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On this occasion all contributors who wanted a voice in our Forum were concerned with literary subjects. Readers aware of an imbalance and perturbed that literature alone of the humanities appears in the pages which follow may be consoled if we mention that articles asserting the weight and value of other disciplines are now piling up on the editors' desks to wait for a hearing in October.

THE EDITORS

## APOLOGY

We regret the dipleted character of this issue and its lateness. After final instructions for printing and binding had been given, it came to our notice that one of the articles we were about to publish had already appeared in another journal. As a result, the press had to be stopped, the offending item withdrawn, and new proofs prepared. Believing we are part of a wide legion of honour, we appeal to our contributors to inform us if they intend submitting their work to any journal other than ours, and to be scrupulous in advising us if an alternative publisher is found.

# LITERATURE AND JOY

*by* A. J. WARNER

Some writers and critics have thought that literature finds its source in the discontent and unhappiness of the writer. Stevie Smith wrote wistfully and plaintively

> Nobody writes, or wishes to,
> Who is one with their desire.

In one of his early poems Yeats seems to be taking the same view. Wondering what would have happened if he could have made his unresponsive love, Maud Gonne, understand and sympathize with him, he wrote:

> I might have thrown poor words away
> And been content to live.

Perhaps the most complete statement of the view that writing springs from disappointment and discontent is that expressed by A. E. Housman in his famous lecture on *The Name and Nature of Poetry*. He compared poetry to a morbid secretion, like the pearl in the oyster, and went on to say: 'I have seldom written poetry unless I was rather out of health, and the experience, though pleasurable, was generally agitating and exhausting.' How far this throws light on Housman's own poems I am not quite sure. *The Shropshire Lad* was once a best-seller in the world of poetry, but it is now somewhat out of fashion: there is certainly a strong flavour of melancholy and nostalgia in his poetry.

It is certainly possible to make a case for the view that poetry springs from unhappiness, but it is on the whole a minority view, and not many writers would subscribe wholeheartedly to it. The later Yeats was passionately convinced that 'the arts are all the bridal chambers of joy', that even Hamlet and Lear were gay. It is this view, that sees a basic principle of joy at the heart of literature, that I want to examine in this article.

I would like to begin with a passage from a rather depressing book, Malcolm Brinnin's *Dylan Thomas in America*. America was not good for Dylan Thomas; the hectic round of lectures and readings and lavish hospitality encouraged his exhibitionism and the heavy drinking that was to lead to his early death. But in the sad record of this book there are moments of peace and perception. Brinnin records one of them as follows:

> Our talk rambled then, but I remember clearly Dylan saying that now, finally, he was determined to write only 'happy poems.' But that was a great trouble — it was so very much more difficult to write a poem happy in sentiment rather than tragic and still manage to have it come out believable and good. He was absorbed in this notion, I could see, but also troubled. Implicitly he was saying what many of his poems had already said: that his wisdom was the perception of joy — an insight so comprehensive and instantaneous that the meaning of joy is defined not as a relative state of human emotion but as another name for life itself. Yet there was little joy in his face as he thumbed hesitantly through a clutter of unfinished manuscripts, and little conviction in his voice as he spoke of his writing plans. At last, as if to conclude our visit, he said that his aim now was to produce 'poems in praise of God's world by a man who doesn't believe in God.'

This goes to the heart of the matter. The poet's wisdom is the perception of joy. And if a poet writes poems in praise of God's world, he is in some sense a believer in God, even if he doesn't know it. For as the South African writer, Harley Manson wrote: 'Any joy felt suddenly and spontaneously was, in fact, the way God spoke to men.' (This remark comes from an unfinished fragment of a novel which Manson left behind him at his untimely death. It is published under the title *Karl Gunter Hoffman.*)

For all his weaknesses as a man and as a poet, Dylan Thomas did feel and was able to communicate a spontaneous joy. We find it in such poems as 'Fern Hill,' and 'Poem in October.' In the latter, Thomas expresses the joy of being and remembering; the thirty-year old man rejoices in himself and in his memories of boyhood.

> My birthday began with the water—
> Birds and the birds of the winged trees flying my name
> Above the farms and the white horses
> And I rose
> In rainy autumn
> And walked abroad in a shower of all my days.
> High tide and the heron dived when I took the road
> Over the border
> And the gates
> Of the town closed as the town awoke.
>
> A springful of larks in a rolling
> Cloud and the roadside bushes brimming with whistling

Blackbirds and the sun of October
Summery
On the hill's shoulder,
Here were fond climates and sweet singers suddenly
Come in the morning where I wandered and listened
To the rain wringing
Wind blow cold
In the wood faraway under me . . .

There could I marvel
My birthday
Away but the weather turned round.
It turned away from the blithe country
And down the other air and the blue altered sky
Streamed again a wonder of summer

With apples
Pears and red currants
And I saw in the turning so clearly a child's
Forgotten mornings when he walked with his mother
Through the parables
Of sunlight
And the legends of the green chapels

And the twice told fields of infancy
That his tears burned my cheeks and his heart moved in mine.
These were the woods, the river and sea
Where a boy
In the listening
Summertime of the dead whispered the truth of his joy
To the trees and the stones and the fish in the tide.
And the mystery
Sang alive
Still in the water and singingbirds.

Manson speaks of joy felt suddenly and spontaneously. Joy differs from pleasure, happiness, content, a sense of well-being, in coming unsought and frequently surprising us. 'Surprised by joy' — the opening phrase of a famous sonnet by Wordsworth, gave C. S. Lewis the title for his autobiography. He saw joy as a guiding principle in his life and he offers a perceptive analysis of it. 'Joy is never in our power', he writes, 'and pleasure often is.' It is a mistake to seek deliberately for that thrill of joy which comes only when a man is absorbed in something outside himself. As Lewis puts it:

'Only when your whole attention and desire are fixed on something else — whether a distant mountain or the past, or the Gods of Asgard — does the thrill arise. It is a by-product. Its very existence presupposes that you desire not it, but something other and outer.' Lewis goes on to stress the fatal mistake, which he himself made, of consciously trying to recapture the state of mind induced by joy. 'To get it again became my constant endeavour: while reading every poem, hearing every piece of music, going for every walk, I stood conscious sentinel at my own mind to watch whether the blessed moment was beginning and to endeavour to retain it if it did.'

The kind of joy I have in mind is not simply joie de vivre, a delight in being alive and able to experience a variety of human pleasures. Gaiety and high spirits and the satisfaction of being alive are also much to be welcomed in literature as in life, but they are on a somewhat different level from the blessed moments of joy that transcend human pleasure. When Browning wrote:

> How good is man's life, the mere living, how fit to employ,
> All the heart and the soul and the senses forever in joy,

he is enthusiastically celebrating a sense of joie de vivre, and his enthusiasm may even seem immature and misplaced to the world-weary generations of the twentieth century. When the Wyf of Bath looks back on the pleasures of her youth,

> But Lord Christ! when that it remembreth me
> Upon my youth and on my jollity
> It tickleth me about myn hertés rote.
> Until this day it doth my herté boote
> That I have had my world as in my time . . .

there is an infectious warmth about her enjoyment of the senses, but it is not quite joy. And the same could be said about Falstaff and Justice Shallow looking back on the pleasures of their roistering nights in Southwark:

> *Fal.* We have heard the chimes at midnight, Master Shallow.
> *Shall.* That we have, that we have, that we have, in faith,
> Sir John, we have; our watchword was 'Hem Boys!' —
> Come, let's to dinner; come, let's to dinner. Jesus
> the days that we have seen! Come, come.

One of the gayest and most attractive of Robert Burns' songs is 'The Rigs O' Barley', where he is thinking of the past happiness of the moonlight nights he spent with Annie:

> It was upon a Lammas night,
> When corn rigs are bonnie,

Beneath the moon's unclouded light
I held awa to Annie:
The time flew by wi' tentless heed,
Till 'tween the late and early,
With sma' persuasion she agreed
To see me through the barley.

. . . .

I hae been blythe wi' comrades dear;
I hae been merry drinking;
I hae been joyfu' gatherin' gear;
I hae been happy thinking;
But a' the pleasures e' er I saw,
Tho' three times doubled fairly,
That happy night was worth them a',
Amang the rigs o' barley.

Corn rigs, an' barley rigs,
An' corn rigs are bonnie:
I'll ne'er forget that happy night,
Amang the rigs wi' Annie.

For all its lively warmth and gaiety this song still comes short of the joy glimpsed in Dylan Thomas's 'Poem in October'. I would like to compare it with another love poem of a very different kind by Thomas Hardy. It may seem strange to be looking for joy in Thomas Hardy, many of whose poems are poignantly sad, registering the disappointments, the regrets, the missed chances of life, the corroding effects of time. But it was because Hardy was aware of joy that he felt so deeply the force of sorrow. Hardy's first marriage was happy in its early stages, but he and his wife became estranged in later life, owing partly to divergent views on religion, partly to Mrs Hardy's frustrated literary ambitions, partly to differences of temperament. When his wife died, Hardy was deeply shaken and thrown back suddenly to the emotions of his youth. He discovered amongst his dead wife's papers a journal she had kept during their courtship and he was deeply moved. Whatever the complex causes, Hardy embarked on a series of remarkable love poems, some dealing with his present feelings of loss, others celebrating the love of forty years earlier. Amongst them is one called *At Castle Boterel:*

As I drive to the junction of lane and highway,
And the drizzle bedrenches the waggonette,
I look behind at the fading byway,
And see on its slope, now glistening wet,
Distinctly yet

Myself and a girlish form benighted
In dry March weather. We climb the road
Beside a chaise. We had just alighted
To ease the sturdy pony's load
When he sighed and slowed.

What we did as we climbed, and what we talked of
Matters not much, nor to what it led, —
Something that life will not be balked of
Without rude reason till hope is dead,
And feeling fled.

It filled but a minute. But was there ever
A time of such quality, since or before,
In that hill's story? To one mind never,
Though it has been climbed, foot-swift, foot-sore,
By thousands more.

Primaeval rocks form the road's steep border,
And much have they faced there, first and last,
Of the transitory in Earth's long order;
But what they record in colour and cast
Is — that we two passed.

And to me, though time's unflinching rigour,
In mindless rote, has ruled from sight
The substance now, one phantom figure
Remains on the slope, as when that night
Saw us alight.

I look and see it there, shrinking, shrinking,
I look back at it amid the rain
For the very last time; for my sand is sinking,
And I shall traverse old love's domain
Never again.

The mood of this poem is sober and quiet; there is even a kind of staidness and a slight clumsiness in its movement that is characteristic of Hardy. It has none of the dancing gaiety of 'The Rigs o' Barley', but it pays a moving tribute to a moment of joy, whereas Burns is remembering pleasure.

The celebration of joy in literature frequently takes on religious forms. One kind of joy is that known to the mystic who becomes aware of the white radiance of eternity, 'like a great ring of pure and

endless light'. That phrase comes from Vaughan, but Traherne even more than Vaughan writes of the religious joy of worshipping God in the visible universe. For him a full and proper awareness of the world meant enjoyment of it. 'For if you know yourself, or God, or the World, he wrote 'you must of necessity enjoy it.' He writes in a mood of 'mystical gaiety', of man embracing the sea and the sky putting on the robe of the universe.

> You never enjoy the world aright until the sea itself floweth in your veins, till you are clothed with the heavens, and crowned with the stars: and perceive yourself to be the sole heir of the whole world, and more so, because men are in it who are everyone sole heirs as well as you. Till you can sing and rejoice and delight in God, as misers do in gold, and kings in sceptres, you never enjoy the world.

In a less specifically Christian way, we find Wordsworth caught up in a mystical communion with earth and sky and sea. Those sacred 'spots of time' to which he referred are frequently moments of joy. There are many passages in *The Prelude* where he describes occasions of ecstatic contemplation or a spontaneous leaping of the heart in response to scenes of peace and beauty, and in *Tintern Abbey* he finds the secret of his moral life in the power to respond to such moments. His awareness of the beauty of the Wye valley is not just a passing tourist glance at the picturesque woods and the river, but something 'felt in the blood and felt along the heart' which leads him to

> That blessed mood
> In which the burthen of the mystery,
> In which the heavy and the weary weight
> Of all this unintelligible world,
> Is lightened:- that serene and blessed mood,
> In which the affections gently lead us on, —
> Until, the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:
> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

Another poet who responded deeply to the joy in nature was Gerard Manley Hopkins, although his temperament is markedly

different from Wordsworth's. He cries out in sudden delight at the richness of texture, the inscape, the variety and originality of the visible world:-

All things counter, original, spare, strange;
Whatever is fickle, freckled (who knows how?)
With swift, slow; sweet, sour; adazzle, dim;

Then there is the rush of life in springtime, all this juice and all this joy', 'When weeds in wheels shoot long and lovely and lush;' — and the melting tenderness of autumn skies. The sonnet 'Hurrahing in Harvest' catches the note of breathless joy in the almost unrealisable beauty and majesty of God's created universe. 'The Windhover' suggests vividly the circling and wheeling movements of the hawk in the sky, the freedom and effortlessness of flight —

then off, off forth on swing,
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow - bend; the
hurl and gliding
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding
Stirred for a bird, — the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!

There is joy of a different kind in the poetry of Yeats. Here it is not related to the beauty of the external universe, but it wells up in Yeats himself. Sitting in a London café he experienced a sudden irradiation of joy.

My fiftieth year had come and gone,
I sat, a solitary man,
In a crowded London shop,
An open book and empty cup
On the marble table-top
While on the shop and street I gazed
My body of a sudden blazed;
And twenty minutes more or less
It seemed, so great my happiness,
That I was blesséd and could bless.

The feeling of joy carries with it an acceptance of life and a welcoming of human experience, in spite of all its pains and perplexities. Yeats, in his 'Dialogue of Self and Soul', makes an explicit statement of this acceptance. Although life is no more than a blind man's ditch, he would live it all over again.

I am content to live it all again
And yet again, if it be life to pitch
Into the frog-spawn of a blind man's ditch,
A blind man battering blind men . . .

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest.

Yeats not only believed that his moments of joy conferred a blessing on life, but he thought it was the poet's instinct to rejoice even in the midst of tragedy. He spoke of a tragic joy and asserted that Hamlet and Lear were gay.

> No tragedy is legitimate unless it leads some great character to his final joy. Polonius may go out wretchedly, but I can hear the dance music in 'Absent thee from felicity awhile,' or in Hamlet's speech over the dead Ophelia, and what of Cleopatra's last farewells, Lear's rage under the lightning, Oedipus sinking down at the story's end into an earth riven by love?

In one of his early plays, *The King's Threshold*, Yeats tells the story of a Celtic poet who chooses to starve himself to death at the door of the King's palace, in a traditional act of protest against a wrong done to poets and poetry. The King, influenced by his courtiers and soldiers, decides to end the ancient custom that gave the chief poet a right to sit in the King's Council with bishops, soldiers and makers of the law. As soon as the King's new decree has been passed the chief poet, Seanchan, goes to the steps at the King's threshold and begins his death fast, in spite of all the tempting food that is brought to him, and in spite of all the pleas made to him to end his fast by the king and his councillors, his old servant, and the pupils of his own school of poetry. When his youngest pupil beseeches him not to die and leave the lovers of his music without a leader, Seanchan replies:

Do not speak.
Have I not opened school on these bare steps,
And are you not the youngest of my scholars?

> And I would have all know that when all falls
> In ruin, poetry calls out in joy,
> Being the scattering hand, the bursting pod,
> The victim's joy among the holy flame,
> God's laughter at the shattering of the world.
> And now that joy laughs out, and weeps and burns
> On these bare steps.

In his last speech before death Seanchan affirms that joy has lifted him up: 'The man that dies has the chief part in the story', and his final words are 'Dead faces laugh.' The death of the poet has affirmed the values of poetry.

This play illuminates Yeats's conception of tragic joy. The death of a tragic hero is an affirmation of human values. At the end of *Hamlet* and *Lear* our perception of the difference between good and evil is sharpened, and our belief in love and loyalty and truth is strengthened not diminished. This point is well made by Lionel Trilling in distinguishing between tragedy and melancholy.

> Melancholy differs from the tragic sense of life in that the former is a symptom, the latter a therapy. Tragedy recognises the defeat of virtue but the recognition is health-giving, for men have found the philosophic essence of tragedy not in the pain of individual defeat but in its affirmation of human values. Whereas melancholy is the very opposite; at its root lies the diminution of all belief in human possibility.

In his early immature poetry Yeats frequently indulged in a dreamy languorous melancholy, but in his last poems there is no trace of it. In *The Gyres* he faces the decline of civilization with a message of laughter and rejoicing.

> Irrational streams of blood are staining earth;
> Empedocles has thrown all things about;
> Hector is dead and there's a light in Troy;
> We that look on but laugh in tragic joy.

> What matter though numb nightmare ride on top,
> And blood and mire the sensitive body stain?
> What matter? Heave no sigh, let no tear drop,
> A greater, a more gracious time has gone;
> For painted forms or boxes of make up
> In ancient tombs I sighed, but not again;
> What matter? Out of cavern comes a voice
> And all it knows is that one word 'Rejoice!'

