active life (p57). The extent to which the scribe's belief that the 'divine texts are permeated with the blessing of the Holy Spirit' (p103) can be gauged from Trithemius invoking the case of the Benedictine monk who had devoted his life to the copying of sacred books and of whose remains, on being exhumed some years after his death, it was discovered that 'the three fingers of his right hand with which he had written so many books were as preserved and fresh as if

buried the day before' (p61). And can we not descry behind Trithemius' caution against letting 'art work become an end in itself; otherwise beauty might prevail over truth' (p69) the presentiment of recognition that an exclusive involvement in sensual appearances is a hindrance to the spiritual discipline of the work?

When we read a page of print we actually *see* marks of ink on paper but we *recognise* and read letters and words. With calligraphy and lettering there is a subtle shift of emphasis; we certainly see the ink (or incised stone or wood, or whatever) but to some extent we read the material as well as the letters and words. Our attention is constantly shifting back and forth from what the words say to the way they are written. Any form of hand lettering is able to exploit this polarity of focus in our attention because we take delight in the abstract patterns such lettering presents to us (see fig. 3b). This shifting of our attention is absent when we look at print because of the familiarity of the eye with the fixed appearance and regularity of type-face lettering. But given all this, what we *understand* from all these shapes, what is communicated, is a meaning that is not manifest in the same way as the ink and letters are but which is nonetheless mysteriously and inseparably connected with them. We can test this by altering the shapes of letters slightly whereupon we discover that they have become, literally, meaningless. Letters body forth a series of mental prototypes and these 'ideal letters', as Father Catich pointed out (in *Reed, Pen and Brush Alphabets for Writing and Lettering*), 'are the formal exemplars of calligraphy . . . They are the nearest approach we have to a calligraphic Universal. Being Universal they exist only in the mind.'

To what extent the scribe can depart from these 'ideal letters' before the mysterious link with meaning is broken is something that must always remain open to exploration and skill. That this uncertain ground continues to act as a stimulus to many of our present day calligraphers and letterers is evident from the anthology put together by Michael Gullick and Ieuan Rees. Whether there could be a consensus of agreement as to what letters appear to approach most nearly the 'ideal letters' is again very uncertain, but to this reviewer's

eye an arrangement of finely wrought Roman capitals spaced well (see figs. 3a and 4a) can suggest something of the primordial silence from which the original Word issues. One thing is clear; the 'ideal letter' is never a fixed stereotype of shape. Letters are organic forms; they are living things and not just dead shapes that remain static in design. No one style exhausts the expressive possibilities of the 'ideal letter'. Letters come into being, they evolve, become vigorous with development, are taken for granted and repay our complacency by becoming artificial and unwieldy — Drogin's volume admirably illustrates this in the successive styles used by western scribes, from 4th century Roman square capitals to Gothic *littera bastarda* in the 13th century. Constantly the prototype has, as it were, to be re-sounded. In the magnificent capitals of Hermann Zapf and Werner Schneider (see fig. 4a) we are witness to this process in our own time. Moreover, the act of re-sounding the prototype must remain the primary justification for the calligrapher's art in a society manipulated by technicians whose only concern is technological convenience.

Many of these scribes and letterers have attempted work that moves away from conventional calligraphy in which word meaning is paramount, and have gone on to explore the non-verbal, tactile-kinetic qualities of letters. The starting point for such experiment is the recognition that the scribe's particular skill is one of steering a true course between keeping faith with the 'ideal letter' while not resorting to sterile copying and cultivating a proper degree of innovation without reducing the alphabet to mere pattern. While the shackles of conventional calligraphy have certainly been broken, the temptation to wander in the specious territory of 'creative self-expression' has clearly beckoned some. At the opposite extreme, the purity and grace of, for instance, John E. Benson's humanist italics (see fig. 4b) cut into black slate and the rhythmic and formal vitality of David Mekelburg's letter-forms (see fig. 5) command attention as outstanding examples of contemporary lettering.

Few artists have explored the inter-relationship between writing and lettering, between form and sense in letters, as has David Jones

who, in his painted inscriptions, wrought such telling patterns from the abstract qualities of letter-shapes. Indeed the appearance of all the major inscriptions in a handsome volume makes it evident that the stature of Jones's achievement as an artist and writer has to have added to it another dimension, one of equal strength with the poetry and the painting but occupying a position mid-way between the two — in fact, uniting and in some sense completing both. Given the unique concatenation of his interests in the 'matter of Britain', Roman history, the combat of war, and much else, all overseen from the point of view of a subscriber to the Catholic faith, it is evident that in his later years he experienced increasing difficulty in making things shape up to an intelligible unity. The labyrinthine and multi-layered density of his later paintings and writings reveal a desire to 'show forth' an even greater weight and complexity of association and evocation. This exacted demands he was perhaps unable to resolve satisfactorily in aesthetic terms in his last poems and paintings; that of uniting a need to work from immediate personal experience with material that is 'actually loved and known' while communicating his belief in the artist as spokesman of the 'cultural myths' of a tradition; in this case the 'myths' and symbols of European Christendom whose gradual impoverishment he daily witnessed. Thus for Jones the problem of wedding form to content was crucial and paramount, for the symbols of his faith were less and less the common language of deeply and ardently held values and beliefs. When all due allowance has been made for the semantic depreciation of words in our devaluing term of history, still they remain an objective and common measure of communication; are perhaps the one remaining body of symbol, i.e. referents, that is rooted in our mutual understanding of life, and for that reason are still capable of reverberating in the hearts of men. Here form and content, feeling and expression are most directly joined and made whole. Thus Jones, in concentrating on the formal problems involved in the making of these inscriptions, was able to let the word, as it were, speak for itself. As the author says, 'It is from this approach, from the fact that the words which he transcribed were both of

objective import and of personal immediacy, that the stature of these inscriptions derives.' (p.14).

The artist's strategy — 'the strategy is directed towards the establishment of the general feeling, the securing of an idea' (p.105) — is to gather the phrases and quotations that are to be woven into a unity and to proceed as if he were simply 'writing out a page of stuff, without setting-out and carefully spacing the words, plus (*and a very important plus*) the painting of a picture. That is to say the parts must relate to the whole.' (p.104). The anomaly of his method lies in the fact that the letters themselves are often executed somewhat tentatively and indecisively with a brush and yet obviously have as their general visual antecedent the Roman Inscription. Jones's letters have neither the immediacy of the calligraphic form where the stroke of the writing instrument forms an element in the letter-shape nor the incised clarity that goes with the inscriptional letter-form cut into stone. But this is to some extent part of the artist's method since he is concerned to achieve a freedom that is lost whenever the letters are spaced with a formal exactness. To this end, and especially in the later and more mature examples from 1956 onwards, a white background is worked in conjunction with the actual letter-shapes so that the whole surface is 'patient of continuous correction'. Thus the organic unity of the inscription is kept fluid until quite late on in the process of its completion. In the shaping of each letter regard is taken of the surrounding shapes and the whole surface pattern is built up into a complex web, an inter-related and interwoven texture of lines, mass, movement, sense and association. Moreover, Jones's letter-forms are chosen 'always for some reason of evocation, of re-calling, the historic provenance of (the) word' (p.106).

If we are attracted to these works at all (which are to be *looked at* no less than *read*, as the author insists) it is, at least initially, likely to be because we delight in a certain indefinable sense of rhythmic and organic interplay at work among the letter-forms. By comparison with the vital, linear movement of oriental calligraphy this interplay may seem comparatively rigid and static. But this

would be a mistake. In *QUIA PER INCARNATI* of 1945 (see fig. 6) for instance, some of the characteristic tactics used by the artist, in being here rather exaggerated, reveal in their pursuit of unity a different type of movement. Here the letters lean backwards and forwards along the line, the line of letters itself undulates, certain strokes on some of the letters are made either to ascend or to descend to the line above or below so that an interlocking effect becomes apparent. Add to this the fact that each letter is shaped in accordance with its relation to its neighbours and we can see how all the letters interrelate vertically as well as horizontally. Moreover the colours – the khaki-yellow of *NOVA* acting as the tonal fulcrum balancing the other words in green and red – the dark small *A* in the second line a neat counterpoint to the black *INFVLSIT* – are disposed so as to knit together and balance the whole design. In her commentary on this inscription Nicolette Gray rightly draws attention to the way in which these letters work together as in a dance. It may not be too fanciful to see in this effect a pictorial concomitant to the Latin text (translated as 'For by the mystery of the Word made flesh the light of thy glory hath shone anew upon the eyes of our mind'); the light dances among the letter-forms and its reflection rebounds from letter to letter as the Word illumines and interpenetrates the sense of human words. Thus, properly *looked at* and *read*, such an inscription approaches an almost iconic intensity in its ability to focus our attention and to affirm the essential hidden aspects of the words.

If we turn to *PWY YW GWR* of 1956 (see fig. 7) we can see the same 'tactics' at work but deployed with greater mastery. The subtlety of the spacing here, the use of ligatures, of extended and curled terminations, the interspersing of coloured letters and crosses among the black letters above and below the 'via', the variants of *A*, *E* and *Q*, and the fact that the whole background surface was covered with Chinese white, thus allowing 'endless adjustment' from letter to letter (added to which the whole physical surface is invested with a vitality and vibrancy that is not patient of reproduction); these among other 'tactics' continue to give a unique 'feel' to the overall organic pattern of words.

