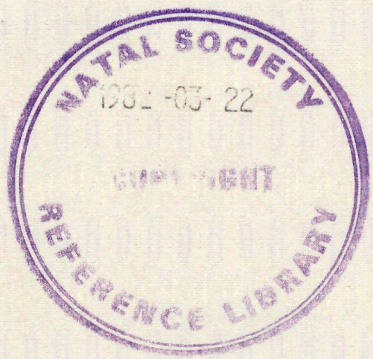
THEORIA

A JOURNAL OF STUDIES
in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol. LVII



October 1981 57 **R2,50 (+ 10c GST)**

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in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences
Vol. LVII
October 1981

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Published twice yearly by the
UNIVERSITY OF NATAL PRESS
PIETERMARITZBURG

CONTRIBUTIONS

Authors should send contributions to:

The Editors,
Theoria,
P.O. Box 375,
Pietermaritzburg 3200,
South Africa.

Articles intended for the May issue should reach the editors not later than 15th March and articles for the October issue not later than 15th August.

Authors are asked to send typescripts which are double-spaced. Single quotation marks should be used for quotations, and double quotation marks only for a quotation within a quotation. When the title of a book is given it should be underlined. Notes should be consolidated at the end of the articles, not inserted as footnotes. An abstract not more than 200 words in length should accompany an article.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

These should be sent to:

The Secretary,
University of Natal Press,
P.O. Box 375,
Pietermaritzburg 3200,
South Africa.

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THE EDITORS

BULWER, CHELMSFORD AND THE BORDER LEVIES

by J.P.C. LABAND

'Sir H. Bulwer', remonstrated Lieutenant-General Lord Chelmsford in a long and self-exculpatory despatch to the Commander-in-Chief of the British Army, the Duke of Cambridge, 'from my first arrival in Natal has thrown every obstacle in my way'.[1] Those lines were written in April 1879, by which date relations between Chelmsford, the General Officer Commanding in South Africa, and Sir Henry Bulwer, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Colony of Natal, had reached their absolute nadir. Not that they had ever been completely unclouded. When in August 1878 Chelmsford had arrived in Natal bent on making the necessary military arrangements for an apparently impending campaign in Zululand, he had found Bulwer unconvinced of the necessity, or even the justice, of the contemplated war. Such a divergence of attitudes did not make for easy cooperation, though initially Chelmsford and Bulwer had been able to discuss several issues 'in the most friendly spirit and without reservation.'[2] The atmosphere of goodwill had rapidly dissipated, however, and Bulwer had come rapidly to resent the bellicose and impatient tone of Chelmsford and his military Staff, and to find them 'not very pleasant to deal with'.[3] Over the coming months many areas of friction were to develop between the military and civil authorities. Yet none was to be more vexed than the dispute over the deployment and command of the Natal border levies, for the issue came to represent the essence of the struggle between the Lieutenant-General and the Lieutenant-Governor for dominance in the Natal sphere of military operations related to the war in Zululand.

On setting up his headquarters in Pietermaritzburg, Chelmsford was at once appalled to encounter the Natal government's insouciance and lack of military preparedness in the face of what he considered the likelihood of a sudden Zulu raid into the Colony. He was only too conscious that once the three columns of his army had invaded Zululand, the whole extended and ill-defended Natal border with that kingdom would be exposed to a devastating counter-attack. To meet this threat, the colonial authorities seemed to be relying solely on the passive defence of the white community, who during such an emergency would take to the various laagers and fortified posts then in the process of improvement or construction about Natal, while the unfortunate black population was to be left to take care of itself as best it could.[4] Faced with the prevalent belief that the idea of a Zulu in-

vasion was in any case 'absurd', Chelmsford indignantly undertook to disabuse the Natal government, to chivvy its members out of the 'fools' paradise' where he was convinced they had taken refuge, and to force them to take up the pressing question of their own defence.[5]