Yeats's repeated belief in joy is part of the general affirmation of human values in his writing. He admires 'beautiful lofty things'; he celebrates the heroic and the passionate, 'whatever most can bless/ The mind of man or elevate a rhyme.' It was his conviction that there was no great literature without praise. In this belief he stands firmly in the mainstream of European literary tradition, which started from the view that literature should hold up acceptable models of virtue to encourage men to imitate them, especially those men who were princes and potentates, magistrates and rulers. Spenser declared that his aim in writing *The Faerie Queene* was to hold up examples of virtue and courage. 'The general end therefore of all the book is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline.' Sir Philip Sidney defended poetry from a similar viewpoint. It was a worthier study than philosophy or history, because it not only gave us precept and example, but it had the power of moving us to the exercise of virtue.

> Truly I have known men that even with reading *Amadis de Gaule*, (which God knows wanteth much of a perfect Poesie) have found their hearts moved to the exercise of courtesy, liberality and especially courage. Who readeth Aeneas carrying old Anchises on his back that wisheth not it were his fortune to perform so excellent an act?

Sidney went on to confess that even a crude old ballad like *Percy and Douglas* could move his heart more than a trumpet.

Yeats, of course, did not take such a simple moralistic and didactic view of literature; he thought it would 'bless the mind of man' by implicit rather than explicit means. But he did, more than most writers of the twentieth century, hold up positive images of virtue to his readers. He did praise beauty and courage and magnanimity. He praised the great houses, like Coole Park, the Gregory home in Co. Clare, and he praised the great men and women he had known. He was able to rejoice, even though he believed that civilization was in decline, because he thought that human values would reassert themselves. His best poetry confirms our belief in life, which is surely one of the things that literature should do for us — or is it?

Since the death of Yeats there has been a strong trend in modern writing towards the unheroic, towards cynicism, disillusion, even despair. Contemporary literature has few images of virtue, few heroes or heroines. The anti-hero is a common type in modern fiction, and it is hard to find moments of joy in modern poets. We seem to be getting a literature of low temperature, as D. J. Enright once called it. We find a good example of this in the work of Philip

Larkin, a poet of considerable talent, the general effect of whose work is depressing and diminishing. There are a few fleeting glimpes of joy in some of his poems, but we never feel his mind or his body blazing. His poetry generates no warmth. One poem ends like this:

> Life is first boredom, then fear.
> Whether or not we use it, it goes,
> And leaves what something hidden from us chose
> And age, and then the only end of age.

Other poems give us bleak, vivid snapshots of industrial England in the sixties — cut-price stores, railway-stations, furnished rooms, ambulances. A typical one is 'Mr Bleaney.'

> 'This was Mr Bleaney's room. He stayed
> The whole time he was at the Bodies, till
> They moved him.' Flowered curtains, thin and frayed,
> Fall to within five inches of the sill,
>
> Whose window shows a strip of building land,
> Tussocky, littered. 'Mr Bleaney took
> My bit of garden properly in hand,'
> Bed, upright chair, sixty-watt bulb, no hook
>
> Behind the door, no room for books or bags —
> 'I'll take it.' So it happens that I lie
> Where Mr Bleaney lay, and stub my fags
> On the same saucer-souvenir, and try
>
> Stuffing my ears with cotton-wool, to drown
> The jabbering set he egged her on to buy.
> I know his habits — what time he came down,
> His preference for sauce to gravy, why
>
> He kept on plugging at the four aways —
> Likewise their yearly frame: the Frinton folk
> Who put him up for summer holidays,
> And Christmas at his sister's house in Stoke.
>
> But if he stood and watched the frigid wind
> Tousling the clouds, lay on the fusty bed
> Telling himself that this was home, and grinned,
> And shivered, without shaking off the dread

That how we live measures our own nature,
And at his age having no more to show
Than one hired box should make him pretty sure
He warranted no better, I don't know.

After reading this one is inclined to feel that a plain deal coffin would be preferable to Mr Bleaney's hired box.

Some modern writers seem to be out to 'do dirt on life', to use Lawrence's expression. They nose out the sordid, the mean, the cruel, the amputated. Their comedy is black comedy, their jokes are sick jokes, their wit is destructive, diminishing, discouraging. The copulations of their characters are incredibly joyless; even their lusts are lukewarm.

The lack of joy and the absence of anything to praise in much contemporary literature go along with a general trend of disbelief today in any kind of virtue or unselfishness, let alone heroism. In the last analysis, so runs a prevailing view, everyone is completely selfish, even the saint. It is not uncommon nowadays for readers to be unable to find anything to admire in Shakespeare's characters. As Manson puts it:

And thus great Anthony is only a fool
Who threw away his honour for a whore,
Brutus only righteous and priggish, Romeo babyish.

One might add — Hamlet a vacillating intellectual, who couldn't make up his mind; Lear a senile, vain fool, and so on — Ghandi a self-righteous masochist; Jesus a crack-brained, long-haired, would-be Messiah.

There is a danger that we may fall into the state of mind and spirit that overtook Mrs Moore in *A Passage to India* after she heard the echo in a Marabar cave. The echo made the same response to everything — 'ou-boum', and it undermined Mrs Moore's hold on life.

> Coming at a moment when she chanced to be fatigued, it had managed to murmur, 'Pathos, piety, courage — they exist, but are identical, and so is filth. Everything exists, nothing has value.' If one had spoken vileness in that place, or quoted lofty poetry, the comment would have been the same — 'ou-Boum.'

Before she heard the echo, Mrs Moore had been a sincere Christian, who believed that God had put us into the world to love our neighbours. After the echo her belief in God shrinks, and 'poor little

talkative Christianity' is only a dim shadow troubling the edge of her vision.

Most of us have moments or periods when we seem to hear Forster's deadly echo, when our belief in anything shrinks away to nothing, and we are left in the meaningless darkness of the Marabar caves. But normally this is only a passing mood; we find again our springs of joy. It seems to me that literature is, and should be, one of the most potent aids to the discovery and rediscovery of joy. For joy is never won for ever. As Blake told us:

> He who binds to himself a joy
> Does the winged life destroy.

We must all go on making the rediscovery all our lives — and we need all the help we can get from the great writers.

Yeats's assertion that the arts are all the bridal chambers of joy and his insistence on the notion of tragic joy follows immediately an attack he made on Flecker's play, *Hassan*. Flecker made Haroun al Raschid put two lovers to death, whereas in the Arabian Nights' story he had been 'the greatest of all traditional images of generosity and magnanimity.' When he finds that a young girl in his harem loves a certain young man, he sets her free, even though he himself loves her, and he arranges for her to marry the man she loves. Yeats considered that the change showed nothing but wanton morbid cruelty on Flecker's part. 'One feels', he writes, 'that its nightmare-ridden author longed to make Galahad lecherous, Lancelot a coward, and Adam impotent.' One wonders what Yeats would have thought of the 'theatre of the absurd' and the 'theatre of cruelty.'

At some level Beckett's tramps do pay a sort of tribute to friendship and human endurance, but there is certainly no hint of tragic joy in *Waiting for Godot*, or any other kind of joy. There are many laughs, but the clowns are sad clowns. Beckett's world is dark and narrow like the grave itself, 'We are born astride the grave, the light gleams an instant, then it is darkness once more.'

Yet it is hard to banish all gleams of joy even from the Beckett universe. One of his apparently dreariest and most hopeless plays is *Krapp's Last Tape*. The decrepit, senile, cynical old Krapp listens to tape recordings he made earlier in his life. He expresses scorn for his earlier self, and yet he keeps returning to what was clearly an instant of joy. He was in a boat on a river with a girl, and although their relationship seems about to end there is a moment of stillness and peace.

> . . . We drifted in among the flags and stuck. The way they went down sighing before the stem! (Pause) I lay down across her with

> my face in her breasts and my hand on her. We lay there without moving. But under us all moved, and moved us, gently, up and down, and from side to side.

It is not only Yeats who has made statements about the principle of joy that lies at the heart of literature and life, though it will be clear that I am leaning heavily on Yeats for all the views expressed in this paper. Another Irishman, Sean O'Casey has expressed similar views, though in very different language. He made a declaration of his own views and beliefs in a late review of a play by Joe Orton entitled *Entertaining Mr Sloane*. O'Casey felt that this play displayed morbid cruelty, which was Yeats's charge against *Hassan*. He called his review *The Bald Primaqueera*, which is a knock at Ionesco's 'absurd' play, *The Bald Primadonna*. At the end of his review he affirms his belief in joy.

> Today I heard on the wireless of a fifteen-year-old lass diving into the sea to save a boy of ten. The boy was saved, she was lost. And of a policewoman who risked her life on a roof-ridge to save a baby which a half-mad father had in his arms, ready to jump off the roof, baby and all, had the brave woman not snatched it from the frantic father. Brave woman, brave teenager lass. Ah, to hell with the loutish lust of Primaqueera. There are still many red threads of courage, many golden threads of nobility woven into the tingling fibres of our common humanity. No one passes through life scatheless. The world has many sour noises, the body is an open target for many invisible enemies, all hurtful, some venomous, like the accursed virus which can bite deeply into flesh and mind. It is full of disappointments, and too many of us have to suffer the loss of a beloved child, a wound that aches bitterly, till our time here ends. Yet, even so, each one of us, one time or another, can ride a white horse, can have rings on our fingers and bells on our toes, and, if we keep our senses open to the scents, sounds, and sights all around us, we shall have music wherever we go.

If we accept the view that literature has some of its deepest roots in joy, and that it re-affirms our belief in life and in human values, then I think there is a consequence to be borne in mind that bears on the teaching of literature. To end this paper I would like to take a brief glance at this consequence.

Robert Frost once remarked that poetry begins in delight and ends in wisdom. I think I would prefer not to separate the delight and the wisdom, but to define the wisdom of poetry as the perception of joy,

to use Malcolm Brinnin's phrase. If this is so, then the most important thing in reading a poem is to experience some response of joy or delight, using these words in the widest, most inclusive sense. Unless a poem can communicate to the reader some degree of joy, it has not really been understood. Understanding through response is the heart of all literary study. As Professor Christina van Heyningen put it, simply and cogently:

> We believe that the sole function of literary training is to help readers to understand — not, in the first or even the tenth place, to criticise, classify, grade or place in time, but to understand — works of literature.
>
> It goes without saying that the most important part of understanding books is to comprehend and feel what they say and to feel their value and effect, in fact to experience them as thoroughly as possible.

This is where the study of literature differs fundamentally from the study of history, or philosophy, or politics. It is not solely, or even primarily, an intellectual discipline, dealing with the relationships between concepts, the analysis of cause and effect, and the collection of facts and information. It would be truer to call it a 'culture of the feelings,' though I don't like this phrase, partly because the word 'culture' is badly worn and somewhat suspect, and partly because it suggests a self-conscious nursing of the emotions. The phrase was used by John Stuart Mill. He was brought up on a very strict rational and utilitarian diet of education, and had fallen into a state of depression until he found consolation and relief in the poetry of Wordsworth. He said of Wordsworth's poems: 'They seemed to be the very culture of the feelings which I was in quest of. In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure.'

A more recent attempt to distinguish between the two kinds of knowledge, knowledge as information, and knowledge as awareness, was made in a recent letter to the *Times* (25th March 1972) by the Reverend H. A. Williams on the contemporary drug-culture of the young. In discussing the causes behind the wide spread use of drugs, he remarks:

> Among those root causes a fundamental factor in my view is our common obsession with knowledge as information about and mastery over what is known to the virtual exclusion of *that other kind of knowledge which cosists of a living communion with what is known*, so that a two-way traffic between knower and

> known is established. This second kind of knowledge is perfectly expressed in the Prayer Book psalm: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help.'
>
> When, however, the hills are regarded as no more than material for scientific analysis leading to technological control, then the knower can do no more than inspect them as from a cabin of insulating glass. The result is a diminishment of personal identity leading to a bankruptcy of self-feeling. If I may quote from a book I have recently published: "People without a sense of identity, who feel no more than an isolated object among other isolated objects, must be strongly tempted by what offers to give an experience which feels like superabundance of being, however temporary the experience is. It is the starving who eat poisoned fruit, and it is people starved of what they are who are most likely to succumb to the attractions of a trip.

Whether or not Mr Williams has put his finger on a root-cause of the drug-culture, he has certainly made a distinction between two kinds of knowledge that is relevant to the study of literature. I don't quite like his phrase, 'a living communion with what is known', but it does suggest that the knower is involved in an experience and not just working with intellectual concepts or counters. His example from the psalms is, of course, poetry.

The problem, for all departments of literature, is how to teach this kind of 'knowledge'! Can it be taught at all? There is a deep and fundamental dilemma here. How are we to reconcile the basic need for a personal, individual, emotional response to literature, with all the organisation and apparatus of Eng. Lit., with essays and examinations, and the increasing flood of critical text-books. Professor Peter Ure, in discussing his idea of an English department, reminded us that the basic image of literary study is a man alone with a book.

> A school of English may not forget that, however ingenious its syllabus or devoted its tutors, its principal emblem remains a man alone with a book. It is a subversive emblem, and in that encounter anything may happen. If nothing happens, then all the rest is simply the performance of exercises, the advancement of careers, the obtaining of qualifications, and other admirable and necessary activities. (*The Critical Survey, Vol. I, 4. 1964*)

The problem facing an English department is not unlike the problem facing organized religion. The letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life. As soon as you insititutionalize and organise the kind of knowledge

that depends on 'a living communion with what is known', you find yourself in trouble. Lawrence once defined religion as a 'profound emotion that has the mind's connivance.' It is hard to translate this into thirty-nine articles and a creed. And so, when we have built up a lofty temple of Eng. Lit., we may find that the god has escaped us.

I have no easy answer to this dilemma, but to be fully aware of it is at least a beginning. We must try to keep open, in ourselves as teachers, and in our students, the secret springs of joy in literature and in life. We should never forget that even at the most unlikely moments, and in the most unlikely places, in a bus-cue at the rush hour, or in a Chemistry laboratory with a class of bored special English students, we can still be surprised by joy.'

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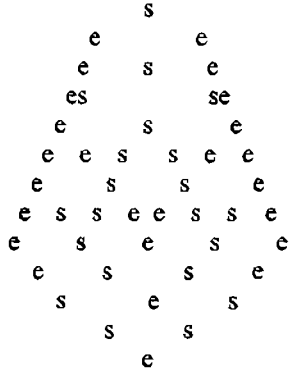
# POETICAL SET THEORY AND THE TECHNOCRATIC CONSCIOUSNESS*

*by* PETER HORN

Confronted with a poem like *es* by Franz Mon[1] the sensitive reader may experience a momentary sensation of vertigo:




His habits of apperception of clearly ordered chains of words along well defined horizontal pathways and his pre-conception that words should be formed by clearly defined groups of letters have been upset[2], as well as his assumption that a poem should mean something; and so his first angry reaction may well be that the poem is a fraud, and that the poet was trying to make fun of him[3].

There is, however, no reason beyond the force of habit why a poem should not be read upside down, from right to left or in a circular motion.[4] So let us overcome the obstacle of ingrained habit and try to read the poem anyway. Starting with the top three letters we can make out the word 'see' (lake, sea). We could even read diagonally down one of the sides of the upper triangle and would then decipher 'seeeeeeee' (which I suppose would be an enormous lake or sea). Reading diagonally from the second row towards the middle we find the word 'es' (it). The third line of the poem contains the configuration 'ese' which can either be read 'es' or 'se' (Latin: reflexive pronoun), or if you prefer, 'ese' (Spanish: this one). The

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'es' and 'se' are clearly separated out from this protoform in the next line and then contaminated again into the more widely spaced 'ese'. In the next line you can make out the words 'ees' and 'see', where the first is a mirror image of the last, as well as 'esse' (Latin: to be) and thus 'es' and 'se'. If you feel so inclined you can continue this game of hide and seek and discover new combinations in unexpected places.

Of course, the fact that the configuration *es* can be read and that it yields words does not necessarily make it a 'poem'. If you take any two letters of the alphabet and spread them aesthetically across a page, you are quite likely to get some meaningful combinations. Two characters will give you $2^1$ or 2 single elements (e,s), $2^2$ or 4 ordered sets of two elements each (ee, ss, es, se), $2^3$ or 8 ordered sets of three elements each (sss, eee, sse, ses, ess, ees, ese, see) etc. Some of these ordered sets are likely to correspond to words in one language or another.[5] Linguistics and more particularly the information theory of aesthetics, developed by Max Bense[6] gives us the mathematical and logical tools to deal with such permutations and combinations, their probability and their construction. One of the processes which Bense discusses under the heading 'textalgebra'[7], namely iteration, is particularily helpful in dealing with the type of poem with which we are here concerned: Iteration is the set of all subsets of a given set, e.g. a text which consists of a certain number of words. To clarify this idea to non-mathematicians let me give you an example of an iteration. Let us take the text 'worte sind schatten werden spiele' which consists of five words. These five words are considered to be a set. Any combination of from nought to five of them is considered to be a subset of the original set. We first have the empty set $\{\varnothing\}$ which contains no word; then we have five subsets of one word each: {Worte}, {sind}, {Schatten}, {werden}, {Spiele}; then ten subsets of two words each {Worte sind}, {Schatten sind}, {Spiele sind}, {Worte Schatten}, {Worte Spiele}, {Schatten Spiele}, {Worte werden}, {sind werden}, {Schatten werden}, {Spiele werden}; then ten subsets of three words each, five subsets of four words each, and one subset of all five words. The iteration of our original text is then the set of all these 32 subsets of the text.