If we take exception to the author's statement that 'It is not really necessary for the beholder to read or to understand the words' (p.12) of the inscriptions, it is not only because such a statement seems misplaced but is also intrinsically contradicted by other statements to the effect that the words 'could not be neutral, or even minor', and 'not only the text but the individual words therein have their roots in our whole understanding of life.' (p.13). Surely a merely aesthetic appreciation of the texts as images could hardly have been what Jones intended since latterly he developed the habit of giving his own translations on the back of many of his inscriptions. Not to read, or to be able to read the whole of the text is surely to impoverish what the artist is trying to communicate by means of evocation and association?

We might consider the inscription BEIRD BYT BARNANT of 1958 (see fig. 8), seeing that it was made as a frontispiece to that larger testament, Jones's collection of essays called *Epoch and Artist*, as a pictorial testament of the artist's intention and vision.

The text is taken, lines 1 and 3, from the Welsh poem *Y Gododdin*, lines 2 and 4 being a translation. The remaining words are taken from *Ecclesiasticus* 38, that marvellous vision of the community of man as artist as the cultivator of the Gifts of God. Jones's inscription amounts to a vision of this perennial role of the artist in society, the poet, by association through the Welsh, being placed among the men of skill who, in their work, honour God. Theirs is to perfect their making, whether as poet, carpenter, smith, potter, each (in the words of the Authorised Version) with his eyes 'upon the pattern of the thing that he maketh; he setteth his mind to finish his work, and watcheth to polish it perfectly'. But, SVPER SELLAM IVDICVS NON SEDEBVNT; it is not for the artist to judge the outcome of human actions and failings but in the action of his art to wed the outward form to that common perfection we are all called upon to bring about, for in that is the 'state of the world' maintained: DE-PRECATIO ILLORVM IN OPERATIONE ARTIS, and 'their prayer is in the operation of their art'. By art — the rule by which a thing is made to realise that inherent plenitude of being we name perfection

— are content and form made one; and as Jones says, 'the more the content and form are one I take to be an advantage in any art — that I take as axiomatic.' (p.107).

Such are some of the evocations and the associations of this particular inscription which is nonetheless representative of the characteristic way in which Jones aligns himself with the sacramental nature of words and meanings, which in turn demand, in their 'showing forth' a wedding of the invisible springs of belief with the outward forms of action.

DAVID JONES: ALCHEMIST OF IMAGES
CAITLIN AND JOHN MATTHEWS

Aneirin Talfan Davies: *David Jones: Letters to a friend*. Christopher Davies Ltd, 1980, 120 pp, £5.95

Thomas Dilworth: *The Liturgical Parenthesis of David Jones*, Golgonooza Press, 1979, 34 pp, £1.50

Patrick Grant: *Six Modern Authors and Problems of Belief*. Macmillan Press, 1979, 175 pp, £10.—

René Hague: *Dai Greatcoat*. Faber, 1980, 273 pp, £12.50

Jeremy Hooker: *John Cowper Powys and David Jones: a Comparative Study*. Enitharmon Press, 1979, 54 pp, £3.75 and £2.55

Colin Hughes: *David Jones: the Man who was on the Field*. David Jones Society, 1979, 32 pp

John Matthias: *Introducing David Jones*. Faber, 1980, 237 pp, £6.50 and £2.95

Kathleen Raine: *David Jones and the Actually Loved and Known*. Golgonooza Press, 1978, 25 pp, £1.50

Henry Summerfield: *An Introductory Guide to the Anathemata and the Sleeping Lord Sequence of David Jones*. Sono Nis Press (British Columbia), 1979, 192 pp

Colin Wilcockson: *David Jones: Letters to William Hayward*. Agenda Editions, 1979, 79 pp, £3.60

The word most often used to describe David Jones' work is 'difficult', and though this is usually qualified, in some instances with understanding, it retains its influence and works against reading this

luminous and lapidary work as it should be read — with heart and mind open, receptive to the multitude of bright images drawn from sources as far and wide as any poet has ever used. In reality, David Jones is neither more difficult, nor less readable than, say, Pound, Joyce, or even in certain instances, Eliot. The problem arises from the nature of the material — Welsh myth and legend, the Latin Liturgy, geology, Old English and Arthurian Literature, are but a few of his sources and they are hardly likely to evoke the feeling of a shared background. They are not any longer — though once they were — the common stuff of poetry.

What makes Jones a great poet (though he preferred the word 'maker') arises from this concern with the outwardly obscure, precisely to the degree to which he transcends the problem by transmuting the base elements (the stuff of creation itself) into work of the highest imaginative quality. He was an alchemist who worked in images both plastic and literary — the coin of his genius was trans-cultural and transpersonal, and his achievement was that rarest of Welsh gold, mined from the substrata of history and belief. He clothed his raw materials not with shoddy, transitory likenesses, but with their true vibrant colours, bringing out the inherent numinosity so that they spoke directly to the spiritual apprehension of the viewer or listener. In this way his craftsmanship was of a high nature: he explored the depths to be revealed in a solitary image in an age which was already beginning to be fascinated by the exterior shell.

While the busy industry of Pound/Eliot/Joyce moves on apace, real scholarship and criticism of Jones's work lags behind. What there is available consists of commentary and curiously subjective speculation. Henry Summerfield's *Introductory Guide* makes a laudable attempt at making accessible the denser passages of *The Anathemata* and, though it does not possess the warm intimacy of René Hague's brilliant commentary, nothing has been left unclear in the interests of readability. Summerfield has taken into account the needs of the non-British reader and has supplied maps of the complex geographical references which occur throughout Jones' work.

As a basic vade-mecum of Jones's work, *Introducing David Jones*,

edited by John Matthias, comes as a very welcome addition. Here the main achievements of the Jones canon are presented for the new reader: selections from *In Parenthesis*, *Anathemata*, and *the Sleeping Lord* are included together with their notes. Reluctant friends might well be encouraged by the gift of this book and perhaps anthology editors might note that David Jones has as good a right to representation as his contemporaries, not only as a poet of the Great War, but as the progenitor of a new genre.

On the whole far too little has been written about *In Parenthesis* which, being a more accessible work than its companion, *The Anathemata*, has received less attention. We are still limited, for the present, to the examination of particular aspects of the work — as in Thomas Dilworth's valuable study of the liturgical source material of *In Parenthesis*. Dilworth traces the soldier's initiation into the horror of war, but put into the context of a deeper confirmation. As he says:

Liturgy endows life with meaning by uniting in a dramatized hypothesis the ordinary experiences of life with the fulness of belief and desire.

Jones is not just writing about war, but about the way in which the 'creaturely' is subsumed in the world order, brought into harmony like a ground string resonating in sympathy with the subtle counterpoints being played outside the range of human understanding. Meaningless acts become meaningful; the apportioning of rations becomes an instance of the eucharist:

Come off it, Moses — dole out the issue.
Dispense salvation,
strictly apportion it,
let us taste and see,
let us be renewed.

No action is too mean not to have its liturgical counterpart. In some places the liturgy is not always Christian but of older times: the men are fodder for a darker sacrifice,

for the northern Cybele.
 The hanged, the offerant:
 himself to himself
 on the tree.

Attis, Odin or Christ: the sacrifice is indistinguishable. And here Jones's quality of faith is most interesting: profound sympathy between man and his fellow being, the relationship of man with beast or inanimate object is mirrored forth in his understanding of the immanence of the redemption. The times and forshadowings of Christ's coming and sacrifice were known to David Jones who saw these prophetic forerunners as necessary signs for our understanding. Wherever compassion and love have set their sign, wherever worship has spontaneously arisen, then there too was Christ. Not for Jones the blank dismissal of history Before Christ; for him the pattern is clearly established. The breadth of this realisation is shocking to the orthodox, and if the disciples were disbelieving at the news of the resurrection reported by a group of women, imagine their indignation had they read Jones's account of the nativity reported by a coven of witches in 'Mabinog's Liturgy' (*Anathemata*). Without the liturgical dimension the carnage of war is senseless, there can be no comfort: in the ultimate confrontation human understanding falters:

Merlin in his madness, for the pity of it; for
 the young men reaped like barley.

In Parenthesis is not about the glory of war, still less about its victory: it is about the futility of war in the face of the Eternal. Ultimately, the Crucifixion means that man is redeemable.

Against this understanding of the darker side of creation, *In Parenthesis* is also an historical document of the Great War, seen through the eye of memory with remarkable accuracy – as Colin Hughes shows in his essay *David Jones: the Man who was on the Field*. He follows the fortunes of Jones's own regiment, tracing the movements of the battalion leading to the capture of Mametz Wood

— the actual location for *In Parenthesis*. Through the eyes of John Ball, the landscape of war presents a very different picture from that of Graves or Sassoon, gentlemen and officers both, a trench-eye view.