In this task the Lieutenant-General had needs of an ally, and in Sir Bartle Frere, the British High Commissioner in South Africa, he was assured of the staunchest support. Frere had come to South Africa in 1877, specifically commissioned by the British government to speed up the process of confederation. He had rapidly come to the conclusion that the independent Zulu kingdom posed an obstacle to his plans, and had therefore to be eliminated. Consequently Chelmsford, in making preparations for a war against Zululand, which Frere was trying to engineer, was acting in strict accordance with the High Commissioner's intentions.[6] But it would not have suited Frere at all to have Natal ravaged by the Zulu. Therefore Chelmsford felt perfectly justified in writing to Frere, representing that his presence in Pietermaritzburg was absolutely essential if Bulwer and his advisers were to be persuaded to take adequate measures against a possible Zulu onslaught.[7]

Frere, as the Imperial Agent in South Africa, and in his capacity as High Commissioner and military Commander-in-Chief,[8] was superior to both Bulwer and Chelmsford, and so was ideally placed to arbitrate between them. He was also, if it became necessary, in a position to support one against the other. Frere was unable to arrive in Pietermaritzburg before 28 September 1878. Nevertheless by that date Chelmsford had succeeded, unaided, in bringing the Natal government around to his way of thinking. The Lieutenant-General was staying at Government House as a guest of Bulwer's, and though the two men were increasingly at variance with each other on any number of issues, they still managed in their many private conversations to maintain a 'most amicable manner'. Gradually, these discussions paved the way for a meeting on 10 September of the Defence Committee of the Natal Government's Executive Council. Invited to attend, Chelmsford grasped the opportunity to speak out freely. The Committee had met frequently in the past but, to Chelmsford's mind, Bulwer had on those occasions sabotaged any positive consequences through excessive bureaucratic pedantry. This time, though, he allowed all of Chelmsford's suggestions to be adopted,[9] and by 26 November the Executive Council had finalized their arrangements for the defence of the Colony.[10]

Natal was divided into seven Defensive Districts and two Sub-Districts,[11] each under the command of a Colonial District Commander, responsible to the Natal government. These officers had

command of the laagers and fortified posts in their Districts, as well as whatever forces they could raise, until such time as their Districts might be placed under direct military command.[12] Very few whites, though, would be available for military service in their Districts, as the Natal Mounted Volunteer Corps and the bulk of the Natal Mounted Police had been placed at the disposal of the military authorities invading Zululand, while those that remained would be needed to man the laagers. This meant that the real defence of the border Districts would have to be left in the hands of the black population.[13]

Despite much settler disquiet over the wisdom of arming the 'natives', Chelmsford had from the outset been determined to augment the imperial troops under his command with black auxiliaries, to be raised from Natal's Native Reserves. During November and December 1878 nearly 8 000 were drafted, either into the seven battalions of the Natal Native Contingent, or into Pioneer, Transport and Hospital corps. All of these units fell under the command of the military, and not colonial authorities, and were intended for service in Zululand. On the other hand, it was agreed that the additional levies that the Colonial District Commanders would have to raise for the defence of the border once the British troops and their colonial supports had marched into Zululand, would be maintained by the Natal government.[14] Chelmsford had initially held extravagant plans for these border levies, envisaging a standing force of some 6 000. But Bulwer was able to fend him off, pleading that his government had not the desire nor, most likely, the financial wherewithal to keep such a large body of men in the field. Instead, he proposed a scheme whereby all the blacks living along the border with Zululand would constitute the force guarding it. Each Colonial District Commander would raise a small standing Border Guard of a few hundred men, posted under white levy-leaders at strategic drifts along the river. These would be supplemented by a Reserve of fighting-men furnished by each chief in the vicinity of the border. The Border Guard and Reserves would be able to relieve each other at intervals, thus enabling them without too great a disruption to continue with their normal occupations. Bulwer's plan had what was, to his mind, the three-fold advantage of saving his government the cost of rations, clothing and shelter because the border levies would be spending so much time at their homes; of actually mobilizing more men along the border than could have been achieved with a standing force as envisaged by Chelmsford; and of allowing the blacks to fight as they preferred, employing their traditional tactics, which they would not have been able to do if organized into regular British-style units as was the Natal Native Contingent. After considerable debate, Chelmsford gave

way to Bulwer in late December 1878.[15] In reality he had been left with but little option, for the Zululand campaign was about to open and arrangements, even unsatisfactory ones, had to be finalized. There was just time enough in hand. By the first week of January the Colonial District Commanders had called out their levies along the Tugela and Buffalo frontier and, just a few days later — on 11 January 1879 — the British began their invasion of Zululand.