In poetry we usually do not deal with sets in which the order of the elements of the set is of no account, but with ordered sets. It makes a difference whether you say 'worte sind schatten' or 'schatten sind worte' or 'schatten worte sind' or 'worte schatten sind' or 'sind worte schatten' or 'sind schatten worte'. We therefore have to multiply the number of possible subsets by the number of possible permutations within each subset. Bearing in mind that any subset may contain just a repetition of the same word, e.g. 'worte worte

worte' we get $5^5$ or 3 125 permutations of five words in sets up to five elements. Limiting ourselves to only three elements of the possible five per subset we still get $5^3$ or 125 possible three-word sentences. If a poet were to use all of these 125 possibilities in order to write a poem the poem would contain no element of chance and no additional information beyond the original text 'worte sind schatten werden spiele'.[8] On the other hand, if we were to write a poem which consisted of words selected completely at random, e.g. by blindly pinpointing a word on the page and selecting the word thus indicated, the resulting text would contain a maximum of previously unknown 'information', because none of the words could be predicted: 'funny held stick scale holes me hiding object discover the himself order daring'
— whereas normal speech and poetry has a certain degree of redundancy which allows us within certain limits to anticipate the probable ending of a sentence after the first few words. The poem *worte sind schatten* by Eugen Gomringer[9] has an even higher redundancy than everyday speech:

worte sind schatten
schatten werden worte

worte sind spiele
spiele werden worte

sind schatten worte
werden worte spiele

sind spiele worte
werden worte schatten

sind worte schatten
werden spiele worte

sind worte spiele
werden schatten worte

It is true that Gomringer's text only uses 12 out of 125 possible word triplets, but his choice is not entirely dependent on chance. If we take $R = 1$ to mean complete redundancy, i.e. that every word can be predicted from the outset, and $R = 0$ to mean an arrangement of words with no redundancy, i.e. a text made up of words selected by chance only, then the redundancy of our text is $R > 0{,}096$ (i.e. $12 \div 125$), which is the figure if our text were a

chance-selected subset of the set of all ordered subsets of three words of the original text 'worte sind schatten werden spiele'. The poem is, in fact, an *ordered* subset of the set of all ordered subsets of three elements of the original text. By that we mean that there is a structure which determines the order in which each word triplet appears in the poem. You will have noticed that each line contains the word 'worte' which means that all word triplets which do not contain the word 'worte' or which contain it more than once have been eliminated from the original 125 possibilities; furthermore no line contains the same word twice; the number of possible triplets is thus reduced to 60 and the redundancy rises to R = 0,2 (i.e. 12 ÷ 60). Now Max Bense maintains that writing is a reduction of chance and an increase in redundancy by the use of predetermined sentence patterns and, in the case of a poem, other redundant structural patterns (such as rhyme and metre).[10] As a matter of fact the redundancy of the poem is further increased by a number of additional structural devices such as: (1) 'Stanza' three to six contain all five words with the exception of 'worte' once and only once; (2) the first two 'stanzas' begin and end with the words 'worte'; (3) 'stanzas' three to six begin their first line with the word 'sind' and their second line with the word 'werden'; (4) 'stanzas' three and four place the word 'worte' as third word in the first and as second word in the second line, while 'stanzas' five and six reverse this order. This structure thus determines the placing of all words of the poem with the exception of 'schatten' and 'spiele', which are as it were the 'variables' of the poem.

I could inflict more abstract text theory on you, bore you with text statistics, text topology, text semiotics, text semantics and all the other useful tools of Max Bense's information theory.[11] But no doubt you will have become impatient, and you will ask: yes, but what about the poem? Has it got a meaning? Or why did the poet write a poem like that? Why should we read it? I must ask you to postpone your questions for a moment while I justify the unusual procedure I have followed thus far. In order to do this I have to introduce one more new concept, the concept of the 'material text'.[12] A material text is a text which consists of sets of materially and discretely given elements which are ordered to form a whole according to certain rules. If we regard a text as a 'material text' we completely disregard the fact that the elements of the text function as signs for something, ie. that they have a *meaning*, which is outside the text. Thus if I say 'tree' I will not think of the fact that there are *things* for which the word 'tree' is just a *sign*, but I will treat 'tree' as if it were a *thing* itself, which could be counted, measured and analysed like any other thing. A 'material text' thus has no semantic

external world to which the signs refer, but only an internal structure which I can analyse with the help of certain mathematical procedures.

My justification for regarding concrete poetry as 'material texts' in this sense comes from the theoretical writings of the poets themselves. A definition of concrete poetry by a group of Brazilian poets[13] reads as follows: '*Word-objects* placed into the tension of space-time-structures'. In the same manifesto the poets say: 'A concrete poem is *the communication of its own structure*. It is an object sufficient unto itself and not a description of another external object or of more or less subjective feelings.' The manifesto then underlines the fact that concrete poetry is 'concerned with communication of forms and structures and not of traditional messages'.

According to the theory of the poets themselves it would therefore be illegitimate to analyse concrete poetry for a 'meaning'. The poem communicates what it has to say not as meaning but as form and structure: and form and structure are accessible to mathematical analysis.[14] Thus if we accept the theoretical self-evaluation of the poets we have now come to the end of our discussion of the texts in front of us, unless we find some other access to concrete poetry. Are we as critics condemned to take the word of the poets themselves as the last arbiter of these poems? If the poets can say: 'There is no meaning', it seems legitimate to me to ask: 'Why?'. What, above all, is the significance of their refusal to regard words as signs for something beyond the linguistic self-sufficiency of the words as material within a structure?

What seems to be symptomatic and in need of scrutiny is the 'absence of the world'[15] from these poems. The fact that the poet no longer pronounces upon the reality of objects, people, values, feelings, or relationships, seems to indicate a total estrangement from the world of what we generally consider as reality. By making language, words, poems into *objects*, the poets deny the most essential function of language: that of denotation. Words do not exist for themselves like objects, they are created and used by people for people as carriers of meaning. To 'free' words of this meaning is not an act of liberation, as the theorists of concrete poetry claim, but an act of annihilation. We are left with just sounds or letters, and it makes no difference whether we say 'lala' or 'chicha' or 'ese' or 'es' or 'worte'. We are dealing no longer with words but with groups of graphic signs on the page.

The refusal to engender meaning is, however, a process which is far more dangerous than a first superficial look at this game with letters seems to suggest. It is a refusal to word the world and to communicate with word-images a conception of the world. Since these poets at the same time pretend to write "poetry" which tries to

usurp the place of what we generally understand by this term, and since they pretend that such traditional poetry is old-fashioned and useless, there is the danger of the loss of intersubjective human understanding. The underlying assumption of the theorists of concrete poetry is the same as the philosophical basis of positivism, namely that 'the world is everything which is the case'[16], which entails that the world consists of a finite number of unrelated facts. All sentences are thus either propositions about facts (scientific statements), or tautologies (logical or mathematical equations), or they are meaningless (e.g. metaphysics, poetry etc.). Unless the poet wants to compete with the scientist, he is reduced to uttering meaningless statements. Thus he prefers to make no statement at all, by using words not as signs but as material objects for his art. The concrete poet is silent about everything, heeding the warning of Wittgenstein: 'Whereof one cannot speak, thereon one must be silent'.[17] He has handed over the responsibility of understanding the world to the scientist. His poetry is merely decorative and ornamental, and thus cannot be interpreted.

The assumption that the advance of science has made poetry superfluous or at most an artistic game of no real consequence is not only widespread but also by no means new. Concrete poetry is only the most recent offspring of a number of outwardly changing but essentially alike movements, which all trace their ancestry to the Romantic movement. It is not entirely by chance that Pierre Garnier starts his essay on international (concrete) poetry with a quotation from the German Romantic poet Novalis: 'One is amazed by the ridiculous error in the belief of most people — namely that they speak for the sake of objects. Nobody knows the very essence of language, namely that *it concerns itself only with itself* . . .' Garnier is by no means the first one who found that his problem has been stated by one of the German Romantics: again and again modern writers from Baudelaire to Enzensberger have appealed to this treasure-house of formulations about the modern predicament.[18] It is therefore not astounding that the third of our concrete poems, *Sprech-Wörter* by Helmut Heissenbüttel[19] takes up a central theme of Novalis: 'Wo gehen wir denn hin? Immer nach Hause.'[20] (Where do we go then? Always home.):

geh ich
immer zu
zu
immer geh ich
wieder zu

ich
geh zu
immer wieder
immer zu
geh ich
wieder zu rück

You will notice that Heissenbüttel has replaced the 'wir' (which indicates a still functioning community) by the word 'ich', and the words 'nach Hause' (which indicate, however vaguely, the sense of belonging) by the words 'zu rück'. The predicament of the mid-twentieth century poet has become far more acute: the last vestiges of a feeling of community with other people have disappeared, and his direction is no longer homewards but simply backwards. An expression of complete defeat and a longing for the past? The poem does not state it explicitly, but read in conjunction with Novalis' statement there is little doubt that this is what the poet wanted to convey. However, the home to which the poet wants to go back, the innocence of some lost paradise has receded so far that it seems unattainable.

If we take a closer look at this 'coincidence', we discover, that despite its emphasis on rationality, calculation and a scientific theory, concrete poetry shows a surprising tendency towards mysticism and irrationalism, a combination which it shares with positivism as well as with Romanticism. It is revealing to note how words, first reduced to mere objects, i.e. deprived of their communicative and thus social function, are suddenly expected to become the 'centre of energy' for the 'functional and cosmic society' envisaged by Pierre Garnier[21]; how these poems, which are deliberately devoid of meaning, are expected to be 'prolegomena to a new ethics and aesthetics; for man returns to the sources of energy without being burdened by a preconceived or decreed language'[22]. With the positivist philosophers they share the conviction of the extremely narrow limitations of rational discourse, and therefore a basically irrational and intuitive approach to essential human and social questions; with the Romantics they share a belief in mysterious, intuitive, miraculous, sudden illumination and an artificial paradise in which humanity, deprived by an inhuman progress of the centre of its life, will suddenly recover the lost resources of energy and be restored to a truly human existence. There is a curious mixture of eschatological hope and technological jargon in the pronouncements of the concrete poets: 'On the ruins of history the most beautiful poetry will flower; a poetry, namely, which by denying history asserts the appearance of demiurgic phantasy. Yes, poetry, *poiesis*,

demiurgic creation of a world, *verbum incarnatum*. Civilisation is a general jail and culture itself is a hospital . . . The day is not far away, and it is no utopia, but a clear *technological possibility*, in which there will be no other way out but to be honest, because all social relationships have become absolutely lucid . . . It seems certain that on this day individual existence and community, private and public life will merge. They will merge as poem, as social and individual creation. That would mean *to eat from the tree of life* which is guarded by the angel with the fiery sword.'[23] Totality of meaning, equivalent to paradisian fulness of existence, is to be engendered by the absolute sign: but in order to become absolute the word has to be 'freed' from all conventional meaning, to be purified of the layers of everyday misuse. Absolute poetry — a magic word handed down to us from Novalis through Edgar Allen Poe's 'poem per se', Baudelaire's 'arabesque', Rimbaud's 'alchemie du verbe' and Mallarmé's 'poésie pure'. From there the way leads to the 'Ur-Bedeutung' of Stramm's expressionist visions and to our present-day concrete poetry.

But what is the meaning of 'absolute' in this context? Novalis' 'Selbstsprache' without communicative purpose is supposed to be 'without any meaning and coherence' and described as 'fragments made up of the most different objects', a mixture of heterogeneous, chaotic, but fascinating darkness; the goal of Baudelaire's poetry is an empty ideality without content; and Franz Mon describes his poetry as 'the pure *emptiness*, in which everything is possible, without necessarily being realized'.[24] This seems to me an apt description of poems like 'es': they are totally meaningless, nonsensical, and yet they want to suggest the possibility of sense. The absolute emptiness demands to be filled with concepts, ideas, images, and thus calls up in the reader an uncontrolled flow of the fantasy. The reader finds himself thus not in communication with another mind, but in contemplation of his own soul (='se'): the poem because of its emptiness works like a Narcissistic mirror confronting the reader with the chaotic subconscious, the *id* (='es'), which the poem suggests is both the origin ('see'=sea) and the being (='esse') of life.

But 'absolute' suggests something else as well: the irrational, magical power with which the orient invested the formula 'It is written', a fatalism which accepts words as they are, simply because they are. Poems acquire the power of scientific facts, with which one cannot argue. No doubt the scientific hocus-pocus which surrounds concrete poetry, the jargon which speaks of isomorphism, ideogram, verbo-voco-visual semantics reinforces the impression amongst an audience which has an enormous but entirely unscientific respect for the magicians of the twentieth century and their mysterious laws.

Not all concrete poets produce extreme examples of pseudo-scientific abracadabra like the following: 'Time-micro-measurements of chance. Control. Cybernetics. The poem as self-regulatory mechanism: feed-back. More intensive communication (as functionality and structure are internalized) give the poem positive value and determine its coming-into-being'.[25] The white coat of the scientist covers the magico-mystical nucleus of this poetry and invests it with a borrowed respectability: but the scientific vocabulary is uttered with the belief of witch-doctors in the usefulness of incantations and litanies: constellation pray for us, material structure liberate us, co-ordination give us fulfilment, transformation give us insight, correlogram save us from all further thinking, autodetermination relieve us from all positive action.

The relationship between mysticism and technology is not gratuitous; it reveals unspoken assumptions, widely prevalent in our society, and by no means confined to the small group of concrete poets and their audience. We are dealing here with basic assumptions of what the American sociologist David McClelland has called *The Achieving Society*.[26] The ideological assumptions made by the technocrats all tend towards eliminating the difference between political decisions and technological decisions, i.e. towards obscuring the difference between what can be done with the technology and the resources at our disposal and that which ought to be done to enhance the quality of human life (not just the quantity of products). Because a functioning technological society seems to be able to supply all the needs of the society, and since all problems of this society seem to be merely problems of production and distribution, the decision-making process becomes more and more a 'scientific' process. How to produce cars is as significant a technological question as that of how to get rid of the pollution caused by cars. The number of hours we work and the reward we get are 'scientifically' determined by the productivity of the average worker. In this way the illusion is created that there are no political questions left (apart perhaps from such completely irrational behaviour patterns as racialism and nationalism). The normative discourse of morality, ethics and other values which was ideally the basis of political discourse in the past, has been replaced by technological discourse: the only norm of the thoroughgoing technological state is the 'technologically possible', i.e. our society is thoroughly rational in its discussion of the means, but it has completely eliminated the discussion of the ends of human effort, in an irrational belief that the technological means as such determine the ends to which we can and therefore must aspire. This technocratic ideology threatens one of the fundamental conditions of our existence: language, or more precisely, intersubjective

communication, which is the basis of both the socializing and the individualizing process, and thus our interest in emancipation and self-determination.[27]

In this context it is interesting to note that Helmut Heissenbüttel criticised Gomringer's poems, because they exclude 'problems, criticism, despair, conflict etc.,' because by their very 'positiveness' they reinforce the illusion that there are no problems in our society which can be profitably discussed by poetry. When Gomringer excluded the 'all-too-human social and erotic problems' from his 'constellations' he protested that this was done not in the sense of an acceptance of existing conditions, but in the sense of priority of language and communication problems. Gomringer envisages a 'universal language' and a planetarian communication system, and believes to create by this a more elementary experience of community.[28] Behind this vaguely progressive but essentially technological goal — a universal language would be an extremely labour-saving device for commerce and industry — not only do all real problems of this world disappear, but the poet can also conveniently hide his essential nihilism behind a progressive screen. To attest Gomringer that with his vision of universal peace he performs a far more valuable function than all the politically engaged poets — as Heissenbüttel does despite his criticism — simply obscures the fact that Gomringer's poetry is essentially in conformity with the trends of the developing technological society and its veiled but nevertheless very real repression of essential human values.