David Jones has seldom been fruitfully compared with other writers, but this has been successfully accomplished by Jeremy Hooker in his comparative study *John Cowper Powys and David Jones*. Both Anglo-Welsh, both possessed of a mythic imagination, Powys and Jones share so much. Yet Powys's lack of a social reality, his shambling prose, his obsession with the decadent, seem at variance with the lucid yet complex poetry of Jones. They both exhibit a profound knowledge of the inner realities of life, both compulsively trying to synthesise the mystery as they see it into an identifiable shape. Jones's writing is a veritable glory-hole of such finds, redolent of every era, every epoch, but all of them impinging upon the present. He stands over and above Powys in that he grasped the essential mystery — that all signs are *the* Sign, taken from the standpoint of the Eternal. Powys never reached this agreement; his was not a submissive character, and he often lapsed into a miasmic welter of clutched straws. With Jones, all is encompassed by Christ, however he manifests himself; with Powys, suffering is assuaged only by a slow dissolution and is inflicted by savage fates who ruthlessly pontificate. His obsessional anti-vivisectionist views can be understood as a horror at the flesh of the demiurge profaned, and here he is near to Jones's view of suffering, rejecting perhaps Jones's belief in the redemptive sacrifice, but approaching his innate courtesy to the creaturely.

Both writers share that overlap of subconscious into the conscious, of the otherworld with ordinary reality: Hooker indeed points out that both men are explorers of thresholds, margins and boundaries. The sense that one moves between the dead and the living is as strong in *In Parenthesis* as it is in *Maiden Castle*. An understanding of the female principle was inherent in both their writings: in Powys the best example is the magnificent unfolding of Blodeuwedd in *Porius*: as a comparable symbol of liberation we find The Queen of

the Woods who covers the fallen with her garlands in *In Parenthesis*, and the long, sinuous portrayal of Gwenhwyfar in *Anathemata*. Neither writer would have been ashamed to call: 'Queen of the undifferentiated sites, administratrix of the demarcations, let our cry come unto you,' knowing her, Christian or pagan, as the proper tutelar of the place. In the language of mythology, Powys is Merlin — the magus, druid of a vast, organic archetype; but, if Powys is Merlin, then Jones is Taliesin — the poet, in whose proud boasts we see the redeemed archetype renewing itself over and over.

Of the three collections of letters here, the most disappointing is *Letters to William Hayward*; only six letters are actually printed, including one rather irrelevant postcard in which Jones merely confirms an appointment. Whether this material merits publication in such a small volume is doubtful — it would sit better in a larger collection. The result as it stands is a fussy and overdressed attempt to give six minor letters the status of 'research value' which but heightens the already rampant preciousness surrounding Jones's memory. This prevailing tendency to eulogise is understandable; David Jones died only six years ago and his loss is an abiding sadness to his friends and admirers. He himself would not have relished such overwhelming enthusiasm, although no doubt he would have been quietly pleased at the recognition it now affords. It is as well that really close friends should have set the score straight at last and presented us with a rounder picture of him. *Dai Greatcoat*, a self-portrait, edited by his lifelong friend, René Hague, is surely the most valuable companion to a true understanding of David Jones. The letters, from many sources, reveal the tentative genius painfully working out his vocation, beset by ill-health, almost agoraphobic in his insularity. Hague gives a sensitive linking commentary which brings out the true qualities of his friend, without being blind to his faults. For all his scholarship (deprecatory though he was about it) and the supportive love of his friends, David Jones is revealed as a shy batchelor whose vocabulary remained rooted in the trenches; his numerous bed-sits were often likened to dug-outs where he still lived surrounded by the regimental impedimenta of his trade. These

are exuberant letters whose humour seeps through the lurking self-pity: intolerable though things were at times he keeps at it, balancing the blows of fate with a hearty curse. A single reading of this collection will be enough to balance the adulation which threatens to swamp the real David Jones; he has humility and wit enough to see his work for what it was:

It's terribly difficult to find the words to convey this quite practical and un-highfalutin approach across to chaps. Indeed I despair of doing so . . . Chaps refer to the 'mystery' or 'subtlety' or 'illusiveness' or 'fragility' or 'waywardness' or 'complexity' or 'fancifulness' etc. etc. — Well, Christ almighty! what else is there in a bunch of flowers or a tree or a landscape or a girl or a sky, but these qualities? By the severest logic one must somehow, if possible, capture *something* of these qualities if the thing is going to be any damn good. It isn't the artist's 'fancy' or 'imagination' that imposes these qualities on a work — the blasted stuff is there as plain as a pikestaff — the bugger of it is how to 'transubstantiate' these qualities into whatever medium one is using whether paint or words or whatever.

Letter to Harman Grisewood 22.5.62

Another good collection of letters, this time covering the period 1954–71, is *David Jones: Letters to a Friend*, edited by Aneurin Talfan Davies. These letters concentrate particularly upon Jones's Welshness. Many people find it strange that one who was, after all, only half Welsh and lived predominantly in England, should insist on this so much; Jones's was an almost spiritual Welshness, an awareness of being totally at home with things Welsh. His deepest ties sprang from this source and were indulged, not in dusty archivistic pondering, but with the primal eye reading a map of great significance. The essence of his Welshness abided eternally, nor was he unaware of the very real apathy of the Welsh towards their own heritage and language — realising too well the necessity of having bilingual texts even for his own countrymen. That he himself could not speak Welsh was a source of regret, although, as those who

know the language will relate, he certainly did not let this worry him. His finest inscriptions are composed of this high mixture of both uncertain Welsh and dog-Latin, an amalgam essentially Jonesian in its charm and virility.

One of the foremost considerations for anyone seeking to understand David Jones must be a sympathetic treatment of the artist's religious beliefs. So that one turns hopefully to Patrick Grant's book *Six Modern Authors & the Problem of Belief*, which contains an essay entitled 'Belief in Religion: the Poetry of David Jones.' Most of Grant's book revolves around a study of the symbol of the cross which in David Jones's work is particularly marked. In contrast to, say, Empson's horror of the cross as a symbol of torture and an abandonment of hope, Jones's positive affirmation of the anathemata — the divine drama of the Passion in terms of an actual rehappening — comes as a fresh and spontaneous surprise to those learned in the tenets of a recycled and emasculated Christian ethos. His insistence upon the unique yet ever-efficacious redemption bursts through all layers of his writing, arising in some unlooked-for areas: in the trenches (the Garden of Gethsemene), on board ship (the ark of salvation), and in the orisons of witches (symbolic of the three Marys at the sepulchre as well as of mankind itself.) But Grant's handling of his material is not delicate enough and he loses much of the vitality of Jones while pursuing his theories of belief.

Happily we have among his interpreters the testimony of those who knew David Jones personally and, in the instance of Kathleen Raine, we have also a critic whose own understanding of the numinous is as great as that of her subject. Dr Raine shows us not only the nature of David Jones's painting — 'too subtle, too delicately gentle . . . for those who see in gentleness weakness and in violence strength,' but relates the two sides of his work as painter and writer — more properly 'maker of signs.' In a landscape devoid of cultural reference, he would supply his own — a church in the country became *The Chapel Perilous*, a tree, *Roland's Pine*. Jones was only happy where he could be in contact with the successive layers of

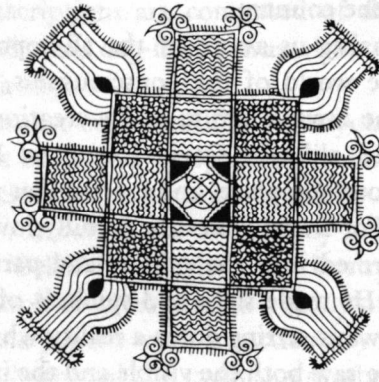
living and being which are the bed-rock of every land, which compose the culture of the country.

Dr Raine also makes us aware of the all-important distinction between the private world of the consciousness, where the artist seeks to explore the inward nature of his creation, and the 'sacramental' view, shared alike by David Jones and Blake, where the visionary is made 'common-place' and is a familiar part of the artist's view of the world. For David Jones the 'actually loved and known' is everywhere transformed into the minute and particular objects of his painterly craft. He made signs and symbols of all he saw, with paint and words, always setting down a reality which was as unique as it was precise. He saw both the visible and the invisible reality of creation, and spoke of it in all he wrote, painted or drew. And 'he wrestled in bitterness of heart with the difficulty in our time of discovering valid signs — signs that would speak to a generation forgetful of tradition and taught to look no further than the senses . . .'

In a worthless currency Jones's true metal goes unappreciated, while many still prefer the glitter to the gold and remain poorer for it. Critical works, exhibitions and television broadcasts are still to come if Jones's true worth is to be appreciated by more than a minority. Until that time we must consider David Jones as he stands, a sign maker who showed the way to the interior landscape and was not disheartened by the lack of response of others who could not, or would not walk into it with him. It is certain that in years, maybe centuries to come, his insights will be judged wise, and that a new generation will turn towards his vision and seek to renew the sacred traditions of art, reinterpreting them from the basic materials of their own valid experience. David Jones proved that his kind of alchemy was not really esoteric; as he said:

I tried very hard to make a lucid, impersonal statement with regard to those things which have made us *all* — of this island.

Our debt is indeed great, for we needed to be shown such things before it was too late: this was the vocation of David Jones.