Almost at once, on 22 January, disaster overwhelmed Lord Chelmsford's Centre Column at Isandlwana and forced him to retire over the Buffalo into Natal. By this action the Left Column under Colonel Wood was also constrained to fall back; but the Right Column, which had fought its way to the mission-station at Eshowe, was blockaded in its hastily fortified position. After the first thunderstruck spasms of panic at this totally unanticipated turn of events had subsided somewhat, Chelmsford feverishly set about restoring the military situation. During February and March he toured the border improving the defensive posts, and began deploying the reinforcements rushed out to him by the appalled imperial government at Westminster. His plan was first to relieve Colonel Pearson's garrison at Eshowe, and then to launch a major new offensive deep into the heart of the Zulu kingdom.

To Chelmsford, about to commit a major part of his available forces to the Eshowe Relief Column, it seemed axiomatic that not only should he have the final say in deciding on the dispositions of the colonial troops left manning the border to his rear, but that they should also actively assist his advance on Eshowe by making diversionary raids across the Tugela river line.[16] Bulwer instantly and vigorously opposed the Lieutenant-General's requirements as far as they concerned the border levies. For one thing, he stood firmly by the prerogatives, vested in him as Lieutenant-Governor, as Supreme Chief of the 'native population' of Natal. In terms of these, Bulwer alone was empowered to call up the blacks in time of war, and he was adamant that 'no provision is made for the supersession of the Lieutenant-Governor by any military or other authority.'[17] He could, of course, make over the command of any black troops raised in Natal to the military, as had been the case with the Natal Native Contingent. But the border levies had not been, and were (as we have seen) maintained by the Natal colonial authorities rather than by the British military ones. It was perfectly true that the three Colonial Defensive Districts along the Buffalo and Tugela had in early January been placed under overall military command,[18] and Bulwer had then conceded that the military would be assured of the right to give any directions 'regarding the distribution and disposal' of colonial troops which 'for military reasons may at any time appear necessary for the bet-

ter defence of the District';[19] but that did not mean that Bulwer had abandoned his ultimate authority over the border levies nor, more immediately, that he had ever sanctioned their employment on military service in Zululand. There was the nub. If the Lieutenant-General planned to use the border levies in a way which the Lieutenant-Governor considered foolhardy or ill-advised, then Bulwer was prepared to invoke his powers to prevent him. And indeed, Bulwer gravely doubted the wisdom of allowing his border levies to make raids into Zululand. In his stand Bulwer received the unexpected support of Sir Bartle Frere, though for reasons rather different from his own. The High Commissioner merely feared that the 'raw' border levies would be 'next to useless' if used for 'offensive purposes', and should rather be reserved for passive defence along the border line.[20] The nature of Bulwer's objections was succinctly expressed in a Resolution of 1 March 1879, adopted by the Executive Council of the Colony. In it, 'raiding expeditions' were stigmatized, 'as being an impolitic and undesirable system of war . . . calculated to provoke retaliation, and . . . tending to demoralize the people engaged in it.'[21] Bulwer was willing to grant, however, that in the event of a Zulu raid into Natal, the border levies were 'free' to pursue the raiders back over the border.[22]

Chelmsford was not prepared to countenance the reservations of the civilian authorities. He persisted in his conviction that if the forces defending the border were to be effective, they must on occasion be prepared to go over to the offensive and to strike at the Zulu facing them across the river. In the short term such action would serve to create a useful diversion in favour of the column advancing to the relief of Eshowe; while in the long term it was supposed that a vigorous adoption of what Chelmsford termed the 'active defence' would force the Zulu to abandon the border zone altogether, thus significantly diminishing their ability to mount raids against the Colony.[23] Confident of the wisdom of such a strategy, and contemptuous of the colonial authorities' craven and unproductive reliance on passive defence centred around the settlers' laagers, the Lieutenant-General resolved to proceed regardless with his plans for the border levies and to employ them as he thought best. If by doing so he acted without the prior sanction of the Lieutenant-Governor, then the consequences would simply have to be faced as best they could once Bulwer discovered what he had done. The obvious drawback with such an approach was that it required duplicity, but Chelmsford no doubt considered that the circumstances warranted it. Perhaps it was Frere's departure from Natal on 15 March to deal with pressing problems in the Transvaal[24] that spurred Chelmsford on in the underhand course he was about to adopt. Although Frere