The title of Lothar Bornscheuer's essay on Gomringer — 'Das Gedicht als "Gebrauchsgegenstand" — seems to me to give a clear analysis of the real function of concrete poetry. These poems are indeed 'consumer goods' in the same way in which records, posters, and television sets are 'consumer goods'. They perform no useful function like food, clothes and housing but serve to fill the cultural void with culture *ersatz*. (It may be significant that Gomringer has written an essay on 'Poesie als Mittel der Umweltgestaltung' and was secretary of Max Bill (from 1954 to 1958), the co-founder of the Technical High-School for Industrial Design in Ulm, and later cultural advisor of the German porcelain manufacturer Rosenthal). Certainly there is a very close realtionship between concrete poetry and the functionalized language of advertisements. Max Bense has classified advertisements in his book on information-theoretical aesthetics as a 'kind of text design, in which linguistic, aesthetic and marketing aspects have to merge, in order to produce a successful design' and he goes so far as to see advertisement as a kind of 'applied literature'. He also recognizes the close relationship between concrete poetry and advertisement: the syntax of both is brought

about not by grammar but by the visual arrangement of words, not by images and logical connections but by sensual and optical phenomena. In this connection he quotes the advertisement for the apéritif 'Dubonnet':

DUBO . .
DUBON . .
DUBONNET

and a concrete poem which actually served as an advertisement for the four hundredth anniversary of Rio de Janeiro:

o
rio
roi
oro
orior
orion
rionoir
ronronron

which Bense sees as an icon of the sugar loaf mountain, above which the 'o' symbolizes the sun, and the 'ronronron' the sound of the waves at the foot of the mountain.[29]

Now advertisement and propaganda is the one sphere of modern life which is primarily interested in a form of language which can be manipulated and whose effect can be precisely calculated. Economical pressures and solid profit motives stand behind the research to quantitize and formalize linguistic, audio-visual and graphical components of advertisement messages, and the experiments of the concrete poets serve, perhaps only incidentally, as a testing ground for new ideas. Advertisement, too, is the one sphere which is *not* interested in language as a vehicle of information between world and consciousness, but treats it simply as a sign stimulus for consumption or as a means to manipulate behaviour; or as Bense says: in the urban surrounding semiotic systems are deformed 'to more general structures of manipulation and operation of means'.[30]

There is an even more alarming perspective, however. The sociologist David McClelland proposes as the most effective method to increase the achievement of an individual, the attempt to manipulate simply and directly the nature of the imagination of the individual. Whether the concrete poets realize it or not, this is what would happen if their kind of poetry became the only poetry — an event which seems unlikely, but is nevertheless nearly an accomplished

fact: if we think of those millions whose only contact with poetry is through advertisements, we will no longer look with complete equanimity at the advertisements aimed at the cultural snobs. And David MacClelland's theory is by no means fantastic: it has been tested in courses for managers and it has a good theoretical basis. Fantasy is bound up less with a specific concrete situation than is overt behaviour. With the help of fantasy it is possible to place oneself in all sorts of imaginary situations. If one teaches students not only facts and techniques but also directs their fantasy towards achievement-directed situations, it is much easier for them to transfer their learning from the class-room to the real situation, because then they will not only have the ability but also the motivation to succeed.

On the other hand, if one starves the communicative fantasy continuously through concrete poetry and advertisements which have no real communicative content, which are in the sense explained above 'material texts', one might I fear eventually arrive at a situation where at least the less educated and unsophisticated will lose all interest in real communicative behaviour — which after all is the basis of all democratic decision-making — and learn to accept docilely all decisions handed down to them as accomplished facts brought into being by those who know best anyway — the scientists and statesmen.

Against Bense and with Flaubert I insist, that 'poetry is an undertaking against civilisation' — perhaps today more than ever; an undertaking against a civilisation which is essentially inhuman as long as it puts technical progress above the quality of human life. Concrete poetry, however, unthinkingly accepts progress for progress' sake, and thus reveals itself as advertisement and not as poetry.

*Empangeni,*

*Natal.*

## NOTES

[1] Pseudonym for Franz Löffelholz, born 6.5.1926 in Frankfurt/Main, a leading member of the German group of concrete poets. Cf. Hermann Kunisch (ed.): *Handbuch der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur.* — München: Nymphenburger 1965, p. 435 f.

[2] Concrete poetry relies a good deal on graphical elements. Theorists speak of 'spatial and visual syntax' by means of which the linear-temporal development of a poem is replaced by spatial-temporal or ideographic methods of representation. They claim isomorphism of the ideograph and the structure of reality. cf. Pierre Garnier: 'Internationale Lyrik'. — In: Reinhold Grimm (ed.): *Zur Lyrik-Diskussion.* — Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft 1966, p. 453 ff.

[3] One should not underestimate this motive in modern poetry, especially in the period of Dadaism and Surrealism (approx. 1910 to 1925). To make fun of the

'philistine' is moreover a recurring motive at least since the middle of the 18th century. Cf. Alfred Liede: *Dichtung als Spiel. Studien zur Unsinnspoesie an den Grenzen der Sprache.* — Berlin: de Gruyter 1963.

[4] Attempts to use the graphical lay-out of written and later of printed poetry as part of the message of the poem can be traced to antiquity. Cf. Gustav René Hocke: *Die Welt als Labyrinth. Manier und Manie in der europäischen Kunst.* — Hamburg: Rowohlt 1957 — amd: Gustav René Hocke: *Manierismus in der Literatur. Sprachalchemie und esoterische Kombinationskunst.* — Hamburg: Rowohlt 1959.

[5] In February 1970 Spanish concrete poets produced their first 'public' poem. A number of friends of the poet Alain Arias-Misson wandered aimlessly through Madrid carrying placards each displaying one letter of the expression A MADRID. Chance meetings of members of this group produced expressions like DADA, MAR (sea), RIADA (deluge), DRAMA, MARIA, RIMA (rhyme), DAR (give), ARIA etc. Cf. Ignacio Gómez de Liñao: *Experimentelle Dichtung in Spanien* (with a bibliography). — In: *Akzente* 4/1972, p. 289-299.

[6] Max Bense: Einführung in die informationstheoretische Ästhetik. Grundlegung und Anwendung in der Texttheorie. — Hamburg: Rowohlt 1957. — Cf. Helmut Kreuzer und Rul Gunzenhäuser: *Mathematic und Dichtung. Versuche zur Frage einer exaktern Literaturwissenschaft.* — München: Nymphenburger 1965/1967; Peter Horn: 'Konkrete Poësie: Max Bense en die groep van Stuttgart'. — In: *Tydskrif vir Letterkunde* 5 (1967) No. 3, p. 49-52.

[7] Max Bense: op. cit., p. 87.

[8] This is not strictly correct since the order of the triplets could be considered additional 'information'.

[9] A leading poet and theoretician of the Swiss group of concrete poets. Born 1925 in Cachuela Esperanza, Bolivia.

[10] Max Bense: op. cit., p. 86 f.

[11] A comprehensive criticism of formalized procedures in the analysis of poetry is not possible within the space of this short paper. I have treated other aspects of formalized poetics and their application to concrete poetry in 'Wer liest denn das? — Oder: die Literaturgeschichte vergißt den Leser' which is to be published shortly in *Die Horen* (Hannover). A comprehensive analysis of this problem in the context of a theory of poetics will appear as 'Das Problem des "Verstehens" in der Literaturtheorie'. Cf. also: P. Horn: 'Can machines produce art? Some theoretical and practical aspects.' — In: *De Arte* vol. 1 (1967) no. 2, p. 36-42.

[12] cf. Max Bense: op. cit., p. 76.

[13] Augusto and Haraldo de Campos and Deci Pignatori, the founders of the Brazilian group 'noigandres'. Quoted in: Pierre Garnier: op. cit., p. 456 f.

[14] For this reason concrete poetry has remained the field of linguists rather than literary critics. Cf. Siegfried J. Schmidt: 'Möglichkeiten und Grenzen gedichtsprachlicher Bedeutungskonstitution (im Hinblick auf konkrete Poesie)' — In: *kolloquium poesie 68 dokumentation* (ed.: Peter Weirmaier, Innsbruck 1968, p. 12 ff.) — Siegfried J. Schmidt (ed.): *Konkrete Dichtung — Konkrete Kunst 68.* — Karlsruhe 1968; Siegfried J. Schmidt (ed.): *Textitheorie und konkrete Dichtung* (-Sprache im technischen Zeitalter 15) 1965.

[15] Cf. Rudolf Nikolaus Maier: *Paradies der Weltlosigkeit. Untersuchungen zur abstrakten Dichtung seit 1909.* — Stuttgart: Klett 1964.

[16] Ludwig Wittgenstein: *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1). London 1922, '1955. Cf. also: Eric Stenius: *Wittgenstein's Tractatus. A critical exposition of the Main Lines of Thought.* — Oxford: Blackwell 1960, p. 7 ff.

[17] Wittgenstein: op. cit., (7); cf. Stenius: op cit., p. 225.

[18] cf. Hugo Friedrich: *Die Struktur der modernen Lyrik von Baudelaire bis zur Gegenwart.* — Hamburg: Rowohlt 1956, p. 19 ff.

[19] Born 21.6.1921 in Rüstringen near Wilhelmshaven. Leading experimental poet. cf. Hermann Kunisch (ed.): op. cit. p. 265 f; Dietrich Weber (ed.): *Deutsche Literatur seit 1945 in Einzeldarstellungen.* — Stuttgart: Kröner 1968, p. 546 ff; Peter Horn: 'Die Interpretation: Topographien e' — In: *Neue Deutsche Hefte 100* (1964) p. 78-80.

[20] Ludwig Tieck und Friedrich Schlegel (ed.): *Novalis Schriften*. Stuttgart: Macklot 1826, p. 195.
[21] Pierre Garnier: op. cit., p. 465.
[22] Pierre Garnier: op. cit., p. 466.
[23] Ignacio Gómez de Liñao: op. cit., p. 297.
[24] Franz Mon: 'An einer Stelle die Gleichgültigkeit durchbrechen'. — In: *Akzente* 1/1961, p. 30; cf. Hugo Friedrich: op. cit., p. 35 f, where he shows, how Baudelaire's poem *Élévation* follows a mystic pattern of Platonic and Christian origin, *elevatio*, i.e. the ascent to the uppermost heaven (empyreum) of pure fire. But the absolute of Baudelaire is completely devoid of any meaning. It is an empty ideality.
[25] cf. Pierre Garnier: op. cit., p. 457.
[26] Princeton: von Nostrand 1966.
[27] Cf. Jürgen Habermas: *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie'*. — Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp 1968, p. 91.
[28] Cf. Lothar Bornscheuer: 'Das Gedicht als "Gebrauchsgegenstand". Über Eugen Gomringer'. — In: *Akzente* 5/1970 p. 423.
[29] Max Bense: op. cit., p. 127.
[30] Op cit., p. 132. This is not intended as criticism by Bense. He thoroughly approves of it.

# THE WORDSWORTHIAN SENSE OF THE RELATION BETWEEN THE MIND AND THE EXTERNAL WORLD

*by* F. J. HUGO

Critical opinion not uncommonly regards Wordsworth's concern with the objects of Nature as a concern with 'things' and therefore as a reflection of a limitation of mind. Thomas McFarland in his book *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*[1] provides an example which is both recent and striking. He argues that basically only two attitudes of mind are possible. The first assumes the primary importance of 'I am', the other the primary importance of 'it is'. Coleridge falls into the first group, Wordsworth into the second. Here Wordsworth finds himself in the company of Locke, Bentham, and generally with those who believe in the 'overriding importance of things'. The book may finally be judged as a late example of perverse, monkish logic, but in the meanwhile it has a certain provocative value. It is not so much in the impulse to dispute the classification, but in the recognition that the mode of classification itself is inappropriate that the value of the provocation lies. Wordsworth may be an author pre-occupied with impressions of the external world, but he does not therefore belong with the Benthamite class of mind. McFarland has made what Ryle calls a 'category mistake'. A poet's apprehension of 'it is' must differ in kind from the Benthamite apprehension of 'it is'. The poetic function, independent of the views a poet may subscribe to, is essentially non-Benthamite. The point to be borne in mind, then, is that any discussion of Wordsworth's relation with the natural world must start from an assumption of an artistic, creative relation with that world. Any discussion that fails to do so falls under suspicion of being mere abstraction from the poetry. It is worth noting in parenthesis, because of the confirmation it brings, that McFarland goes on later to reduce all poetry to a form of materialism on the grounds that metaphorical thinking is materialist.

M. H. Abrams[2] offers an account of the Romantic idea of the relation between the mind and the world which one might seize on as a counter to McFarland. His discussion brings together rather than separates Wordsworth and Coleridge.

> A number of romantic writers then, whether in verse or prose, habitually pictured the mind in perception, as well

> as the mind in composition, by sometimes identical analogies of projection into, or of reciprocity with, elements from without. Usually, in these metaphors of the perceiving mind, the boundary between what is given and what is bestowed is a sliding one, to be established as best one can from the individual context. Sometimes, as in Coleridge's formulation of the 'coalescence of subject and object' in the act of knowing, there is not, nor can there be, any attempt to differentiate the mental addition from that which is given, for as in the philosophy from which Coleridge borrowed these terms, we are confined to a knowledge of the product, as against the raw materials, of the perceptual amalgam.

That statement is useful in its diagrammatic clarity, but tested in the light of actual examples of Wordsworth's poetry, it is not wholly satisfactory. One comes to realise that Abrams is not altogether safe from the McFarland category mistake. His terms are those of physical measurement, laboratory terms, and convey that perception arises from concrete contributions made by subject and object. The idea of perception as a concrete compound prevails. He mentions a 'sliding' boundary, but even though it slides actual contributions are implied. He recognizes that at times no boundary can be discerned, but this is explained as arising from the formation of a 'perceptual amalgam', a concrete product.

Wordsworth's poetry requires that we think of a subtle creative relation, not a process resembling chemical combination. A helpful analogy would be the vital communion between people, where the relationship itself is the creative source, not a process of reciprocity. Wordswoth does not present a vision of things basically external to one another coming together as 'raw materials' to produce by action upon one another a 'perceptual amalgam'. The natural qualities and entities Wordsworth is concerned with as a poet are not essentially external to the mind but share with the mind from the beginning an 'interior' quality. We experience in reading a number of his poems an entry into a sphere of creative animation in which the creative movement wholly engages us and questions of subject and object become quite unimportant.

It would be possible to apply Coleridge's phrase 'coalescence of subject and object' to the central event of Wordsworth's *The Daffodils*, if certain points were previously established. First, it would need to be understood that the coalescence is merely the recognition of a pre-existing, fundamental unity. It would need to be understood, also, that the coalescence of subject and object is only an incidental aspect of the creative stream which becomes active in a typical poem

like *The Daffodils.* The poem as an exploratory act is involved in the progress of that creative stream. With these considerations in mind there is less danger of the phrase 'fitted to' being misunderstood in the famous passage:

> my voice proclaims
> How exquisitely the individual Mind
> (And the progressive powers no less
> Of the whole species) to the external World
> Is fitted:- and how exquisitely, too —
> Theme this but little heard of among men —
> The external World is fitted to the Mind;
> And the creation (by no lower name
> Can it be called) which they with blended might
> Accomplished:- this is our high argument.

Professor Durrant[3] has pointed out valuably that the first two lines of *The Daffodils* represent a state of mind detached from the world.

> I wandered lonely as a cloud
> That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

However, I do not agree that this image suggests an 'indifference' to the world around us. It seems to me a pleasing image of a vague, floating mood in which the mind is passive but ready for response. Like a cloud, the mind is freely, easily buoyant within its sphere, the natural world, and carries with it an as yet undefined promise of a closer, more specific, relation with the natural world. If this reading seems acceptable, then it follows that we enter the creative stream at the very beginning of the poem and we, thus, have ample reason for not thinking of the creative presence portrayed in the poem as consisting in a simple reciprocating function.

Our sense of uncircumscribed creative potential is confirmed by the poem's development. A coalescence of subject and object takes place as the speaker of the poem perceives a 'crowd' of daffodils, but that is only the beginning of an astonishingly fertile process which supersedes that coalescence.

> When all at once I saw a crowd,
> A host, of golden daffodils;

We do not receive from the word 'crowd' an idea of quantity only, we gain at the same time a sense of latent energies. That sense is present

to us as an impressionistic visual image of a jostling or rippling movement in a crowd. The golden host brings a dramatic amplification; we imagine a vast shining, stirring multitude; in other words a rich numerousness. Then the joyous dance beneath the trees directly expresses the qualities which have already, but less directly, been conveyed to us. We are induced to imagine a gay general dance, expressing the creative principle present in natural things.

> Beside the lake beneath the trees
> Fluttering and dancing in the breeze,

In the second stanza the dance becomes universal in being extended to the sky and stars.

> Continuous as the stars that shine
> And twinkle on the milky way,

The central word is 'continuous'. Both the clustering together of the stars to form the milky way and their twinkling together to light this 'way', help to suggest a continuous dance around the globe. A similar effect is gained in the following lines,

> They stretched in never-ending line
> Along the margin of a bay:

The flowers outline a half-circle, the bay, with a suggestive effect which brings to mind a complementary half-circle. So hemisphere reflects hemisphere, whether patterned in flowers or stars, and we are left with a satisfying impression of wholeness. A broader, more relaxed sense of continuity is conveyed by the loosely generalising function of these lines.

> Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
>
> The waves beside them danced; but they
> Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:

The mood is one of luxurious enjoyment — 'I gazed and gazed', yet the full value of the experience only appears later in times of solitude. Then the 'inward eye', conscious of consciousness, reflects on his imaginative participation in the universal dance of the natural world: at the time of the experience his consciousness was wholly occupied with participation itself. The 'inward eye' is not the mere capacity for recollection: it is the faculty by which we recognise the 'interior' character of natural qualities and entities.

*The Daffodils* is by no means an isolated example. A number of important poems and passages dramatise a moment of perception and, as in *The Daffodils*, that moment must be apprehended in its context in order to be understood. One would not, then, emphasise exclusively the crisis of the passage 'There was a Boy' as Herbert Lindenberger[4] does. He speaks of the 'strategy which Wordsworth employs to shift from the purely physical plane of hootings and screams along the lakeside to the landscape of the mind'. The conception of a neat switch from one sharply defined sphere, the physical world, to another sharply defined sphere, the intellectual world, seems to me to arise from attending only to the climax of the poem. As in the case of *The Daffodils* one enters a creative stream immediately on beginning to read, and one is consequently made aware of an undetermined world of creative possibilities.

The opening lines imply that the cliffs and islands are mysterious presences, watching over the boy.

> There was a Boy; ye knew him well, ye cliffs
> And islands of Winander!

The movements of the stars on the horizon suggest the stillness and silence within the valley.

> At evening, when the earliest stars began
> To move along the edges of the hills,
> Rising or setting, would he stand alone,
> Beneath the trees, or by the glimmering lake;

But the image functions conversely too, leading us outwards from the valley. The quiet movements of the stars bring unobtrusively to mind the slow turning of the globe. Accordingly the dark and silent valley is seen in relation to the whole turning globe. The valley does not in this way lose significance, rather a quality of pregnancy is enhanced through the link with the great context of mysterious universal rhythms and processes. The lake, too, because it is 'glimmering' with the light of the sky, is suggestive of something more than itself. One might say that it has already a little of the ambiguous quality so important in the final image (once more of the lake) of the poem.

The boy does not represent for us a closed mind amongst external objects; he is aware, though indistinctly and uncertainly, of a subtle relation between himself and the world of suggestions around him. For this reason he stands alone; for this reason he addresses a trumpet call, both an appeal and a challenge, to the silent valley.

> And there with fingers interwoven, both hands
> Pressed closely palm to palm and to his mouth
> Uplifted, he, as through an instrument,
> Blew mimic hootings to the silent owls,
> That they might answer him.

The boy plays upon the silence with fine skill and evokes an exciting response. Jubilant, unrestrained, the boy and the owls together create a rising crescendo of sounds. A relationship has been made explicit, but in boyish terms, and the limitation of that expression of the relation is demonstrated in the sudden silence. In other words the relationship cannot evolve any further in terms of boyish brotherhood.

> Then sometimes, in that silence, while he hung
> Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
> Has carried far into his heart the voice
> Of mountain-torrents; or the visible scene
> Would enter unawares into his mind

The interior depth of the landscape and the interior depth of the heart are recognised simultaneously, because they correspond to one another. That the experience is one of recognition or illumination rather than of first discovery is reflected in the phrase 'Would enter unawares'. No effort of adjustment or assimilation is required, since the correspondence had always existed and merely waited upon developing understanding. The vast deepening of consciousness is remarkably easy and natural: 'a gentle shock of mild surprise'.

The final image of the poem is extraordinarily rich in suggestion and our first vivid apprehension of it should in itself be sufficient to make us distrust confident divisions between subject and object, physical and spiritual.

> that uncertain heaven received
> Into the bosom of the steady lake.

This image represents an adult vision: a vision towards which the boy's experience tends, rather than one actually achieved by him. His perception of an affinity with the world around him ought to lead in time to a sense of unity and order. This order would not be static, but would be seen as being continually re-created out of movement (that uncertain heaven) and stillness (the steady lake). We imagine a hemisphere which is clear and evanescent counterpoised by another, equally clear, but now unchanging and substantial; we imagine a

receding depth of sky 'received' or contained within the bosom of the lake, and as we do a deeply satisfying sense of unity and order is conveyed to us.

However, the image has another, an ambiguous, aspect. As we gaze in imagination at the level plane of the lake, we see and do not see the depth of the sky through that plane. The surface of the lake is palpable and stable, suggesting order; but the reflection of the sky is recessive and elusive, suggesting mystery. In this ambiguous aspect the image conveys at one and the same time an image of order and an image of mystery. Our minds, then, are occupied in dwelling on these lines of the poem, not only with an inter-play of change and permanence, but also with an inter-play of order and mystery. It is the presence of mystery, we finally realise, which is our deepest reason for believing that sharp divisions between subject and object, physical and spiritual are misleading in an approach to Wordsworth's poetry.

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## NOTES

[1] Thomas McFarland: *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*. London, 1969.
[2] M. H. Abrams: *The Mirror and the Lamp*. New York, 1958.
[3] Geoffrey Durrant: *William Wordsworth*. Cambridge, 1969.
[4] Herbert Lindenberger: *On Wordsworth's Prelude*. Princeton, 1966.

# LOUISE COMBRINK

Kristalle uit *Kroniek van Kristien*
van
D. J. Opperman

Die digter D. J. Opperman gebruik dikwels 'n bestaande teks as 'n soort stramien waarop hy nuwe patrone borduur. So 'n voorbeeld is 'Kroniek van Kristien', wat agt strofes van twee en twintig reëls elk behels, en wat 'n verwerking is van die middeleeuse 'Leven van Sinte Christina de Wonderbare' wat 1949 reëls beslaan.

Hierdie procédé bied vir die literatuurwetenskaplike allerlei literêr-teoretiese probleme, wat Louise Combrink heel nugter ondersoek, byvoorbeeld: is kennis van die stramien onontbeerlik vir kennis en evaluering van die patroon?

Die doelstelling met hierdie studie is tewens: , 'n wetenskaplik kontroleerbare beskrywing van wat daar in hierdie bepaalde gedig deur middel van die taal gedoen word en ter sake is'. Die skryfster word dus in die eerste plek 'n 'beskrywende analiseerder en interpreteerder'. As sodanig open sy die oë vir die dikwels verwaarloosde maar hoogs essensiële eerste stap van iedere kritikus: die so goed moontlik probeer verstaan van 'n teks vóór daar oorgegaan word tot die evaluering daarvan.

Hierdie studie is onmisbaar vir elkeen wat gemoeid is met die literatuurteorie.

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# MISUNDERSTANDINGS OF MANSON'S PLAYS

*by* C. van HEYNINGEN

There has been scant time as yet for criticism of H. W. D. Manson's work to have been written, much less published. Apart from essays in literary journals, here and overseas, by Professor Colin Gardner, Professor T. G. Whittock and myself in *Theoria*, *Standpunte*, *Contrast*, *Crux*, *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, published by Leeds University, and the British *Critical Survey*, there have been various newspaper articles, a long, very good one by John Wright in *The Natal Witness*, a clear, pithy, short one, beautifully balanced and central, by Fidela Fouché in the same paper and various reviews of plays, performed at the Royal Lyceum Theatre of Edinburgh, at the new University Theatre of York, and in Johannesburg, Iscor, and Pietermaritzburg. As well as these there has been the as yet unpublished M.A. thesis by Mr J. V. Crewe on Manson's work, predominantly excellent, which is now available in the Natal University Library. There has also been a great deal of oral discussion of his work, and it is chiefly in this, though also in a small part of Mr Crewe's otherwise brilliant thesis, and also in ephemeral newspaper reviews, that the misunderstandings I wish to discuss occur. The parts I object to in Mr Crewe's thesis are to be found only in what he has to say about the two Brandel plays and *Pat Mulholland's Day*.

One of the common misunderstandings, and one that occurs again and again in, for example, such already vanished papers as *Teater* and an S.A.B.C. interview, as well as in oral discussion, is that Manson is interested only in the past; and another is that he does not discuss the 'race' or 'colour' problems of South Africa — to write about them is, of course, a good horse to back if you want to be popular. I shall reply in detail to the criticism that Manson's interest is only in the past. About the colour problem the answer is that Manson considered it of only temporary interest, too meagre and barren and too merely fashionable a subject to be worth writing about — a horse that has already been ridden hollow-backed by inferior writers. The 'colour problem' will be settled sooner or later. Moreover, to Manson, people were, above all, people, whatever their colour. Speak to any African, Indian or Coloured who knew Manson well and you will find that he found it a great relief to be taken for granted as simply a human being like Manson himself. If you wish to see how utterly natural and genuine this non-racial, non-political attitude was, read Manson's preface to *Magnus*, especially the part

about the missionaries' converts. (The preface to *Captain Smith* is also enlightening in this regard). It must be galling, in fact, to be spoken to as a member of a certain class or race instead of as yourself, even if the members of that race or class are held up as paragons of all the virtues.

Another common stricture is that Manson's work is not relevant to the present age. Let us consider the artificiality of this idea.

It never occurred to Manson to be fashionable. In the realm of the new, he just *was* naturally new. His plays came out of the ever-fresh well of originality within his own being. He knew himself, unconsciously, as it were, to be a leader, not a follower, and it never occurred to him to try to write like anybody else — although he would sometimes use a *form* that, for example, suggested middle-English verse, as in parts of *The Green Knight* where it was most suitable, or the ancient Scottish ballad of tradition, as in *The Noose-Knot Ballad*, actually using a fairly close imitation of *Edward, Edward*! at the very beginning. He felt the importance of 'natural piety' in Wordsworth's sense when he says in the poem, 'My heart leaps up when I behold . . .

> The Child is father of the man
> And I could wish my days to be
> Bound each to each by natural piety.

He was, in fact, *not* that trivial creature, a Neophiliac![1] Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton and the rest were his forebears among poets — they wrote of what is always new, century after century. ('Literature', said Ezra Pound, 'is news that stays news') To *that* tradition his 'natural piety' was due.

He was also a child of Africa, which is not merely Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town and Dar es Salaam, but also the great, varied, beautiful natural world ever renewing itself, which is part of the unfathomable mystery of the universe so vividly suggested in that very modern yet traditional poem Prologue to *Pat Mulholland's Day*.

Naturally, the then fashionable 'Kitchen Sink' and the even more fashionable 'Absurd' had no attraction for him. Manson was by temperament emphatically not a Kitchen Sink man, nor a Theatre of the Absurd man. He could not be the latter, because, though capable of infinitely more intense suffering than most people, at bottom he rejoiced in life and the beauty of the visible world. As for his one apparently domestic drama *Pat Mullholland's Day*, of which he once asked me, 'Is it too *Kitchen Sink?*' — it is immeasurably and more than even domestic drama, let alone Kitchen Sink. Merely as domestic drama, it is moving and original. The natural, yet intense family

relationships are delineated with a beautiful truthfulness, delicacy and variety of tone; they are very much alive, the scenes sometimes exquisitely funny, with a mixture of ironic observation, high spirits and deep meditation in them. Mulholland, with his varying moods, his half-joking rhetorical bravado, changing in a moment to profound seriousness, or his deep compassion becoming pure objectivity, his maddening satirical calm suddenly bursting into raging fury in the course of a domestic storm, becomes as real as bread and butter as Manson's insight lights up now this, now that facet of the same situation. Quite as real and interesting as Mulholland is May. She more often moves us to inward tears, poor May, so 'ordinary' and so brave, than anybody else in the play. And yet how extremely comical she is when, deathly serious in her passionate maternal protectiveness towards Bogey, she lets herself be trapped by Mulholland's cunning logic into admitting, unaware, exactly what he wants her to admit, and is so frustrated that she gives him a resounding slap on the cheek and runs out. The whole play is full of harrowing dramatic ironies. One of the most piercing is that when coming home from a 'hen-party' May, slightly drunk and tired of poverty, lets out her real opinion of Pat's sculpture, which she doesn't understand. In a burst of recklessness she tells him that 'it's no bloody good at all'. Immediately she is horror-stricken at what she has done. The scene ends with a laconic bit of dialogue, in which the few words and the helpless silences are loaded with inexpressible grief, dismayed remorse and unutterable hurt:

*May:* Oh Christ, Pat! I'm sorry. I'm sorry.
Oh Pat, I am sorry!
*Mulholland:* That's O.K. May.
*May:* I'm terribly sorry.
*Mulholland:* That's O.K. May.
*May:* (heartbroken) It's not true!
*Mulholland:* That's O.K. May.

Jenny, the teenager, irritating as only adolescents can be, but capable of quite extraordinary imaginative insight, Bogey, the little boy who creeps home through a grassy ditch to hide from the school bully he has challenged, Curly, the derelict alcoholic, welcomed into the family that evening — each of these people has to learn the courage life inexorably demands of each in particular. Bogey is a wonderful creation, the undoubted genius, who is nevertheless a very real and natural little boy. All these members of a household Manson, being gifted with human warmth controlled by a wisdom both intellectual and intuitive, creates with ease in their domestic relation during a

single day. But the play is not merely domestic. The domestic life is transformed by being shown *sub specie aeternitatis*, and the transformation is achieved largely by means of two images — those of the moon and the estuary, which images permeate the play.

In a conversation with the almost totally uncomprehending Jenny, Mulholland says his wife is like the cool moon to him, and not the blazing sun. As the moon, by casting her quiet shadows on it, shows up the faults in his sculpture, so May shows him (but 'silently, so no one can hear') where he has gone wrong. This image, apart from making one feel May's character, even her very aura, as it were, gives one, with strange accuracy, a very strong sense of the indispensable, subtle and indefinable support that an inarticulate and untalented wife may yet give a highly gifted and utterly different husband, and implies lightly, that the bond may have beauty like that of moonlight and be as strong and mysterious as the influence of the moon upon the earth.

As for the estuary image, it is the chief thing that gives the audience and the reader the powerful sense that emanates from the whole play of the presence of death in the midst of all life — a sense which at times is mistily present, perhaps to everybody, of the mingling in all life of a consciousness, now intense, now faint, of beauty and excitement, terror, mystery and sorrow — the mixture which is our natural element, though we are so seldom conscious of all its components together. Only the very gifted, like Bogey and Mulholland, says Manson in effect, are keenly aware of it most of the time, but almost anybody may be in special circumstances.

So the one play that might be thought to be an attempt at Kitchen Sink turns out to be something very different.

None of the others could possibly be mistaken for a Kitchen Sink play, though many of them *are* mistaken for historical, or, rather, 'costume' plays. That is because Manson, having things to say about what is essential, chose to shake himself free as Shakespeare did of contingencies. The times he is apparently writing of are remote, distant either in time or place, or both, as in *The Fight at Finnsburgh*, *The Green Knight* or *Magnus*. Or they are imaginary, as in *The Counsellors*, *The Festival*, *Captain Smith*, *Potluck*, or (possibly) *The Magnolia Tree*. But every one of them has a central modern relevance. The essence of *The Fight at Finnsburgh* is the tragic waste of the best when pitted against their inferiors. 'The worst have passionate intensity' says Yeats. The best in this play have magnanimity, patience, tact, fortitude, wisdom, courage. They exercise these virtues to their utmost in trying to prevent disaster and carnage. Till the very last moment they keep the peace. Then the generosity of good King Finn betrays them. Spite, prejudice and hatred take

advantage of it, and all is lost. The *Finnsburgh* situation is all over the world at present, actually or potentially.

*The Green Knight* is equally relevant to the late twentieth century: a once great civilisation has become decadent; the way to revitalise society, suggests Manson, is for individuals to develop in themselves the freedom and the courage to find in the vital centre of their own being what they really do believe in and most value, and then break away from those fixed codes and live according to their own real values. *The Noose-Knot Ballad* (that saddest of all the plays) shows how people who (like Roderick and Angus) have committed great wrongs as a result of living in a society that represses their deepest natural instincts and emotions, may, after a great shock, followed by deep pondering, suddenly be able to see themselves and the crimes they have committed in a truer light, and so be able to save themselves, perhaps by a mere hair's breadth, like Angus, from a perpetual cycle of violence and misery.

The next play, that strange, rich, most beautiful and passionate one, *The Counsellors*, deals with the corrupting influence of an older generation upon a younger one, and the outcome of the struggle between them. The older generation in this play are secretly using the younger in order to achieve their own ambitions: the younger, or rather, King Dioran, who represents the younger, has to exercise the utmost power of intuition, and the most powerful intelligence and integrity, to guess at, and finally perceive fully the source of the corruption he at first only dimly senses. Finally, he has to act ruthlessly, however much it hurts him, against people he dearly loves, in order to eradicate the evil. One might call *The Counsellors* a play about the nature of responsibility (it was originally called *Upon the King*), and the harrowing conflict between the claims of personal and of public life. This is a perenially relevant theme. We are shown very movingly the springs of life in all the characters, physical, intellectual and emotional, Dioran, the five Counsellors, and the two women who are tragically involved by the Counsellors in the struggle. It is this tragic involvement of these eight human beings that captures all our interest, and leaves us in the end satisfied that Dioran has chosen the best course available to him, despite all the unhappiness and pain it has caused, and is still to cause to himself more than any.