ANANDA COOMARASWAMY AND THE METAPHYSICS OF
ART: A Review Essay of his Selected Papers on Traditional Art and
Symbolism

SEYYED HOSSEIN NASR

Unlike most works of scholarship which become rapidly dated in a few years, the writings of A.K. Coomaraswamy are as fresh and timely today as when they were written since they issue from that fountain of wisdom wherein is to be found the spring of eternal youth. Emanating from Tradition, these works belong to that moment which is never past, to that *nû alzemâle* of Meister Eckhart whom Coomaraswamy quoted so often, to that present which never withers away. Over half a century after the main period of Coomaraswamy's literary activity, his masterly works present to the contemporary world a magisterial exposition of traditional doctrines, especially those concerning art, an exposition as relevant and pertinent today as when it was first presented to a Western public much less aware of Oriental arts and civilizations than today.

Since he first opened the eyes of the Western intelligentsia to the beauties of Oriental art, to the language of symbolism, to the relation between art and life and, most of all, to the metaphysical principles of *philosophia perennis* which all traditions reflect in both their religious life and teachings and their art, much has been written on these subjects in English and other European languages, inspired

to a great extent by Coomaraswamy himself as well as the other outstanding expositors of traditional wisdom such as R. Guénon and F. Schuon. Yet, the appearance of this volume of essays on traditional art and symbolism marks a major event in that it makes available works which continue to enrich the field of traditional studies.

The plan to publish the essays of Coomaraswamy, which are immense in number and unbelievably rich in the variety of subjects they treat (a 'working bibliography' is being prepared by R.P. Coomaraswamy and a complete one by J. Crouch)¹, was made at the time of his death in 1947. Despite many years of effort by his widow, D.L. Coomaraswamy, at the time of her death the project was not completed and planned *opera* never saw the light of day. The two volumes published by R. Lipsey as *Coomaraswamy 1: Selected Papers – Traditional Art and Symbolism* and *Coomaraswamy 2: Metaphysics*, (Princeton), 1977, accompanied by a biography, *Coomaraswamy*,² are in a sense the continuation of that earlier project although, unfortunately, not embracing the whole of his works as one would have hoped. Nevertheless, the two volumes collect together some of Coomaraswamy's most important works and are a precious document for which all lovers of traditional wisdom must surely be grateful.

With the volume of metaphysics which includes some of his most masterly articles such as 'On the One and Only Transmigrant', 'Vedic "Exemplarism"' and '*Mahā Purusa*: Supreme Identity', we are not here concerned. Rather, it is the more voluminous collection of papers on art and symbolism which forms the object of this review of Coomaraswamy's metaphysics of art.³ The thirty essays and review articles assembled in this volume represent a major opus and contain some of the most metaphysically profound and penetrating works of Coomaraswamy. They thus complement his other well-known works on the meaning of traditional art, especially *The Transformation of Nature in Art*, *Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought?* and *Why Exhibit Works of Art* (published as *The Christian and Oriental Philosophy of Art* in its later paperback editions).⁴

The editor has divided the works into eight sections. The first section, entitled 'The Indian Temple', contains only one essay — 'An Indian Temple: The Kandarya Mahadeo' — which the author wrote shortly before his death following the publication of S. Kramrisch's *The Hindu Temple*, a book which the doctor appreciated profoundly, calling it 'a magnificent work'. Through a single example Coomaraswamy made a masterly study of the Hindu temple as such — beyond time, space and particularity — as the altar wherein is reflected the Divine Presence. Only a master scholar of Indian art, whose earlier descriptive works on Indian art⁵ had practically single-handedly put the subject on the map as far as serious Western studies of the field were concerned, could select but a single work of architecture to expound the meaning not of a particular Hindu temple but of the archetypal temple which consists of the essential reality of each traditional temple without being limited to only one embodiment. Already in this opening essay, we are confronted with the characteristic genius of Coomaraswamy in combining detailed scholarship based on careful study of classical texts and objects of art with a universal metaphysical vision which penetates within and beyond each particular to the Universal at once beyond and at the heart of each particular.

The second section entitled 'Synoptic Essays' includes four of Coomaraswamy's well-known works on the general meaning of traditional art in its relation to the whole pattern of traditional life at whose heart stands religion in its most universal sense, embracing of course the metaphysics or wisdom which comprises the essence of religion and which provides the principles for the art of the tradition in question. These essays written between 1932 and 1946 include: 'Figures of Speech or Figures of Thought?', in which he advocates replacing aesthetics by rhetoric so as to emphasize that art is a language through which meaning is transmitted rather than something which excites one's senses or emotions; 'The Philosophy of Mediaeval and Oriental Art', now made widely available for the first time; 'The Part of Art in Indian Life', written mostly for an Indian audience with special emphasis upon the relevance of art to

Indian life and the refusal of India throughout her history to ever cultivate an art for its own sake; and 'The Art of Eastern Asia' in which the author treats Asia as a single spiritual entity in its understanding of art and its relation to man's spiritual life, emphasizing mostly India but also including China and Japan.

The third section, 'Indian Art and Aesthetics', again contains only late essays written from 1935 to 1943, and including three technical articles on the principles and meaning of Indian art: 'The Intellectual Operation in Indian Art', 'The Nature of Buddhist Art', and 'Samvega: Aesthetic Shock'. These essays include some of Coomaraswamy's most profound expositions of the metaphysics of art with particular reference to Hinduism and Buddhism, although even here there are many references to Western sources, both Greek and Christian.

It is, however, in section four, 'Mediaeval Art and Aesthetics', that Coomaraswamy's masterly treatment of Christian art and the traditional Christian doctrine connected with art is brought out through three of his basic essays on the subject: 'The Mediaeval Theory of Beauty' (written in 1935 and revised in *Figures of Speech*), *Ars sine scientia nihil*, and 'Meeting of Eyes', the latter two both written in 1943. The first of these essays is an extensive treatment of the Christian 'philosophy of art' as reflected in the works of Dionysius the Areopagite — whose crucial significance for the understanding of Christian art was emphasized by Coomaraswamy over and over again —, Ulrich Engelberti and St Thomas Aquinas. The last two works in this section are short essays dealing with the meaning of a passage from St Thomas on the relation between *scientia* and *ars*, which Coomaraswamy quoted often, and the significance of a passage by Nicholas of Cusa concerning eyes in certain paintings which look upon the beholder at whatever angle he happens to be standing in relation to the painting.

In the fifth section entitled 'Further Studies', Lipsey has included eight essays, widely divergent in nature, treating themes ranging from 'Shaker Furniture' to Coomaraswamy's masterly note on Persian art,⁶ but all written during the last decade of the author's life.

The last three sections of this volume in a sense constitute a separate part since they are all concerned with symbolism and the methods of studying traditional art which is symbolic because of its traditional character. The first of these sections, which constitutes the sixth in the book, is entitled 'Methodology' and contains three essays, again written late in the doctor's life, including 'Literary Symbolism', essentially treating symbolism as it concerns the traditional understanding of literary sources in contrast to the modern; 'The Rape of a Nāgī: An Indian Gupta Seal', in which Coomaraswamy demonstrates the method by which the significance of a traditional art object, here a seal, can be brought out; and a review of an article by W. Andrae, *Die ionische Säule: Bauform oder Symbol?*, where the author shows his appreciation of the gradual awakening of interest among academic scholars in the traditional significance of symbols.

The section, 'Four Studies', which follows presents studies concerned with symbolism, again belonging to the last years of the doctor's life. Each of the four essays — 'On the Loathly Bride', '*Le Corps perseme d'yeux*', 'The Inverted Tree', and 'The Seal' — explains the metaphysical and cosmological symbolism of a specific symbol but with reference to diverse traditions and by drawing upon a wealth of literary and artistic sources which demonstrate the unbelievable breadth of Coomaraswamy's scholarship and his familiarity with sources of numerous traditions ranging from the Icelandic to the Islamic. Everywhere, however, the author brings out the universality of the life of symbols while at the same time demonstrating that they possess efficacy only within a particular traditional context.

The last section, 'The Sundoor and Related Motifs', is in reality a continuation of the previous section in that it too is concerned with symbolism but of a particular kind dealing with that nexus which at once relates and separates one order of being from another, the door through which the hero must pass safely if he is to attain paradisaal beatitude. In 'The Symbolism of the Dome', '*Pāli kannikā: Circular Roof-plate*', '*Svayamātrna: Janua Coeli*' and 'Symplegades',

again all products of his last years, we have some of the Coomaraswamy's most masterly studies on symbolism, studies which combine incredible scholarship with that participation in the reality of the subject treated which characterize traditional writings as such. In reading these essays, not only does the reader learn much about the myth of the 'clashing rocks' or the symbolism of 'the axle tree as the Axis of the Universe' (p.422), but he also faces the reality of that narrow gate or 'clashing rocks' through which he himself must pass, the reality of the journey upon whose safe accomplishment his life, not only the transient terrestrial life but life eternal, literally depends.