had not favoured the use of border levies for raiding Zululand, he was not opposed to raids as such and advocated, moreover, the prospect of a military man taking charge of Natal and of subordinating everything there to the conduct of the war.[25] For Chelmsford the loss of his sympathetic and powerful support at Bulwer's very elbow was certainly calculated to make it very difficult, if not impossible, to win the Lieutenant-Governor over to his conception of the proper rôle for the levies stationed along the border.

That Chelmsford had early determined on proceeding behind Bulwer's back was borne out by his letter of 3 March to Colonel Wood, in which he confided that as soon as he was in a position to move on Eshowe he hoped to be able 'to send in large raiding parties with a hooroosh.'[26] Yet within a fortnight of writing that letter he met Bulwer at Pinetown and left him with the most distinct impression that he had bowed to the Lieutenant-Governor's insistence that the border levies should be employed exclusively for the defence of the border, and should not raid into Zululand. He certainly let Bulwer know that he might require them to demonstrate along the river in order to create a diversion, but he made no reference to sorties into the enemy's country.[27] The Pinetown meeting, aimed ostensibly at clearing up the differences between the Lieutenant-General and the Lieutenant-Governor concerning the employment of the border levies, had in fact been exploited by Chelmsford to allay Bulwer's suspicions as to his real, and unexpressed, intentions. Once Bulwer found out that he had been misled, what had passed at the meeting became a matter for intense recriminations. Meanwhile, Bulwer proceeded in good faith. In accordance with what he understood to be the Lieutenant-General's requirements, he issued instructions on 15 March ordering the Colonial District Commanders along the border to move their levies up to the river, not preparatory to leading them across it, but to make demonstrations along the Natal bank should the military authorities request this.[28]

While Bulwer fulfilled his part of the Pinetown accord, Chelmsford proceeded with his cynically disguised preparations. In his letter of 17 March to Wood, concerning his imminent march on Eshowe, he bluntly declared:

> '. . . I shall tell the border Commandants to make demonstrations all along the line . . . and if the river admits to raid across'.[29]

Word was accordingly passed along the border to the various Commanders to demonstrate and raid across the river in order to divert attention from Chelmsford's advancing column. Major A. C. Twentyman, the military commander of the Middle Border,

began his demonstration on 24 March, and on 2 and 3 April sent small raiding parties over the flooded river, which burned a couple of deserted Zulu homesteads.[30]

Bulwer was absolutely ignorant of these developments. The first intimation he gained of Twentyman's sorties across the Tugela was on 7 April, when he received a copy of a military telegram. Sent from Eshowe, which Chelmsford had just relieved, it called for 'raids to be made across the Border wherever feasible'.[31] Bulwer's initial reaction was to suppose that the instructions concerned only those troops under direct military authority, such as the Natal Native Contingent and Natal Mounted Volunteers. He simply could not believe that they were intended also to apply to the border levies who, as Chelmsford had apparently conceded at Pinetown, were to serve only within Natal, and whose employment over the border Bulwer had never authorized. But that very evening he was disabused, when a report written on 2 April by Mr W.D. Wheelwright, Colonial Commandant of District VII, was handed to him.[32] In it Wheelwright reported that Major Twentyman, under whose overall military command Colonial District VII fell, had indeed requested him and his border levies to participate with the other units under his direct command in demonstrating, and in making raids into Zululand. But, Wheelwright went on to write, although perfectly willing to assist Twentyman by supporting him with his levies along the Natal bank, he had refused to send any of the troops under his command across the river without the prior and explicit 'sanction of the Government'. In taking that decision he had been acting in full knowledge of the Government's expressed disapproval of raids into Zululand, and consequently expected the Government's support for his action, should Lord Chelmsford object to his conditional compliance with Twentyman's request for his cooperation.[33] Wheelwright was not destined to be disappointed in his petition, for the Lieutenant-Governor heartily endorsed his refusal to allow his levies to cross into Zululand without the Government's sanction.[34] Furthermore, on 9 April he wrote to both Frere and Chelmsford officially supporting Wheelwright's stand, and roundly deploring the likely adverse consequences of the raids.[35] He phrased his objections most forcibly in his letter to Frere.