There is something peculiarly wild and desperate in the passion between Dioran and Saffrona, and the construction of the scenes particularly expressing these qualities is very unusual, yet in my opinion, highly successful.

Shall I go on? *Pat Mulholland's Day* I have already dealt with in this cursory fashion. *Potluck* is not meant to be taken *au grand*

*serieux*. It is mockingly Theatre of the Absurd, making uproariously entertaining fun of modern[2] fashions in life and art, the satire registering with gaiety and no bitterness many 'palpable hits'. Relevant in its mocking fashion it obviously is. There remain *The Magnolia Tree*, *Magnus*, and the two Brandel plays.

I don't think the blindest critic could fail to see the relevance of *Magnus*, that ostensibly ninth century play, to the late twentieth. In our own age most people either say 'God is dead' or they set up some half-hearted substitute faith. In *Magnus* we are shown how man cannot possibly grasp what God is; such a concept is infinitely beyond his dreadfully limited conception. And when Cormack tells the heathen savage, Magnus, who is almost literally sick to death of the now corrupt Viking civilisation he has inherited, he, though not 'converted', is moved to emulation. 'Jesus', he says, 'died from *pride*/ Because he carried God's jewel within himself/For all men to see/ And be dazzled by if need be'. So Magnus, the Christian martyr, was not a Christian at all, nor a martyr, but a man who let himself be killed when it wasn't strictly necessary, because he valued himself, and knew that in that way he could show other men a flash of 'God's jewel'.

*The Magnolia Tree* is perhaps the most passionately and beautifully poetic play of all that Manson had time to write. In motivating Akutagawa's stupidly unmotivated short story he makes it forever relevant. Perhaps the main point of this extremely rich and complex tragedy is that the greatest men and women take themselves and others with (centrally) the utmost seriousness, as beings of the utmost value. All Manson's plays are at times asparkle with gaiety, wit and humour. Manson likes his Kurodo and Kawachi, the clever 'first-class second-raters', as they jokingly call themselves, and he enjoys their flippancy, but they themselves know that it proceeds from a kind of moral and social cowardice, a refusal to face life fully (as Morito and Kesa do) lest they should look foolish.

This long summing up of so many plays has been too cursory, but perhaps it will help to scotch the absurd contention that Manson's plays do not concern the present, and at the same time draw attention to their great range and variety. It does not, of course, even attempt to give an idea of the extraordinary poetic beauty and originality with which their deep understanding of humanity is expressed.

It remains to discuss, less briefly, the two Brandel plays, *The Festival* and *Captain Smith*, and to return, also briefly, to *Pat Mulholland's Day*. Many critics underestimate to an astounding degree the depth and quality of passionate feeling in these three plays. They actually accuse Manson of being in them 'sentimental', 'mawkish' and 'self-pitying'. Manson of all writers! No *man* could

have been less so, and the examples of these supposed faults quoted from Manson's writing are based on total misunderstanding. To begin with, it is assumed that because both Brandels and Mulholland are all artists and exceptionally brave, and because Manson himself had unusual courage and was a writer, Manson is identifying himself with those characters! This kind of criticism is of the same order as that so amusingly exposed by William Bliss in his book, *William Shakespeare*. Because in his plays Shakespeare shows an extensive knowledge of, for example, law, of seamanship and of military matters, such criticism assumes that he must at various times, have been a lawyer, a sailor, and a general! In Macbeth he shows an intimate knowledge of what it feels like to have committed murder. Therefore, argues Bliss, poker-faced, Shakespeare must have been a murderer! In any case, Manson's critics have failed to observe that the Bard is *not* Brandel. He is quite a different person from the Brandel of *Captain Smith*. He merely *acts* the part of Brandel in the dream-vision, the play within the play, of *The Festival*. The Brandel of *Captain Smith* is not any kind of artist, unless strumming a few bars on a mandolin makes a man an artist! It is Robert the Bard of *The Festival* who both strums a mandolin and is an inspired poet. The Bard merely lends his body one night for Robert, Duke of Brandel, to use in a dream-play. As for Pat Mulholland he *is* an artist, but not a writer — I grant that what he says about sculpture, which is *his* art, applies to poetry too. He is, however, *not* a writer; he is emphatically a sculptor. His interest in the drawing in the doctor's consulting room is the technical interest of a sculptor. His conversation falls naturally into a sculptor's images: consider, for example, his explanation to Jenny of why he is a sculptor, and consider especially his comment to his wife about Curly asleep:

> He has a fine head — can you see — ?
> Most people's heads don't sit so firmly
> So square and true
> As if you felt his backbone run up straight — right through him

Curly is now bald and Mulholland asks May to imagine him 'Like he used to be'

> Dark curls, cut short, soft, almost woolly —
> Not a big man or small — but nicely, well-made —
> Not tall — or stocky either — neat —
> Sort of neat and light and tough — and stubborn — can you see?
> Can you see, May, can you, can you, hey, Jenny? — from pride?
> In the funny sort of way gay men
> With a sort of speed of life in them can be . . . ?

This is seen as a sculptor (a very good sculptor) would see a man, with his character and his habits of life expressed in his physical shape — in the moulding of his body. It is not a painter's way, nor a poet's — except in the way Keats says the poet becomes the sparrow he is watching on the window-sill. (Incidentally, *pace* those who think Manson a poet but not a dramatist, could anything be more dramatic than this speech? The very tone of Mulholland's voice, his pauses, his gestures, the responsive silences of May and Jenny, and above all, the deep affection of one man for another, the affectionate comradeship — they are all there too.)

As for courage, there are exceptionally brave people in every one of Manson's plays. Yet it is in no other than *The Festival* itself that Manson has performed the poet-into-sparrow feat of becoming a coward. Professor D. G. Gillham, in his memorial lecture, put the emphasis in the right place when he said that Manson wrote about heroes in his plays, and in his life too he was a hero. But Isabel in *The Festival* is a coward — well, perhaps not exactly a coward, but her failure to save her own people from anarchy and carnage by returning to them as their Queen is certainly far from heroic, especially as she has seen Brandel, whom she loves, voluntarily die a painful death in order that she may escape from her enemies and return to her own country to take up her responsibilities there again. Yet Manson seems almost to take Isabel's side. He makes Brandel's ghost apologise to hers for having tried when in life to make her act according to *his* ideals. And actually the unheroic Isabel and the arrant coward King Edmund are presented to the audience as almost entirely forgiveable. So much for 'self-identification'.

The mistake some people make in identifying the Bard, King and Queen of *The Festival* with the Brandel, King and Queen of *Captain Smith* is due to a kind of accident. While writing one of the scenes of *The Festival* it struck Manson that a very interesting but entirely different play from the one intended might develop from that scene. He therefore simply stole it (as it were) (*The Festival* III, 2), making it, with a few changes, the beginning of his new play *Captain Smith*, and developed from it the rest of *Captain Smith*, in which those three characters bear some likeness to the Brandel, King and Queen of the play within the play in *The Festival* (not the whole play) but are by no means identical with them.

As for the question of 'self-pity' in the three plays, the following kind of 'evidence' is adduced: in *The Festival* the ghost of Robert, Duke of Brandel, has deliberately brought about mutilation and a painful death upon himself by cutting the bridge from under him in order to save his country by saving its Queen, Isabel I, from capture, probable torture and death (How much Brandel loved life — much

more than the Queen did — Manson, with his rich and vivid poetry, forces us to imagine). Then for three hundred years he has been 'in the dark of death' — Manson makes us very nearly imagine that too! At length one night he 'comes to life' as a ghost and finds Isabel II, whom he mistakes for Isabel I, asleep in a forest. In a most moving scene he approaches her, whereupon, in fear and horror, she rejects him — she does not know him. It does not need much imagination to realise the bitter pain he feels; very conscious, since he loves Isabel, of the hideousness of his mutilation and deeply humiliated by the horrified rejection of him, after the delight of being 'alive' again and finding Isabel, he mutters as he limps back to death, 'I must go — grotesquely/Slowly down into the dark! — Like a twisted toad!'

*This* is called self-pity!

So! Our hero must keep a stiff upper lip no matter what has happened! He must not cry out — he must not be bitter! *That* is the novelettish, the sentimental, the 'romantic' idea of courage, not Manson's. Manson knew enough of what courage was from his own personal experience, as well as from his imagination, to realise that it is ridiculous to suppose that a brave man never wavers, never utters a human protest against his own suffering! It is not Manson who is sentimental here. It is his critics!

Similarly these critics call Pat Mulholland self-pitying — (and by saying Manson identifies himself with Mulholland they insult Manson) — because, for a moment, in a tearing rage, he excusably expresses what he has felt for years about his own life! It has been a life in which he has fought in a great war (we are given a glimpse of how dreadful that must have been in Curly's narrative). He has won a V.C. — an achievement of which he makes little. Most of all he has faced years of hardship and poverty, for his family as well as himself, and an almost complete lack of success or recognition (try that for yourselves, my prosperous or untried critics!) by following his own lights as a sculptor. On that day he has come home from the doctor's, with the news of his imminent death locked up in his breast, hoping to find some peace and relief at home. First Jenny, and then his wife, a little drunk, derides or negates the value of the sculpture which is at his life's core. Then at the 'special' but very frugal, supper the two females of the family have prepared for him in miserable, but unspoken, contrition, Jenny accidentally spills salad-oil over his trousers. *Of course* he flies into a rage (he is quick-tempered anyway). And of course, in the midst of his biting irony about the pretences of bourgeois family life, the central grievance of his life for one second comes out:

*Mulholland* (angrily): Nor is it noble and brave and true
To do what you think you have to do.

That has been called a 'trite jingle'. To a cold listener or reader, in fact, one not fully imagining the dramatic situation or the passionate pent-up feeling of the speaker — not, in fact, reading or seeing the play with everything that has happened until that moment in his mind — which is the way a play should be taken — it may be a jingle. To one feeling what all Mulholland's life has been like, and what has just happened to him that day (at the moment of the doctor's verdict, he had been firmly believing that he was just about to make his great break-through — to create the most wonderful piece of sculpture that he had ever done) — to such a one the 'jingle' is loaded with a most tragic irony. Next moment his words have sounded like a jingle to Mulholland himself, and how foreign such utterances of his deepest griefs are to his nature is shown in the very next line:

*Mulholland* (relapsing into heavy irony): Silly old Daddy for using such words!

As for the "sentimental" episode, as some critics call it, of May and Jenny's sailing the red paper boats 'on the quivering river' at night after Mulholland's death, it seems to me most eloquent. Consider the dramatic and poetic situation. Bogey and his father, the two artists in the family, share a vision expressed in one of Bogey's childish paintings. (Bogey, young as he is, is likely to become a greater artist than his father). They have imagined an estuary, about which Bogey has told Jenny, and Jenny on that last fatal day has told her mother. Pat and Bogey know this imaginary place so well that they can imitate the bird-sounds there. Jenny has described it beautifully; they imagine, she says, something 'secret and terrible and strange'. It's like a stream. It's 'bright — sort of leaping bright and spiteful' until, like an estuary, it vanishes into the unfathomable ocean (the passage is on pages forty-five and forty-six). 'And somehow that makes them terribly unhappy.' This passage is full of the mystery at the bottom of all life — it seems to suggest something like the lovely but frightening turbulence of life, followed by the blankness and peace of death. May and Mulholland have been estranged lately, and Jenny tells May that sometimes, when the vision is strong on Mulholland and his little son, Pat makes miniature boats of strong red paper, and the two of them go secretly to the river to sail them. Curly, Pat's erstwhile war-comrade, now homeless, has successfully persuaded Pat to tell his wife about the doctor's verdict, and afterwards at the slightly drunken party they give that night, because they both mean to 'die gay', (Curly, being an alcoholic in the last stages

of cirrhosis, must have drink, and in all the circumstances it is only human for the rest to drink too) — on this special occasion, for the first time Pat lets the others into the estuary 'game' — he makes five boats instead of two, so including Curly, Jenny and May. So now May dimly understands about the estuary, and the mystery it represents, and she feels most deeply and thankfully, though in a shadowy, subconscious way, that she and Pat had been reconciled before he died. Therefore she and Jenny sail the boats down the river, in something the same spirit as the Christian Vikings in *Magnus* burn the boat with Cormack's body in it, as a kind of funeral pyre, and send it down Loch Swilly. This action of May's, of sending the boats down the river, has the deepest emotional significance. In it is concentrated all the meaning of the play's estuary. Also it is a moonlight night. May's gesture is made in that light which is akin to May's being, 'Your mother is like the moon to me', Mulholland has said in the first act to Jenny.

To turn to *Captain Smith:* some critics complain of the frequent reversals in the action. Of course the play is choc-a-bloc with most violent change. That is the whole point of it. Smithy, though his innate goodness is angelic, is *mad*, and therefore he is most terrible and unaccountable. But the play has a climax, strongly marked. It occupies most, if not all, of the central act, Act II, and takes the most unusual form of a rest from the intense anxiety and tension of the first part of the drama. Only at the end of Act II, towards the end of Captain Smith's wonderfully imagined soliloquy — a soliloquy fathomless in its sadness — do we begin to realise that this blessed interval of peace may soon be over. At the end of the play we realise that all the bewildering changes and reversals in the action both before and after the unusual climax are welded together by it, and that the hidden pattern of it underneath the apparent sea-saw of the action has in fact been the classic one of exposition, complication, climax, resolution, catastrophe. For the resolution begins with the King's sneer to Smithy, doubting his courage, as Act III begins; and in spite of the almost-truth of Brandel's despairing cry: 'We are back where we started!', we are not back: a gradual, subtle, at first invisible change is beginning, and only when we look back at the end do we see fully with what artistry the knowledge that Captain Smith would in the end act as he does has been developed in our minds, so that finally we are not really surprised. That — his falling on his own sword, as Brandel, bewildered by Smithy's suddenly tossing it to him, holds it out, point towards Smithy — that was the only solution that the madman, being instinctively more good than mad, could have found. The catastrophe comes as a shock, but when it comes, we find that it is what we should have expected.

Some critics have referred slightingly to Brandel's speech about how he used to love to lead his country's nobility in ceremonial processions. It *is* nostalgic, but what is wrong with nostalgia when it is firmly rejected, no less than in Lawrence's *Piano?* It is certainly *not* just the lovely piece of decoration some people take it for. Brandel is young; he is almost certainly about to die; naturally he thinks longingly of that happiest part of his life that he now recalls. But the speech is also an *appeal* to Captain Smith, who shares his feelings about such vanished glories. Brandel is in an intolerable dilemma; he cannot hand over the innocent King and Queen to torture and death; he can't kill Smithy himself, though he tries to, and finds he hasn't the heart for it. Captain Smith is a dear old man, but he sees the ransom he will get for the King and Queen as his only means of escape from an incredibly ghastly Hell for all eternity, that he believes will be his fate if he offends God by not seizing this one chance of being able to pay a doctor to cure his madness — a worse Hell than Milton or perhaps even as terrible as that Dante imagined. The Hell the royal pair will suffer in being first tortured and then killed would be a mere waft of unpleasantness by comparison. And Brandel can't just wash his hands of it all and walk away. What can he do but issue his impossible challenge? He might, he really just might, by skill and sleight of hand, disarm Smithy. But he hopes to move Smithy enough to make him give up the impossible duel himself. Hence his nostalgic speech. He knows it will move Smithy, if anything can. And it almost does. But a trick of light around Brandel gives Smithy the insane idea of Brandel's being 'God's man,' and its being in God's plan that he himself, as 'the devil's man', should fight it out with him — and so Brandel loses the toss.

There is plenty of preparation for Smithy's tossing his sword to Brandel at the last moment. It is, in fact, 'just like him'. The strong root of goodness, kindness and self-sacrifice that proves finally ineradicable, has been shown a dozen times. It is in his conduct before he goes mad, it is in the way he is so moved, even when he is mad, by the Queen's youth and prettiness, by his horror at his own 'black blood', and by the mean things that madness has sometimes made him do. The play is a true tragedy, for when Brandel accidentally kills Smithy, as the Captain falls upon the naked sword that he has thrown to his friend, and is impaled, Smithy dies, sure that he is slipping as if down a glass mountain to that bottomless hell he so dreads. In view of the enormous amount and the true and passionate quality put into the writing of this play any critic who can call it sentimental or self-pitying must have read it with a temporarily paralysed imagination.

The creative imagination of a great writer never fails. But the

imagination of even the best critics sometimes does. Some of the critics who make such mistakes as those analysed above accuse Manson of sometimes 'lacking control'. To them we may reply in Roy Campbell's words:

> They praise the cool restraint with which you write
> I'm with them there, of course;
> You use the snaffle and the curb all right,
> But where's the bloody horse?

*Pietermaritzburg.*

## NOTES

[1] See *The Neophiliacs* by Christopher Booker.
[2] Fashions change so rapidly that 'modern' here means 'then modern'.