The richness of these writings or even a single essay can hardly be described here but perhaps these few words can reflect something of the wealth of material which Lipsey has collected from over five hundred of Coomaraswamy's essays on art. With such a rich source, inevitably one could complain that this or that article has not been included. Only the printing of the complete works could satisfy such critics. In one volume of nearly six hundred pages, however, the selection made by Lipsey, all from the most mature and penetrating works of Coomaraswamy, cannot but be thoroughly approved since every essay is of great value. Moreover, the careful scholarship displayed in the preparation of the indices and other scholarly paraphernalia, and the great effort entailed in correcting proofs, has put all those attracted to these volumes in R. Lipsey's debt. His own introduction as well as twenty-three illustrations further enhance this handsomely printed volume.

Since Coomaraswamy began as a lonely voice in England and America to defend traditional principles and to criticize the anti-traditional world in which modern man lives, many people have become aware of the falsehood of the very premises which constitute the modern world on the one hand and on the other of the spiritual message of traditional art, even if not enough have been willing to make the necessary sacrifice to live according to tradition. In this process of the rediscovery of tradition, in both its metaphysical and artistic dimensions, and the re-evaluation of all that constitutes the

modern world in the light of tradition, Coomaraswamy remains a towering beacon of light whose works continue to illuminate the path of those who search for that Truth which always is and never becomes. The present collection of essays must therefore be welcomed by all those whose love of truth and beauty has led them to the watershed of tradition and who are in further need of elucidation of various aspects of traditional life and thought. Through the works of this noble scholar, in whose person the traditions of East and West were wed, those truths have been made available once again, truths of which today's tormented humanity of not only the West but even the Orient, where the spread of modernism has eclipsed much of traditional life and destroyed a great deal of the artistic tradition, is in dire need.

Notes

1. There is also the well-known bibliography by R. Ettinghausen, 'The Writings of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy', *Ars Islamica*, vol. 9, 1942, pp 125-42, and the selected bibliography by R. Lipsey in his biography, *Coomaraswamy — His Life and Work*, Princeton, 1977.
2. Although the biography casts light upon many aspects of the activities of Coomaraswamy, it is somewhat problematic not only because of certain factual errors but because it creates an image of Coomaraswamy and the significance of his works different from what Coomaraswamy himself wanted to have reflected in his works, especially the later ones, and as it concerned his own person.
3. We use the term metaphysics rather than philosophy of art in order to avoid all association with profane philosophy and aesthetics. Otherwise, if philosophy is understood as it was by Plato or Plotinus, then of course it is the philosophy of art with which Coomaraswamy deals and with which we are concerned.
4. Many essays in the latter two works are in fact reproduced in this collection.
5. We have in mind such earlier classical studies as *Medieval Sinhalese Art* (1908), *The Arts and Crafts of India and Ceylon* (1913), *Rajput Painting* (1916), and *History of Indian and Indonesian Art* (1927).
6. Coomaraswamy's contribution to Persian and Islamic art was not at all as extensive as his studies of both Indian and Western art. Nevertheless he made some notable studies of Islamic art showing it to be an art of traditional character and not simply an amalgamation of historical borrowing as

so many Western art historians had made it out to be. It remained, however, for T. Burckhardt to bring out the full significance and meaning of Islamic art in his many studies on the subject, especially *The Art of Islam*, London, 1976.

DANTE THE MAKER by William Anderson

477 pages, 14 diagrams, published by Routledge and Kegan Paul,
London 1980, £18.00

JOHN ALLITT

There are many, many books on Dante; however, for the seeker after that wisdom which the poet informs his reader is hidden beneath the veils of his verses, there are very few worth retaining on the shelves of a home library. Mr Anderson's *Dante the Maker* is a unique contribution to Dante studies and is certainly a book to keep for further consultation and refreshment. The sheer scope of topics evoked by this book presumes an ongoing love and study of the master poet by both author and reader.

The book is an impressive introduction and interpretation of the *Commedia* set in the context of Dante's life and work as a whole, and these are always set against the historical, intellectual and spiritual forces which drew inspired vision out of political and social failure and humiliation. There are three parts: the first, *The making of the poet*, culminates in the joy of the *Vita Nuova*. Here there is ample useful discussion of the influence of the Troubadours and the *Fedeli d'Amore* with the figure of Beatrice constantly growing and maturing in the consciousness of the poet and the reader. The second part recalls the Wheel of Fortune which Dante saw on his descent into Hell. The illusions of life begin to mock the poet as the very images and events he put his trust in are by fate drawn away from him, leaving him exposed and vulnerable: *regnabo, regno, regnavi, sum sine regi*. The bitterness of Dante's exile must never be minimised: it is with him in Hell, it still haunts him as he climbs Mount Purgatory, and truth to say the waters of Lethe and Eunoë certainly do not wash the memory away from him as he ascends the Heavens.

In this section Mr Anderson has written important chapters on the *De vulgari eloquentia*, the *Convivio*, the *De Monarchia* and the hopes aroused in Dante by Henry of Luxembourg, clarifying the role of Dante as prophet. Part three is wholly dedicated to the great poem and draws together the numerous strands from the first and second parts. Three main themes have developed: the political events which were to change the history of the West and eventually the destiny of world history; the spiritual teachings and insights of various saints and teachers; and the 'Platonic' tradition, the *philosophia perennis*, the wisdom present to enlighten every generation, which makes Dante vital and pertinent to our own times. Mr Anderson makes his reader experience afresh Dante's mission, his role as prophet and his eschatological teachings.

The briefest of outlines must surely indicate the comprehensive grasp of this book. Its especial value is the way in which it filters so much of what has been said by other writers who have knowingly or unknowingly approached Dante through the traditional view of the nature of man. Sayers and Williams remain as 'the main stream' of the recent Christian interpreters; Rossetti and Valli (and therefore Pascoli and Foscolo) must be seen as the Masonic interpreters of Dante whom they accepted as the 'patriarch' of Italian Masonry; whereas Aroux and Guénon may increasingly appear to be enclosed within their ivory towers of strict orthodoxy. They do not seem to recognize the power of Dante as a poet, a troubadour of the soul's mysteries. Aroux wills Dante to be a heretic, whereas Guénon presents him as his *alter ego*, a unique élitist, an untouchable exponent of a particular brand of tradition which totally ignores the Christian mysteries and joy regarding the Incarnation and the Resurrection. In fact, though Guénon attacks Descartes in *The Reign of Quantity*, he is himself caught by the Cartesian world of intellectual security.

Mr Anderson is emphatic: Beatrice must be known in the flesh, otherwise the Christian understanding of the sacramental life is overthrown. Dante's doctrine of *trasumanar* is meaningless without the spiritual backcloth of Bethlehem, Mount Tabor, Calvary and the Empty Tomb. We need also to set his teaching in the context of the

teachings of St Francis, St Bonaventura and St Thomas Aquinas as well as the *humanising* frescos of his friend, Giotto, and the noble madonnas of the other Italian painters of his age. When passing through the Cornice of the Proud Dante associates intellectual pride with images, and his interpretations of the 'icons' carved into the rock face is clearly Western and in no way orthodox in the 'Eastern' sense. The scenes are carved with all the vigour of Michelangelo's *terribilità* and they speak to him as if they were scenes enacted during a Franciscan *sacra rappresentazione*.

Beatrice recedes before the vision of St Mary the Virgin as earlier Virgil vanished from sight once the poet beheld afresh his beloved in the Garden of Innocence. Mr Anderson has taken and modified according to his own insights a study written by Robert John, and the result is that numerous key images in the *Commedia* are seen in a new context: the three beasts, the Greyhound, the Old Man of Crete, the girdle, the monster Geryon, the figure of Satan, the hovering angels above the negligent rulers, the pageant of the Church and Empire at the conclusion of the *Purgatorio*. The author makes his reader understand that Dante's symbols and images have a vital, positive worth 'as well as the negative virtue of concealing some of his most dangerous attitudes and ideals':

They are both memorable and mysterious, working on men's minds, like significant dreams demanding interpretation. They have concealed power, preserving civilized ideals and spiritual values in a way that allows them to triumph over the transient setback of Dante's immediate political ideals.

Dante's vision is 'Western', he is at the heart of Catholic Christianity's experience of 'the Coming of the Kingdom'. His outspoken views on the spurious Donation of Constantine and the politically avaricious Popes of his age are unambiguous. He objected to the priestly caste meddling with the knightly world, usurping their rights, confusing the issue, dividing man from man with unnatural prejudice. Bishops in the guise of 'Knights' were for Dante the outrage of his age and the cause of the Church's loss of respect. Red,

pink or blue Deans, whether of Canterbury or of Rome, have never convinced the layman.

Mr Anderson's book is representative of a view which rarely finds a foothold in the academic world. The themes of his books will no doubt be received as were the revealing and penetrating studies of Dr Francis Yates. Too often has the veiled tradition been mocked as 'the Platonic lie' through ignorance and prejudice which only serves to reveal a cultural illiteracy. Perhaps this book will help an ever-increasing family of souls to revalue Dante in the light of tradition just as Dr Yates's books have encouraged many to set Shakespeare against a positive body of knowledge and a convincing social background.

A major theme of *Dante the Maker* is Dante's relationship with the Knights Templar. Many puzzling episodes in the *Commedia* are perceived afresh and are possibly at last put in their proper context. Many years ago Guénon had pointed out that it was not without significance that Dante's final initiation in Paradise was by St Bernard of Clairvaux, the founder of the Order of the Knights Templar.

The identification on the literal level of Pope Clement V and King Philip the Fair, who destroyed out of lust and greed for temporal power the Order of the Knights Templar, with the Harlot and the Giant is most convincing, for it throws an immediate and graspable interpretation on the political background to Dante's vision. Again, it is this 'Knightly' backcloth to the arena which aids an understanding of the civilization of the West and the course that history has taken. The meaning of Dante has inextricably become caught up with the present and the situation with which the remnants of civilization are faced. Dante's powerful images of the White Cross of the Martyrs, seen in the Heaven of Mars, and the Eagle of the Heaven of Jupiter, are viewed as vital symbols of those essential virtues upon which civilization worthy of the name must be based, the Rigour and the Compassion, the Sefiroth Gevurah and Hesed on the Tree of Life from which all sacred history emanates. It was clearly Dante's world of imagery that the Italian Masonic tradition had in mind when centuries later Italy combined these two powerful

images to form the cross with which the Republic still decorates its Knights to this day.

One of the by-products of Mr Anderson's book is that it is possible to visualise Dante in the context of his nation's destiny. For example, the Romantics, inspired by Byron's anarchy, seized on his 'dangerous attitudes and ideals' causing a confusion of intentions. Thus we see Rossetti and Foscolo discovering Dante to be their hero in their search for the 'New Italy', and Donizetti becoming a late exponent of the Troubadour tradition and being naturally drawn to Dante as a source of inspiration. The Romantic age witnessed a 'Dante' vogue sweep through Italy, influencing the arts, politics and religion.

The journey undertaken by the West since Dante's times has led to a profound change in society. Was the 'Revolution' the long expected second 'Pentecost', a bitter awakening of Joachim of Flora's Age of the Spirit, removing Law and promising a land of milk and honey? Dante would have lamented the passing of the 'magic' of Art, the crude tearing away of the veils which has merely served to reveal more clearly the fiery Countenance, terrible to behold and hastening mortality's self-induced judgement. Maybe he would have set aside certain aspects of his medieval theology and joined in Goethe's words:

What does the City of God mean?
God does not have a city but an empire,
not an empire but a world, not a world
but many worlds.

BRENNAN'S BOYNE VISION. *The Boyne Valley Vision* by Martin Brennan, The Dolman Press, 12 chapters, 120 pp, over 100 illus., £10.00
KEITH CRITCHLOW

This book is primarily a very personal and poetic response of an Irish American to the monuments of the land of his ancestors.

He begins his thesis with the not unfamiliar point that the megalithic remains of the Neolithic period are great feats of non-verbal communication, and immediately states that 'These monuments are concrete realizations of the world view of ancient man in Ireland.' This kind of dramatic statement is difficult to assess because on the one hand any monument left by a previous culture is going to reflect its world picture even if this building is the Eiffel Tower. Yet Brennan asks us to believe with him that everything about the 'mounds' is precisely calculated to fulfil a definite purpose.

This purpose Brennan insists is calendaric, and he attempts to elicit the precision from the designs in the stones. Modesty is not Brennan's strong point, nor, unfortunately, is accuracy. He is quite insistent that his book '... will dispel ... finally and conclusively' 'the view that the mounds were burial sites for the dead.'

Such momentous claims, which may not be without some truth, leave the author open to particular scrutiny to which, I fear, his work does not stand up.

We are given a long list of previous opinions stretching back to 1699, on the meaning of the Boyne Valley stone mounds. Brennan describes a man called Vallancey as both 'confused and misguided' in his interpretation of Tuatha Dé Danaan, yet he apparently takes this same man's conclusions on the meanings of the stone markings at Newgrange as the basis for his own opinions.

Unfortunately, due to careless editing, when we come to the conclusion at the end of a long list of Vallancey's symbolic meanings we have an unenclosed bracket preventing us from making sense of what Brennan says is 'central' to his 'own interpretation of the symbolic purpose' of these markings.

Brennan chooses to divide his thesis (p.15) into symbolic and scientific, and proceeds to make yet another grandiose statement which must border on the irresponsible unless very carefully explained. He claims that 'the spatial arrangement of Newgrange symbolizes the universe, demonstrating its governing laws'. One is then told that these governing laws are really only one law, 'The interpenetration of two opposing forces — spirit and matter ...'

This kind of simplistic generalization is enough to make one put the book down immediately. Apart from the obvious fact that 'oppose' is an inadequate word in any theosophy for the relation between spirit and matter (one might as well say that mind *opposes* body), such summaries are only acceptable after very careful explanation of what the terms mean. This is the necessity of epistemology and being clear about what it is one believes one is saying. It simply is not good enough to follow this with universals like Yin and Yang, Izangi and Izanami, and so on. All these pairs are of quite different natures and from quite different contexts, and at best might be said to have duality in common, until a very careful thesis is developed as to what common ground they have.

Unfortunately the text deteriorates into the slack and unspecific romanticizing that is not uncommon in certain quarters of the U.S.A. at present. We find Newgrange simultaneously becoming: 'The moment of Creation', 'the sexual union of male and female', 'heaven and earth', 'spirit and matter' . . . depicted in one stroke on the day of the winter solstice. This may be all right for a personal romantic and poetic experience but to claim scientific proof for such ideas is of a quite different order.

Brennan reveals to us that the mound at Newgrange was originally covered with quartz transported from many miles distant. This, he concludes, was to make the mound even more egg-like, and he uses this to reinforce his insemination symbol of the light penetrating the 'womb-like cave'. It would seem almost elementary biology that Neolithic farmers would be only too aware that eggs do not have wombs and that fertilization of an egg takes place before the shell is formed; and any penetration of an egg *from without* is the most likely thing to kill the occupant. So much for the dangers of woolly symbolism.

Rather more specifically to the point is the method by which Brennan arrives at the 'key' to the 'Boyne Valley Vision'. Brennan, in an uncritical flash of conviction (whilst staring into the fire in a curiously similar manner to the discovery of the Benzene ring), decides that those twig-like features engraved into the stones that

O'Kelly had called 'offsets' were 'obviously' rulers. Nothing less than giving the Boyne Valley canon of measures! 'Everything fell into place in a great cosmic vision of order and harmony.' It is on the personal sentiments of this last statement that the value or otherwise of the book has to be judged, as the mathematical assertions that follow simply do not stand up to objective testing.

The particular 'offset' or 'ruler' that Brennan chooses and illustrates is from Dowth (Kerbstone 51, upper left, *see figs 1 and 2*).

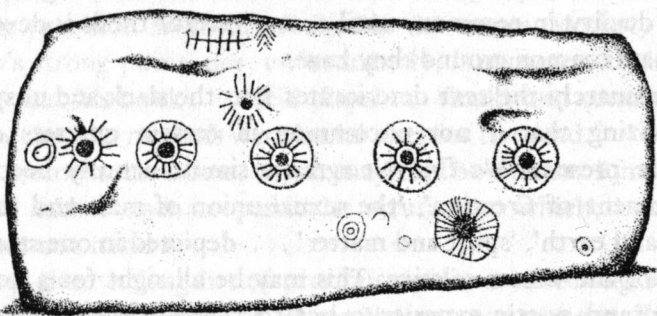


Fig. 1 THE STONE OF THE SEVEN SUNS (KERBSTONE 51)

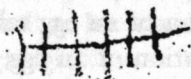


Fig. 2 'OFFSET' OR 'RULER' ON KERBSTONE 51

When one considers the massive weight of authority Brennan is willing to afford this pattern in order to found his thesis on it, it is surprising that this is only illustrated one inch long on page 47. Yet

over the pages six more larger 'offset' illustrations from Newgrange are shown. Now as it is the key to the thesis of this book that these are 'rulers', one cannot help but notice that *parallel* cross markings occur in only *two* of the seven illustrations. Brennan asks us to accept that the intervals between the Dowth (Kerbstone 51) offset has only two intervals which measure precisely 2.6 cms and 3.6 cms. Even a cursory glance gives the impression of unequal intervals though. But Brennan states categorically that the first interval is 2.6 cms, the second slightly larger than 3.6 cms, the third 2.6 cms and the fourth 3.6 cms again. However much one might want Brennan's measures to be correct, they simply do not correspond with the illustration he supplies.

This raises two important issues, firstly statistical method and secondly accuracy of measurement. The first issue has been demonstrated heroically by Alexander Thom who gained acceptance for his megalithic yard from the statisticians *before* the archaeologists. This method entails taking as many measures as are available or possible and then subjecting the results to an objective analysis. The results thereby have the weight of as objective a method as is possible. Brennan's method of taking measures — in themselves questionable by his own illustration — from *one* specimen and proceeding to make universal claims is exactly the opposite of the statistical method and could not be more subjective. Not only this but the second point of accuracy of measures is another weak point of his argument and book.

Nowhere in the whole volume is there an objectively demonstrated image of one of the stones or landscapes of stones or mounds. All the images, beautiful as they are, come from the subjective hand of Brennan the artist. The great benefit of modern techniques of measurement — which Brennan insists is the 'key' — is their relative objectivity, as in simply photographing a site with a measuring rod displaying the appropriate feet or inches or whatever. A simple photograph of a modern ruler divided into centimetres (as this is the claimed dimensional system) placed against the key offset pattern would have given all of us a chance to judge for ourselves the validity or otherwise of the claim.