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# CORRESPONDENCE

## PARADOX IN FAULKNER'S *INTRUDER IN THE DUST*

The Editors,
*Theoria*,
Dear Sirs,

I must confess to some embarrassment in submitting this letter to *Theoria*. Mr Hutchinson's examination of the style of *Intruder in the Dust* in *Theoria* 39 has prompted me to carry out a long dormant wish of my own. The prompting in this case however, is not critical for Mr Hutchinson's task has, I think, been admirably fulfilled. I would rather hope to complement his endeavour from another vantage point and thus help to give this novel the recognition it deserves.

My stress will be largely on the intricate harmony between form and theme in the novel, allowing for two major qualifications.[1] The main aspect of this harmony I would like to consider is Faulkner's exploration of the contrast between false independence and true independence or freedom. Chick Mallison, in trying to avoid his overpowering awareness of Lucas's predicament, is seeking a false independence from concern and honour. His wish to ride as far and as fast as he can out of the town actually brands him as a slavish conformist, yielding himself up to the state of prejudice in his fellow citizens. His realisation of this escapist tendency culminates in the vision of the 'Face' which reveals to him the possibility of total servitude to mass will[2]. Opposed to this is Lucas's shrewd detachment and independence. Though he is very controlled emotionally, he is not at all indifferent (as he may at first appear). The circumstances of the murder themselves confirm this; he was present in the first place because of his concern for justice and honesty. His kindness to Chick at the outset is spontaneous and unconditional (with several Good Samaritan overtones, especially the factor of racial stigma). His whole manner, intended to exempt Chick from any sense of obligation, unfortunately has the reverse effect (was this perhaps how that man from Jericho also felt?).

Lucas has chosen a particular aloofness from the community in order to preserve a far more important bond with his family past — with what the McCaslin clan could have been. He comes into Jefferson only at rare intervals because he cannot allow himself to be degraded into conventional Negro habits; into being a stock inferior type to satisfy white prejudice. His visit to Gavin Stevens' office at the end of the novel (only a week after he was brought to the jail!) is thus a significant departure from his custom, a recognition in part of a

new relationship with the town, or at least some representatives of it. This is the kind of independence that Chick is to learn, precisely through making his time and energy unconditionally available to save Lucas.

While suppressed or unexamined guilt preserves the Southern mores, the novel shows us how conscious guilt may lead the individual to defy these mores and nevertheless, through the freedom thus offered, attain a satisfying relationship with his community. Chick's guilt, in relation to Lucas's rejection of the money, is offered to us as a microcosmic version of the guilt of his whole community in relation to Negroes. Through their everyday servitude (the kind that is only too easily ignored) Negroes are indeed seen to be the unacknowledged backbone of the land:

> the empty fields themselves in each of which on this day at this hour on the second Monday in May there should have been fixed in monotonous repetition the land's living symbol — a formal group of ritual almost mystic significance identical and monotonous as milestones tying the county-seat to the county's ultimate rim as milestones would: the beast the plough and the man integrated in one foundationed into the frozen wave of their furrow tremendous with effort yet at the same time vacant of progress . . .[3]

Here of course the awareness, as Mr Hutchinson suggests, is presented in terms of Chick's still prejudiced sense of Negro passivity. Lucas's two rescuing actions which initiate both aspects of the plot — Chick's aspects of the plot — Chick's guilt and the lynching attempt in turn — provides the significantly ironic challenge to this mode of thinking. As its central focus the novel has the white community exploiting the negro in order to obscure, even more deeply from itself, its own sense of guilt. This guilt is naturally wider in scope than inhumanity to the Negro, but what matters in the novel's context is that the community should try so fiercely to confirm its presumption about the danger and evil of Negroes. For what brings Lucas's life into such peril is that he was in fact trying to prevent *white* fratricide: Faulkner could not have dramatised more powerfully the way the Negro is manipulated to serve as scapegoat for white guilt.

It seems to me that what Faulkner is attempting to show about the nature of freedom in this novel can find expression only by means of paradox. The paradox involves the individual's relationship with himself, and with his community in space and time. A subtly symmetrical arrangement of incidents, both parallel and contrasting, is

the mode by which we are induced to experience the terms of this paradox for ourselves. Crudely stated, the paradox is that real freedom is from some points of view, very like false freedom or escape. This ironic similarity is however the means by which Faulkner persuades us of the crucial difference between the two.

Chick's behaviour in taking up Lucas's cause is deliberately made to resemble the compulsiveness of the mob. Commitment here almost deceives us with its deterministic guise. Much emphasis is placed on the irrevocability of the moments which lead from Chick's agreement with Lucas to look at the body of Vinson to his departure from home.[4] Yet finally these moments show him, not as trapped or fated, but 'set free'. What has happened is that his whole self has bound itself so completely to assisting Lucas that his body *seems* to have no control over its own movements; in reality it relentlessly denies the evasions that one part of his mind (like Sir Gawain's companion on the way to the Green Knight's cave) continues to offer him.

This, which I take to be the heart of Faulkner's perception in the novel, is possibly just where he is most likely to be misunderstood and seen to be denying free will or responsible action. Certainly he appears to avoid any sense that there are precise moments of conscious choice; not because he is a determinist, but because he wishes to recreate the way in which the whole personality involves itself in major choices. He sees choice, not as primarily unconscious, but rather intuitive, and thus unable to be broken down into analytical, rational terms.

Once Chick has inwardly realised his commitment to Lucas (a realisation that is not directly rendered except in terms of its consequences), he *seems* trapped into a certain kind of activity. Through the outward compulsiveness of his and the lynchers' actions Faulkner emphasises that both have taken a fundamental option. He then sets out to observe and compare the development in both, once this has occurred. Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale* reveals, through Leontes, how the individual builds his own world upon one crucial decision which is either creative or destructive. The imagery in the play involves startling correspondences between the two kinds of world: perhaps this is most strikingly found in Leontes's self-judgement

> 'I have tremor cordis on me; my heart dances
> But not for joy, not joy. . . .'[5]

The dancing of creative joy that is enacted in Act IV enforces our sense of how fearful has been Leontes's sick and twisted dancing of

the heart. Shakespeare's point, however, is the near-identity of the two kinds of consciousness when regarded from a fundamental perspective. One might refer also to Conrad's weird parallels between, Heyst and Jones, the two gentlemen in *Victory*. This novel is very much concerned with the question of fundamental inner choice between good or evil; yet the grotesqueness of the dichotomy between them is daringly fostered by Conrad through most surprising likenesses.

My examination of the paradox by which form and theme seem to be married in *Intruder in the Dust*, may be extended by looking at Faulkner's rich sense of spatial and temporal unity. This unity acts as the continuum within which Chick as unique individual, in unique moments, must attain his freedom. Central to the aspect of the paradox I'm now considering is the existence of Beat Four: its very isolatedness and noncomformity curiously makes it of focal importance for the sense of unity Faulkner creates. It seems one of his most intriguing conceptions, functioning, as all deeply realised symbols should, with convincing ease on the level of surface narrative. Precisely that kind of independence which Chick must lose to become a responsible 'individual' is embodied in its extremest form by Beat Four. This locality has no respect for the claims of the wider community, existing as a law to itself and enforcing its own kind of law through sheer violence. Further, it represents in its grossest dimension, the kind of outrage Chick experienced after being shamed at Lucas's house: the Negro is indeed so perpetual and grave a threat that his presence cannot be tolerated in Beat Four at any time. The tribe is in fact sustained and held together by the very fierceness of its hatred for Negroes.

It is not merely for the sake of plot therefore that Chick should come to Beat Four. In violating the grave of a tribe member by night, and with the aid of a Negro (Aleck Sander), Chick is committing the worst possible outrage *against* Beat Four and hence is being symbolically purged of his own, mostly latent, 'Burn' ethics. The inhabitants of Beat Four moreover seem more directly connected with the origins of Chick's society than the city people. Their environment closely reproduces 'the actual mountains in Carolina and before that in Scotland where his ancestors had come from.'[6] In confronting Beat Four, Chick confronts the earliest drives and obsessions of his people. His grim discovery in the Gowrie's graveyard reveals a fundamental rottenness in his whole society in which he too is deeply implicated:

> . . . it seemed to him now that he was responsible for having brought into the light and glare of day something shocking and

> shameful out of the whole white foundation of the county which he himself must partake of too since he too was bred of it, which otherwise might have flared and blazed merely out of Beat Four and then vanished back into its darkness or at least invisibility with the fading embers of Lucas' crucifixion.[7]

Having confronted Beat Four in itself, Chick has to realise that its spirit lives in the town and in himself: the hallucinatory Face which might have seemed only a manifestation of a barbarous outpost, is in fact the 'composite Face of his native kind his native land his people his blood his own.'[8]

Chick's two journeys out to Beat Four have a kind of inverse meaning for his own insight and development. By travelling towards Beat Four, he is spiritually travelling away from 'the long tradition of his native land', though 'it would be some time yet before he would realise how far he had come.'[9] The bridge and the Nine Mile Branch which Chick must cross on the way have an important symbolic function. Whereas Lucas rescued him from the Branch, he has both literally and figuratively to get *beyond* the Branch to rescue Lucas, but more importantly, himself, from the coils of fear and prejudice. The bridge emphasises that Jefferson and Beat Four *are* connected: the impulses of Beat Four are virtually allowed to swamp the town. On the other hand it allows someone like Chick to 'cross over' into a new realm of experience and expose the guilt in his community and himself. This double possibility is heightened by the eventual removal of Vinson's corpse to the quicksand under the bridge. In whichever direction the bridge is used the body, as a witness to inhumanity, has to be crossed over: either it breeds further inhumanity or a transforming resoluteness as in Chick.

It is during Chick's final approach with his uncle to the notorious region, Beat Four, that he is able to see virtually the entire county in perspective. This comprehensive 'vision' (it is so much more than visual detail) has a valuable bearing on all the concerns of the novel and needs to be quoted in full as a major reference point:

> . . . up and on to the last crest, the plateau and now he seemed to see his whole native land, his home — the dirt, the earth which had bred his bones and those of his fathers for six generations and was still shaping him into not just a man but a specific man, not with just a man's passions and aspirations and beliefs but the specific passions and hopes and convictions and ways of think- and acting of a specific kind and even race: and even more: even among a kind and race specific and unique . . . — unfolding beneath him like a map in one slow soundless explosion: to

> the east ridge on green ridge tumbling away towards Alabama and to the west and south the checkered fields and the woods flowing on into the blue and gauzed horizon beyond which lay at last like a cloud the long wall of the levee and the great River itself flowing not merely from the north but out of the North circumscribing and outland — the umbilicus of America joining the soil which was his home to the parent which three generations ago it had failed in blood to repudiate; by turning his head he could see the faint stain of smoke which was town ten miles away and merely by looking ahead he could see the long reach of rich bottom land marked off into the big holdings, the plantations (one of which was Edmonds' where the present Edmonds and Lucas both had been born, stemming from the same grandfather) along their own little river . . . and then the dense line of river jungle itself: and beyond that stretching away east and north and west not merely to where the ultimate headlands frowned back to back upon the waste of the two oceans and the long barrier of Canada but to the uttermost rim of earth itself, the North . . .[10]

The key words in this passage seem to be 'unique' and 'one'; the unique role of the individual, it suggests, is fulfilled only by his involvement in a tremendous organic unity of time and space. There is a simultaneous sense of triumph and destiny in Chick's recognition of his place in this organic world. He is irrevocably knit and conformed to it, yet uniquely relevant to it as a potential individual. The apparent outward movement by which he must find and assert his own identity as against society, is simultaneously a backward movement to affirm and renew his bond with society.

Ironically the Gowries are the most homogeneous representatives of Southern whitedom in the novel. This is most effectively and terrifyingly brought out by the image of the Face. Looking back at the mob blindly pursuing the Sheriff's car after Lucas's innocence has been established, he:

> . . . actually saw it — not faces but a face, not a mass nor even a mosaic of them but a Face: not even ravening nor uninsatiate but just in motion, insensate, vacant of thought or even passion: an Expression significantless and without past . . . without dignity and not even evocative of horror, just neckless slack-muscled and asleep . . .[11]

Gavin Stevens clearly sets great store by the homogeneity of the people and I agree with Mr Hutchinson that he acts as Faulkner's

self-conscious in such matters.[12] The anonymity of the Face however is surely meant to act as a polarising image which, by its bland and merely superficial homogeneity, enables us to apprehend more vividly the value of a fully cultural homogeneity. On the other hand Gavin's rhetorical outbursts against the North, apart from their tedious intrusiveness, incline us to be sceptical of his sense of homogeneity. For Gavin-Faulkner's political stance vis-à-vis the North, tends to turn the whole South into a kind of Beat Four of resistant defiance. While a Chick may rescue his local community from its Beat Fourish Grendel-urges, there is no suggestion that the entire South may need such a Beowulf. Faulkner's irony seems, in this area at least, incapable of penetrating his outraged thought of Northern interference.

For the above reason the problem of the Negro's freedom in the context of this novel becomes delicate indeed. The ending can't quite be reconciled with Gavin's insistence that only the South can free the Negro. Yes, Chick as representative of the finest that can arise from Southern cultural homogeneity does save Lucas, which is to free him in a physical sense at any rate. But in the sense of personal integrity Lucas is free throughout the novel, so that Faulkner could be suggesting (rather as the Black Consciousness movement seems to do) that only the Negro can set himself free. Yet if this affirmation *is* there, it is too ambiguously so. It's certainly too much to ask of the reader that he do some stunning eleventh-hour detective work to discover that Gavin Stevens has learnt this lesson and begun to question his earlier assurance. Chick's activity on which the story hinges is, one must admit, an overturning of his uncle's theories: can one however regard that slow-motion ritual payment as a tacit checkmate to the authorial patronage so frequently bestowed on Gavin? Perhaps, despite all that I have argued in this paragraph, the source of Faulkner's irony is that it is Chick and his countrymen who must be freed: only when they are freed in the sense of discovering the humanity of the Negro, can the Negro regard himself as free.

Beat Four acts as the spur to Chick's growing awareness and maturity in two ways. Not only does it reveal to him the evil, horror and violence contained in his own community and in himself, but that Beat Four itself contains what is fundamentally human and worthy of compassion. Already Chick has been amazed to see signs of grieving on Lucas's face after Molly's death. When his uncle and the sheriff confront Mr Gowrie, he realises incredulously that this old man is similarly possessed by grief for his son. People like Lucas and Mr Gowrie were obviously not included within his mental category of the fully human: 'he had seen grief twice now in two years where he had not expected it or anyway anticipated it, where in

a sense a heart capable of breaking had no business being.'[13] The reader too finds his expectation of a hateful villain disturbingly undermined.

Later when Chick makes a futile attempt to sleep for fifteen minutes, he seems to have no sense of fulfilment of his expectations: 'no grief to be remembered nor pity nor even awareness of shame.'[14] Instead the two images he cannot dismiss are those of the grieving Mr Gowrie and the Face. These two are juxtaposed in ironic contrast: the first concerns the discovery of humanity even in a 'violent foulmouthed godless old man'[15]; the second the discovery of the terrifying non-humanity even in his own much-loved community. The reconciliation of these two realisations, the suffering common to all men, and the mob's negation of individuality, also a possibility for all men, permits Chick finally to accept his place in the community. It seems important that a passage such as that quoted above from page 156 also suggests a kind of identification between Lucas and Gowrie. Only the recognition of common humanity in the patriarch of Beat Four and in its victim makes possible and convincing, the wry affirmativeness of the novel's resolution.

The really valuable sense of homogeneity offered by this novel might therefore be seen to lie in the widening circle of human sympathy experienced by Chick: first Lucas, then Mr Gowrie and most startling of all, the murderer himself. What makes the last so interesting is that Chick's (and our) compassion is evoked through empathy with the murderer's feverish efforts to bury, unbury and rebury. As murderer he has made his crucial choice; Faulkner then asks us to imagine his consequent nightmare:

> . . . and here it is again, the desperate the dreadful urgency, the loneliness the pariah-hood having not only the horror and repudiation of all man against him but having to struggle with the sheer inertia of earth and the terrible heedless rush of time but even beating all that coalition at last, the grave decent again even to the displaced flowers and the evidence of his original crime at last disposed and secure . . .[16]

Once again we find a paradoxical resemblance between his and Chick's compulsive-like activity: this does not of course merely evoke our sympathy but serves to underline finally in the novel the fundamental dichotomy between moral choice for or against life. What prevents the evocation from verging onto the sentimental in any way, is Miss Habersham's insistent reminder:

'He put his brother in quicksand.'[17]

In fact it is precisely *because* Crawford Gowrie's humanity has been realised for us, that we cannot excuse what he has so utterly denied in his brother. It is also significant that our pity for Crawford derives, at least partly, from his own sense of pariah-hood (as registered by Gavin), of having cut himself off deliberately from humanity.[18]

All the aspects I've been considering are very much bound up with Faulkner's sense of the unity of time in the novel. Faulkner himself seems to use the notion of a 'chronicle' for this purpose. When Chick first realises who Lucas is, after getting out of the creek, he thinks of his story as 'a piece, a fragment of the country's chronicle'.[19] Later he thinks about the 'verbiage' which surrounds encloses and insulates a murder 'intact into the chronicle of man'.[20] Not only is the past thought of as unalterable totality, but there is a suggestion of a determined pattern into which all events fit as they occur. This apparent fixity has led one critic to talk of Faulkner's 'inability to see what has passed as anything but an inevitability, part of a predictive grid thrown over the future and sterilizing it into a reproduction of the past.'[21] My discussion should have shown how false is the claim of sterility in relation to this novel (and, I think, to Faulkner's work as a whole): Chick's unique action (and Lucas's too) is clearly not a 'reproduction of the past'. There is certainly a superficial appearance of a time grid: those irrevocable moments I've already discussed, suggest that Chick is as mindlessly or compulsively determined as the mob. In fact what Faulkner' shows us is that Chick, not the mob, is helping to create that 'chronicle' which paradoxically is ever new, while shaped incessantly by the past. Faulkner's sense of a chronicle in which past, present and future *seem* as though already summed up, makes his evocation of a unique moment all the more forceful.