The problem is compounded because we are presented with the author's drawings as the only standard, but then on page 57 (diagram one) Brennan proceeds to superimpose quasi-objective geometrical lines onto his drawings (*see fig. 3*). These are circles derived

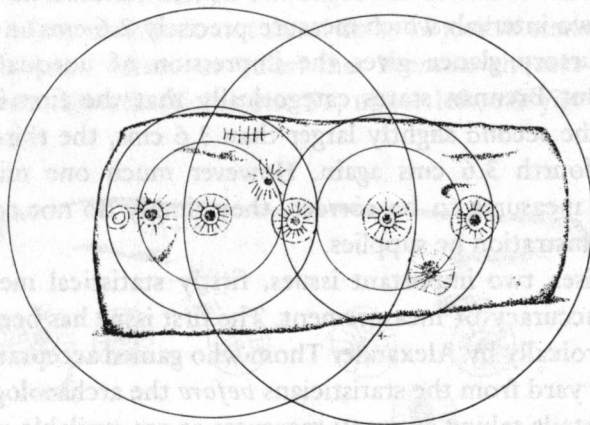


Fig. 3 GEOMETRICAL DESIGN SUPERIMPOSED ON KERBSTONE 51

from the 2.6 cm and 3.6 cm measures which he superimposes on Kerbstone 51 at Dowth. The results remind me very much of Leonardo da Vinci's story of how if a person points out a suggestive image that can be read into the cracks of an old wall it becomes extremely difficult to 'read' these cracks as anything else from then onwards. In the case of Diagram one six circles have been drawn and the only notable fact that seems to emerge is that they are in two groups both centred more or less on one of the radial images. After this it is a simple matter of observed fact that none of the circles pass through any other significant centre or define accurately any peripheral dimension of the stone. There are seven radial images on the stone and three minor circles in Brennan's illustration. Surely for any theory to have even a hope of being taken seriously, particularly one claiming to be *the* canon of the Boyne Valley, the geometrical demonstration should pass through at least *one* centre or define one width or breadth with regard to the stone itself?

By this time it is hard to judge whether Brennan is in a state of self-hypnosis or simply writing with tongue in cheek. Because this diagram says to him that the ‘“designs” . . . were carefully constructed to fit a grid’, and further that this ‘grid’ ‘. . . led directly to the revelation that the designs were actually describing the movement of celestial spheres in space. They were actually a kind of planisphere’. What celestial spheres and what motions we are not told. However, by diagram two we are assured that there is in addition a third cycle (called by Brennan a cycle) whose centre is also the centre of the entire planisphere. Any reader can check for himself that the central axis of this third circle does not fall on the *centre* of the central design of the stone; so what is Brennan claiming? Not least is the puzzle of why the stone has been reversed into its mirror image for this demonstration (*see fig. 4*).

I have gone into detail at this point as these first measures, taken so unsatisfactorily in my judgment, are extrapolated to cover not only the stones of and the entire Boyne Valley but even to radiate across the whole of Ireland! (*see page 111.*)

The quality of the drawings and the careful geometry and the attractiveness of the colour printing do not, for this reviewer, compensate for the increasing arbitrariness of the conclusions Brennan insists on drawing from them. There is simply no acknowledgement of the principles of statistics nor any other standard offered as to what is a valid coincidence amongs the majority of misses.

This inevitably brings me to the misleading and false information contained between pages 50 and 53. Brennan tells us how he arrived at a measuring rod which represents the coincidence of A (2.6 cms) and B (3.6 cms) measures, and asks us to accept 20.25 inches. This, he insists, represents twenty of the 2.6 cm units and fourteen of the 3.6 cm units. Again without being daunted by the transfer of centimetres to inches we merely have to multiply 2.6 cms by 20 which results in 52 cms exactly, and then multiply 3.6 cms by 14 which results in 50.4 cms. Now which length is the rod? Brennan says he settled for 20.25 inches which is 51.435 cms which gives us yet another length! But this last is ‘. . . the exact length of

the druid's cubit as defined by Stukely three centuries earlier.'!

Brennan proceeds to state that the 'Golden Section', which is 1:1.618, is also one to the square root of three, yet any pocket calculator tells us that the square root of three is 1.732. Having affirmed the classical importance of this we are then told that an A measure times the square root of two equals the B measure. But 2.6 times the square root of two = 3.676955261. Then we are told that a B measure times the square root of two equals two A measures. Yet 3.6 times 1.4142135 equals 5.091168823, and 2.6 times two equals 5.2!

Inaccuracy in measure is one thing, the misuse of traditional terms for geometric constructions is another. Brennan's use of the term *Vesica Piscis* for *any* two equally-sized overlapping circles is also misleading. The term *Vesica Piscis* is normally reserved for two circles of equal size related by the precise relationship of the centre of one circle sitting exactly in the periphery of the other. The profundity of the relationship is that where the radius is one, the distance between the overlapping points of the circles are $\sqrt{3}$ to the radius.

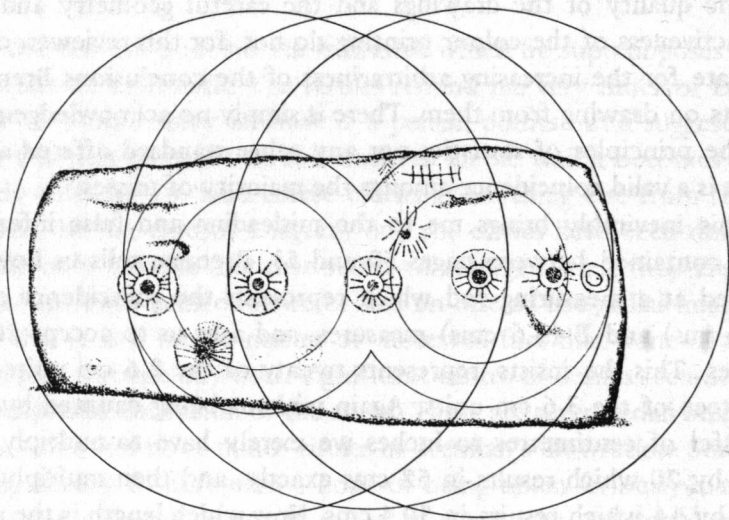


Fig. 4 GEOMETRICAL DESIGN SUPERIMPOSED ON KERBSTONE 51

Brennan seems to be perpetuating an error about the golden mean proportion (which is $(\sqrt{5}+1)/2 : 1$) that appears in Lawrence Blair's book *Visions of Rhythm*.

Brennan also insists on page 53 that his B measure of 3.6 cms is directly related to Alexander Thom's discovery of the Megalithic Yard. The MY (Megalithic Yard) is 2.72 Imperial feet or 0.829056 metres. Twenty-three times Brennan's B measure of 3.6 cms = .828 metres or 2.716535 not 2.72 feet. To use an approximation of this inaccuracy would be completely unsatisfactory to Alexander Thom.

This precise investigation into the mathematical claims of Brennan is important as his claims and the confidence of his style have seduced many since the book was published. But what is at stake is too important to ignore. We have seen in recent years the re-emergence of an awareness of the unwritten knowledge of ancient peoples which has been almost totally unacceptable to the modern archaeological fraternity. The work of such as Petrie, Bligh Bond, Alexander Thom, Schwaller de Lubicz and others has certainly uncovered material evidence of a level of knowledge that is unaccounted for in written evidence. Thus the new affirmation of ancient canons of proportion, geometrical and astronomical skills, in short an ancient wisdom of the universal laws of arithmetic, geometry, harmony and astronomy alluded to in Plato's *Timaeus* as actually residing in the temples and constructions of earlier civilizations and cultures, is done no helpful service by books such as Brennan's. On the contrary they play right into the hands of the cynics. Had Brennan stayed with the personal nature of his own inner vision and raised questions rather than attempting precise claims the book might have been more valuable. There is no denying the care and skill of the illustrations and the provocative nature of the implication of such a breadth of knowledge to the Boyne Valley builders of Neolithic times, but Brennan's mathematics work against his theories not for them.

GEOFFREY WATKINS

KATHLEEN RAINE

Since writing the editorial in which we acknowledge our great indebtedness to Watkins Bookshop, and the remarkable Watkins publications for which the founder, John M. Watkins, and his successor, Geoffrey Watkins, were responsible, we have received the sad news that Geoffrey Watkins himself, who had for some time retired from the House with which he was for so many years identified, has died. This is a great loss for all who remember him and who, like the present writer, found in Watkins Bookshop a school of advanced studies in the Perennial Wisdom. Like his father, the founder (called to his task as publisher and bookseller of theosophical literature by H.P. Blavatsky herself), Geoffrey Watkins was far more than a bookseller; indeed he was perhaps the only bookseller who made a practice of advising customers (many of whom were, or became, his friends) against purchasing books which he thought unsuitable for their particular interests, or too valuable to be entrusted to ignorant hands.

He read the books he sold and was himself immersed in that whole range of knowledge not taught in our Universities but discovered again and again by scholars of that excluded tradition of theosophical (this time I use the word in its larger sense) wisdom. From all over the world seekers converged upon the bookshop in Cecil Court where in the back office (where books not on sale to the public at large were kept) first old Mr Watkins, and later 'young' Mr Watkins, held court under the scrutiny of a faded but magisterial photograph of H.P.B. herself.

Geoffrey Watkins was a mine of accurate information about all those esoteric groups, societies and individuals who were concerned with the Western esoteric tradition: Yeats himself and his circle of friends; C.G. Jung, who came incognito to arrange for the anonymous publication of his *Septem Sermones ad Mortuos*. Virtually all

those concerned with knowledge relating to 'facts of mind' were regular visitors. To me he sold or lent works relating to my own field of studies, Thomas Taylor the Platonist; each of us could tell our own story of indebtedness.

The two qualities that distinguished Geoffrey Watkins were discrimination and courtesy. In a field of knowledge excluded from Academic disciplines, and indeed Academic recognition, discrimination is the more essential, and is rare indeed, but Geoffrey Watkins was unerring. Boehme, Eckhart, G.R.S. Mead, the classical texts of Neoplatonism, Alchemy, and the classics of the Middle and Far Eastern religions were his concern, and for many years Watkins Bookshop had a virtual monopoly in this field. Now that a wider readership is demanding wisdom on easier terms than did earlier generations it is perhaps no longer possible to maintain the rigorous standard of scholarly (and spiritual) integrity that Geoffrey Watkins inherited and long maintained.

As to his courtesy, he welcomed his customers as his guests, assuming that we were seekers for wisdom, and meeting each of us at the level of our learning (or our ignorance) as he was well able to do. He seemed always to have time to listen. When we left, he saw us to the door of his shop like a courteous host. It was the same when, later, I visited him in the flat to which he had retired. He used to see me to the bus-stop; but last winter I with difficulty persuaded him to come no further than the downstairs door of his block of flats; and the last time — only ten days or so before his death — he still insisted on coming as far as the door of the lift that took me down. I did not then imagine that I was seeing him for the last time; for we had conversed on themes and people of common interest and concern, he giving me, as always, wise counsel from a mind and heart of crystalline integrity. There must be many who will see in his passing the end of an era and the loss of a dear and honoured friend.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

John Allitt is deeply versed in Italian culture. He teaches at the Central School of Art and is a Cavaliere dell' Repubblico Italiano, an honour awarded him for his work on Donizetti.

Yves de Bayser. Poet, critic, translator. His most recent volume of verse, *Inscire*, from which the poems included in *Temenos* are selected, was awarded the Prix Mallarmé for 1980. He has translated poems by W.B. Yeats and is at present translating poems by David Gascoyne.

Thomas Blackburn for many years taught English at a training-college for teachers. He published many volumes of verse, of which *The Fourth Man, Post Mortem* and *Bread for the Winter Birds* (published posthumously) are in print. *Browning, A study of his poetry* is his most important prose book.

Keith Critchlow has recently published *Time Stands Still: New Light on Megalithic Science*. He is a geometer with an emphasis on the sacred and its applications to architecture. His forthcoming book *Tradition, Proportion and Architecture* summarizes his main research work. Other books are *Order in Space*, *Islamic Patterns*, *The Soul as Sphere and Androgyne*, etc.

Stephen Cross is a student of Indian traditions and a Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society. He has written and produced films for the BBC and other organizations on the poets T.S. Eliot and W.B. Yeats, the painters Odilon Redon and Cecil Collins, and a series on *The Traditional World of Islam*.

David Gascoyne is a poet and translator. His *Collected Poems* are published by O.U.P., his *Journals of pre-war Paris* by the Enitharmon Press.

Brian Keeble has published essays in *Sophia Perennis*, *Studies in Comparative Religion*, *Studies in Mystical Literature*, *Conoscenza Religiosa* and elsewhere and is editor and publisher of the Golgonooza Press series.

Tom Lowenstein taught English and Education at Northwestern University from 1971–74, and since 1975 has worked in an Alaskan Eskimo village recording traditional narratives and songs. These are to be published by the University of California Press. (Some texts have already been published in various journals.) In 1980 he devised and recorded a series of bilingual Eskimo-English radio

broadcasts of traditional stories for transmission to Arctic villages from a local station. In 1979 he was awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship, and in 1980 a Leverhulme Fellowship. He is at present living in Cambridge, his former University.

Jean Mambrino, French poet, has translated much English poetry, including Milton, Herbert, Hopkins, and Kathleen Raine. He writes regularly on literature in *Etudes*, and his most recent volume of poetry, *Oiseau Coeur* (published by Stock), was awarded the Prix Apollinaire for 1980.

Caitlin and John Matthews are co-editors of the magazine *Labrys*. John Matthews is the author of a book on the Grail just published in Thames and Hudson's 'Art and Imagination' series.

David Middleton. Poet and critic, already well-known both in the United States and in England. He has published in *The Southern Review*, *Agenda*, *PN Review*, *Poetry Wales*, *The Anglo-Welsh Review*, and is at present working at Nicholls State University, Louisiana.

John Montague, poet and scholar, edited the *Faber Book of Irish Verse*, which contains some of his own translations from the Irish. He teaches at present in the University of Cork. His collected poems will be appearing early in 1982.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr: exponent of the Iranian tradition of Islamic mysticism and metaphysics, and also of modern scientific ideas in the light of that tradition. He was a founder of the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, of which Henry Corbin and Toshihiko Izutsu were co-directors. He gave the Gifford Lectures on religion in Edinburgh in 1981: and is at present teaching in the Department of Religion at Temple University, Philadelphia.

Santosh Pall. The paper here printed is extracted from her Doctorate thesis on *Yeats and the Sacred Dance* (University of Delhi); she is herself a dancer and practitioner of the Indian traditional sacred dance.

Kathleen Raine. Poet and Blake scholar. Recent publications include *Collected Poems, 1935-1980*, *The Human Face of God: Blake's Engravings of the Book of Job*, *Blake and the New Age*, *The Inner Journey of the Poet* (Essays).

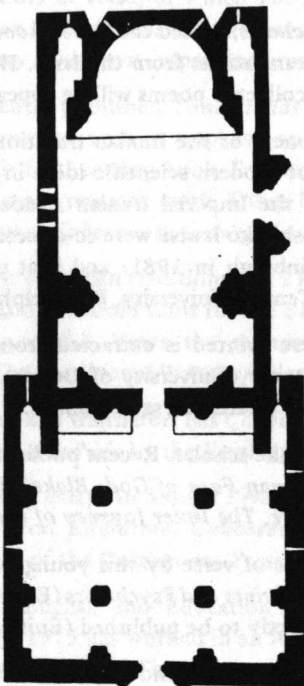
Jeremy Reed. The first book of verse by this young poet was *Bleeker Street* (Carcenet Press) followed by *Saints and Psychotics* (Enitharmon Press). Another volume (*A Man Afraid*) is shortly to be published (Enitharmon Press).

Anthony Rooley is a noted performer and scholar in the field of Renaissance music. He is the musical director of *The Consort of Musick* with whom he has made many recordings including the complete works of John Dowland.

Peter Russell, Translator and poet, was formerly editor of the poetry review *Nine*. Until the overthrow of the Shah he was teaching in Iran in association with the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy, of which Henry Corbin was a Director. Peter Russell is at present engaged in the important project of the translation of the complete works of Corbin into English, under the sponsorship of the Institute of Ismaili Studies.

Philip Sherrard, writer and translator, authority on Byzantine and modern Greek literature. Among his recent publications are *The Philokalia* (with G.E.H. Palmer and Kallistos Ware. Faber & Faber), and Angelos Sikelianos's *Selected Poems* (Allen & Unwin).

Huston Smith. Professor in the Department of Theology at Syracuse University, N.Y., is well known in the United States as an exponent of the Perennial Tradition. Among his publications are: *Forgotten Truths*, *The Primordial Tradition*, *The Purpose of Higher Education*, *The Religions of Man*.



TEMENOS denotes the sacred area around a temple, suggesting the intimate link between the arts and the sacred that has characterised the imaginative productions of almost all human societies. Our society in this respect, as in many others, must be regarded as abnormal, and this abnormality is reflected in much of its art. TEMENOS is concerned with challenging this deviation. Through essays, poems, reviews, etc. the aim is to affirm the sacred dimension of the arts when properly understood, to show what the presence or absence of this understanding means in terms of our human life, and to call for its renewal in the creative activity of our own times.

It is hoped that TEMENOS will be published about twice a year.

From Reviews and Commendations

I am so glad that you are persevering with 'Temenos' and I hear its praises sung among friends I value most.

Laurens van der Post

I must say that you and your editors deserve strong congratulations for putting together a magazine that projects a vision of the possibility of the imagination . . . the contributions are not fragments, but part of the whole view.

Robert J. Bertholf (Curator, State University of New York)

'Temenos' is superbly produced, and the list of contributors is impressive. 'Light' welcomes 'Temenos' whole-heartedly, and wishes it the influentially creative future it calls for and deserves.

'Light', September 1981

WATKINS

London & Dulverton