According to Gavin's explanation to Chick at the age of fourteen, the indivisibility of time may, on the one hand, suggest that July 1863 'hasn't happened yet, it hasn't even begun yet, it not only hasn't begun yet but there is still time for it to begin', while on the other 'It's going to begin, we all know that.'[22] Here he seems to suggest the way Southerners re-experience for themselves in imagination, the crucial experience of the Civil War, and consequently, continue to make the same choice as their forefathers.[23] The entire novel also insists on the presence of the past, but in order to understand it, not mindlessly or inhumanly to repeat it. It is the Face which represents rigid prejudice maintained as though nothing had happened since 1863. Chick's committed activity acts as the novel's powerful rejoinder to the implication in Gavin's speech that Southern youth are under a compulsion to perpetuate the consciousness of 1863.

Chick's obsessive memory of Lucas's refusal to accept payment acts as the preparatory image for the South's obsession with the Civil War issue. The discovery of his responsibility to Lucas frees him from his time obsession. All time is one, is now, insists Faulkner; not for stasis or impotence however, but for redeeming, fulfilling action (consider T. S. Eliot's sense of the possibilities of time in *Four Quartets:*

> What might have been and what has been
> Point to one end, which is always present.)

The Face is above all symbolic of the imminent and recurring possibility of stasis or impotence in the Southern involvement with time. It is a shocking witness to Chick of the truth of his uncle's message:

> '— you escape nothing, you flee nothing; the pursuer is what is doing the running and tomorrow night is nothing but one long sleepless wrestle with yesterday's omissions and regrets.'[24]

That this message is no argument for stasis or impotence is clear from what follows Chick's reverie. In the first place the reverie was necessary because he 'didn't dare relinquish into nothing what little he had left: which was nothing.'[25] So he must immerse himself thoroughly in the implications of this nothingness which seems to have resulted from his rescue of Lucas. Instead of the feeling that he has performed 'something passionate and brave and austere'[26], he is faced with a sense of total disillusionment and betrayal because of the Face. As he gradually spurns sleep altogether, the frantic turmoil and rush he has been engaged in for so long, have changed to a profound stillness and motionlessness.[27] This seems to be the turning point of the novel. Despite the 'absolute silence', he is aware of the 'vast systole and diastole of summer night': like the maximum or minimum point of a plotted curve, or like the 'mighty heart' of Wordsworth's London that is 'lying still', nothing has really stopped. The organic unity is still there and Chick is soon to find how inextricably he remains bound to it. Thus when his uncle counters his contemptuous 'they ran home', with the sympathetic but ironic 'at least they were moving', he begins to see how inadequate has been desire for a completed and satisfying achievement (one form of stasis).

After Chick has at last moved in response to his uncle's cues, they begin their long discussion on the reasons why the crowd ran away. Chick becomes so engrossed in the argument that he stands 'ready to step in one motion' out of his shirt and trousers for a considerable time.[28] As a technical device this helps to create a certain amount of tension, and to provide a humorous overtone. Only when Gavin

implies that Chick's attitude to the crowd is righteous, does he complete the action of undressing; pretending to ignore his uncle's remark, he stubbornly repeats his accusation 'They ran'. The episode that follows leads to his reconciliation with the community, as well as dramatising with great economy much of the novel's significance.

The undresssing is performed with too confident an ease:'flicking the shirt floating away behind him and at the same moment dropping the trousers and stepping barefoot out of them in nothing now but shorts.'[29] This presents an ironic parallel to Chick's first undressing in the novel: then he was obeying Lucas unwillingly, now he is *apparently* very much his own master. This outwardly independent attitude is betrayed however by a deep need to tell the truth. Firstly he begins to talk much faster than he intended; making a bid for sympathy in the suggestion that 'maybe this was too much to expect of us, too much . . . to have to bear.'[30] Then, discovering that he cannot control his speech at all, he manages to stop only when words are no longer necessary for self-revelation:

> . . . he had got the warning at last quite sharp not as if he had heard suddenly in advance the words he was going to say but as if he had discovered suddenly not what he had already said but where it was going, what the ones he had already spoken were going to compel him to say in order to bring them to a stop: but too late of course like mashing suddenly on the brake pedal going downhill then discovering to your horror that the brake rod had snapped: '— only there was something else too — I was trying . . .' and he stopped them at last feeling the hot hard blood burn all the way up his neck into his face and nowhere even to look not because he was standing there almost naked to begin with but because no clothes nor expression nor talking either smoke-screened anything from his uncle's bright grave eyes.'[31]

Here we find the climax to Faulkner's use of paradoxical likeness between compulsiveness and committed awareness or activity. Through the snapping brake-rod image, Chick's discovery of personal humility is made to seem like a fateful disaster in order to convey a sense of its overwhelming, totally transforming impact. The 'hot hard blood' helps to complete the parallel with his experience in the first chapter, while the sensation of burning ironically suggests the catharsis within him of his community's 'Burn' mentality. Furthermore the first shame (at Lucas's house) is present within this second shame: here the indivisibility of time and the fact that one escapes

nothing pass from philosophising to vivid reality. No longer trapped through fear and prejudice as he was at Lucas's house, Chick is now released from a false sense of superiority and righteousness. He is indeed no better than his fellow townsmen whom he rightly accuses of running home 'to hide their heads under the bedclothes from their own shame.'[32] If they kept moving to *escape* the burden of their shame, he must in turn keep moving in refusing ever to tolerate shame or injustive for others.

The central irony of this novel emerges therefore, in my view, through Chick's transcending the possible stagnation of 'chronicle' and environment, in order to re-affirm his belonging to both, and his concern for both. Freedom and heroic compassion, Faulkner suggests, are achieved only by an individual, immersed in the historical consciousness of his race, yet able to reverse its most inhuman tendencies by having experienced in an agonising conscious way, the pressure of those tendencies. Through doing so, this individual discovers his own identity and simultaneously, a way of accepting and living with the shame and guilt he has exposed in the community.

The paradoxical relationships between the individual and the community, between independence and unity (also homogeneity), between immersion in the past and unique transformation of the chronicle seem to be wonderfully captured in the novel's final scene. Since Mr Hutchinson has provided a fairly detailed commentary on the climax of this scene however, I shall confine myself to earlier aspects of it.

To Gavin's first floor office in the midst of the dense Saturday traffic, Lucas comes to pay the expenses for his case. Only in this unique centre is the previous Saturday recalled; the shopping crowd seems to have come in greater throngs than ever before, unconsciously to compensate for, and to forget, that Saturday. The distance and height from which Chick watches the crowds, represents his newly-earned detachment, although he is very much involved with the activity below. What chiefly fascinates him is the 'motion and the noise, the radios and the automobiles.'[33] This sheer delight in motion has accumulated ironic overtones, especially because of Gavin's repeated (and annoyingly sententious) advice: 'Just don't stop.' and that profound stillness referred to earlier. The motion is an expression of solidarity, childish as it may seem; the square acts as a magnetic hub round which the cars must move to experience unity in the form of an 'interlocked mosaic' of cars (compare the Face, which was *not* a mosaic of faces). The noise, too, is important. Although the people seem deliberately to have attempted to increase it in every possible way so that nobody would be 'threatened with a second of silence' (and thus, no possibility of anything like Chick's

recent profound self-discovery), Faulkner's attitude is not disparaging. The tone is more that of tolerant, almost amused resignation, consistent with Chick's rejection of personal superiority (it is, of course, through Chick's eyes that the scene is primarily registered).

Chick finds a way of participating imaginatively in the banal fiesta. The long line of car roofs suggests to him the quaint possibility of riding a gaited horse over them on a bridge of planks:

> . . . thinking of the gallant the splendid and really magnificent noise a horse would make racking in any direction on a loose plank bridge two miles long . . .[34]

Implicit in this fantasy is Chick's new relation to the community: though he has accepted it, he remains detached and receptive to fresh, more invigorating possibilities than it does. The bridge of planks recalls the wooden bridge on the way to Beat Four but this one rests on the community itself; whatever Chick achieves cannot be abstracted, the image suggests, from his membership of that community.

The new relationship between Chick and Lucas is beautifully and simply suggested by three lines of conversation:

> (Lucas) 'You aint fell in no more creeks lately, have you?'
> 'That's right', he said. 'I'm saving that until you get some more ice on yours.'
> 'You'll be welcome without waiting for a freeze,' Lucas said.[35]

J. A. KEARNEY

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## NOTES

[1] The first of these qualifications, the obtrusive presence of Faulkner himself in much of what Gavin Stevens says, has already been dealt with by Mr Hutchinson, though my letter makes some further points related to this view. For treatment of the second qualification, my sense that Faulkner exploits the myth of the Southern lady for this novel's purposes, there is unfortunately not sufficient space in this letter.
[2] *Intruder in the Dust*, Penguin, pp. 175-6.
[3] Ibid. p. 143.
[4] Ibid. pp. 82-3.
[5] *The Winter's Tale*, I.iii. lines 111-2.
[6] *Intruder in the Dust*, p. 98.
[7] Ibid. p. 134.
[8] Ibid. p. 187.
[9] Ibid. p. 94.

[10] Ibid. pp. 146-7.
[11] Ibid. pp. 175-6.
[12] *Theoria 39*, pp. 39 and 44.
[13] *Intruder in the Dust*, p. 156.
[14] Ibid. p. 186.
[15] Ibid. p. 156.
[16] Ibid. p. 222.
[17] Ibid. p. 223.
[18] The possibility of extending the circle of humanity to Northerners in this novel doesn't seem to get beyond a few hints: the 'umbilicus of America' reference (p. 147) and the signs of the community's assimilation of Northern materialism in the final scene.
[19] Ibid. p. 8.
[20] Ibid. p. 87.
[21] Eric Mottram, 'Mississippi Faulkner's Glorious Mosaic of Impotence and Madness', *Journal of American Studies*, April 1968.
[22] Ibid. p. 188.
[23] Mr Hutchinson deals with this aspect in terms of Jungian archetypal unconscious. (p. 35).
[24] Ibid. p. 189.
[25] Ibid. p. 186.
[26] Ibid. p. 187.
[27] See p. 189.
[28] Ibid. p. 191.
[29] Ibid. p. 197.
[30] Ibid. p. 198.
[31] Ibid. p. 198.
[32] Ibid. p. 195.
[33] Ibid. p. 229.
[34] Ibid. p. 230.

# DYLAN THOMAS

The Editors,
*Theoria*,
Natal University,
Pietermaritzburg.

Dear Sirs,

I should like to thank Mr M. B. Gardiner for his letter (*Theoria* 39) referring to my article on the poetry of Dylan Thomas. There are many points, however, on which I take issue with him.

My chief complaint is that I find Mr Gardiner thrusting me into a role which I took some trouble to repudiate. The role is that of 'a Dylan Thomas fan', and its characteristic gestures would presumably include prostration before the untrammelled genius of the Master (or 'Dylan' since anything more formal would violate the special intimacy which should exist between the Bard and the tenderly vibrating enthusiast); a swooning capitulation to those passions and rhythms which make reasoned judgement an impertinence, and a rejection of the adult world, with its 'bourgeois' demands, in favour of fantasies and dream-states which constitute a higher reality.

Mr Gardiner begins his letter in this way: 'I am one of those readers Mr Crewe refers to in his article as having to overcome resistance to the poetry of Dylan Thomas.' One would assume that Mr Gardiner speaks for that body of responsible readers dedicated to resisting hysterical or adolescent enthusiasms, and that his letter is at very least a plea for good sense and critical discrimination. May I, however, remind Mr Gardiner that I wrote: '. . . for readers brought up on "the great tradition" (*and of these I am one*) there is a strong resistance to be overcome before Thomas can be taken really seriously." Nowhere in my article did I argue in favour of unconditional capitulation.

Mr Gardiner writes: 'Instead of contrasting Thomas's poem with poems by Wordsworth and Vaughan, I think Mr Crewe ought to have examined a poem by the man whose work stands as an essential corrective to Thomas's writings, D. H. Lawrence.' I do not see the point of this remark. The contrast Mr Gardiner rejects did, after all, enable me to make precisely the point he makes about the dangers of Thomas's attitude to childhood ('Those were the best days of my life'). That the point *might* also be made with reference to Lawrence does not mean that it *ought* to be made in that way. It may surprise Mr Gardiner to hear that his comparison between 'Piano' and 'Fern Hill' is not new to me, and that, although I share his high estimate of

Lawrence, it seems to me that repeated prescription of Lawrence as an 'essential corrective' is as dangerous in its way as the refusal to prescribe him — especially in circumstances in which the prescription would be redundant. One may surely assume that one is entitled to discuss any author without obligatory reference to the 'essential corrective'?

Mr Gardiner says: 'When Mr Crewe describes the child in "Fern Hill" as being "the centre of a harmonious universe that exists equally within and beyond his own mind, and the 'within' and 'beyond' are inseparable", he touches on the strength of "Fern Hill" and the weakness of Thomas's account of life'. Mr Gardiner appears to be unaware that he is endorsing rather than challenging my view, since I wrote: '"Fern Hill" is one of Thomas's most easily accessible poems because the kind of cosmic egotism . . . (it) . . . contains is easier to take in a child than in an adult.'

I think the essence of Mr Gardiner's argument is contained in this sentence: 'That harmony (i.e. the paradisal harmony of "Fern Hill"), which is valid for only *certain* states of childhood and adulthood . . . is never really challenged in Thomas's poetry.' Mr Gardiner can hardly claim that I did not entertain this possibility, since a great deal of space in the article in question is devoted to it, and to some of its corollaries. In my analysis of 'Fern Hill' in particular I was at pains to consider what elements (if any) within the poem set up such a 'challenge', or modify the monolithic effect of adult nostalgia for the world of childhood. It may be that there is no 'real' challenge, but Mr Gardiner has wholly declined to consider my arguments, which embraced specific details of the poems I examined, as well as the ontology of Thomas's world in general.

Mr Gardiner refers to two quotations I used, one from *Poets of Reality* by J. Hillis Miller, and one from Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*. Mr Gardiner takes the first of these quotations to mean something so utterly different from what I take it to mean that I can hardly discuss with him the point that emerges from it. He also says it is absurd that I should use the 'splendid' quotation from Nietzsche as a clinching summary of what is *found* in Thomas's poetry. My word, deliberately chosen, was not 'found', but '*offered*'. I may add that in addition to misquoting, Mr Gardiner systematically disregards any attempts on my part to qualify bald statements, or to use words which imply a complex judgement of the phenomena they refer to. For example, I assume that in common usage 'seductive' is not a word conveying simple commendation, but Mr Gardiner appears to think otherwise.

I am also accused of making a bombastic attempt to assert the 'relevance' of Thomas's poetry to 'contemporary fashions'. Though

that is not precisely what I was doing, I see no harm in repeating the fairly tame and obvious suggestion that Thomas may be relevant to our understanding of certain aspects of contemporary literature and society. The fact that Mr Gardiner *dislikes* Thomas is irrelevant to the issue.

One of my own misgivings about my article (it seems that I needn't have worried!) was that in trying to strike a fair balance in discussing Thomas I had ended up having it both ways, or simply sitting on the fence. My approach was dictated partly by the requirements of the course of lectures of which the original talk on Thomas's poetry formed a part, but also by the belief that neither Thomas's simplistic partisans, nor those who had subjected his work to close Scrutiny, had said the last word. I hope Mr Gardiner will forgive me for saying what has evidently escaped him — that *his* argument against Thomas is precisely the stock argument I examined in my article, and which he will find paraphrased there in some detail. At least, it is my impression that when Mr Gardiner says: 'The poem "Fern Hill" does have a certain limited appeal, but that appeal lies solely within the domain of and indulgent child-fantasy world rather self-consciously evoked by an adult . . .' he is not saying anything very different from this: 'It has sometimes been said that "Fern Hill" is sentimental in that it presents, instead of the actuality of childhood, a nostalgically idealised state of being into which the adult may project himself . . .' This occurs at the beginning of my discussion of "Fern Hill".

Though naturally I hesitate to prescribe it, the essential corrective to Mr Gardiner's letter would be another reading of the article which provoked it.

J. V. CREWE

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