> 'The burning of empty kraals', he wrote, 'will neither inflict much damage upon the Zulus, nor be attended with much advantage to us; whilst acts of this nature are, so it seems to me, not only calculated to invite retaliation, but to alienate from us the whole of the Zulu nation . . . including those who are well disposed to us . . . (W)e run a risk of driving

> every Zulu into a desperate defence of his country, and thereby incur the further risk of making the war a long and tedious one'.[36]

For his part, Chelmsford adopted the strategy of taking extreme exception to what he was pleased to view as Bulwer's unwarranted interference with his military arrangements. In doing so, one suspects, he was merely practising his own repeatedly proclaimed preference for the 'active defence', for in all truth his position was an untenable if not dishonourable one. But this did not prevent him on 11 April from writing a very effective, disingenuous complaint to the Duke of Cambridge. Despite his intimate knowledge that since January the military command along the border had been by arrangement with Bulwer an essentially divided one, he protested with a show of righteous indignation to the Duke that 'the Lieutenant-Governor of Natal . . . actually sent orders without consulting me or my Staff forbidding any native to cross the border.'[37] Having hopefully secured a vital ally, the following day he carried the attack directly into the enemy's camp. He informed Bulwer in the starchiest of terms that the Lieutenant-Governor's refusal to allow his orders to the 'native forces' to be carried out was 'fraught with such dangerous consequences' that he considered it necessary to refer the whole question of military command in South Africa to the Home Government.[38]

Bulwer, understandably, could accept neither Chelmsford's invidious complaints nor the aspersions they cast upon his integrity as Lieutenant-Governor. In his spirited rejoinder of 15 April, he pointed out to Chelmsford that he had done no more than to approve of Wheelwright's stand in refusing to raid across the Tugela subsequent to the event. Considering, moreover, that the position adopted by Wheelwright was perfectly in line with the terms of the Pinetown accord, as they were understood by him and his Government, Bulwer was furthermore quite justified in firmly making clear that he considered the part the Lieutenant-General had played in the affair had hardly furnished him with adequate grounds for taking the moral tone he had in his various letters of complaint. Having parried Chelmsford's thrusts, Bulwer then proceeded to prepare the ground for his own counter-attack. He concluded his letter with the ominous observation that Chelmsford's ordering of the levies over the border was 'at entire variance' with the understanding they had arrived at at Pinetown, and that he had proceeded without Bulwer's authority, or 'any reference' to him whatsoever.[39]

The very next day on 16 April Bulwer followed up his riposte to Chelmsford with an enormous, eleven-page despatch to Sir Michael Hicks Beach, Secretary of State for the Colonies. During

the course of it he rehearsed all his reservations over the policy of raiding over the border, his understanding of the terms of the Pinetown conversation, and the unfairness of Chelmsford's allegations concerning his 'interference' with military affairs. He then went on to reiterate that the border levies had never been placed under the Lieutenant-General's command, and that he had never authorized their employment over the border. That being the case, he insisted vehemently that Chelmsford in ordering them into Zululand

> 'without any authority, without my concurrence, and positively without any reference to me, — has exceeded his powers and acted without due regard for the authority of this Government.'[40]

While the Government in London proceeded to digest the counter-accusations hurled at each other in their despatches, and to attempt to judge between them, Bulwer and Chelmsford, now both thoroughly aroused, continued with their mutual battle of words. In his response to Bulwer's letter of 15 April, Chelmsford succeeded in fanning the flames of dispute yet higher. He flatly denied that at Pinetown he had ever agreed to the border levies' 'exclusive employment *within* the border' on the logical, but specious grounds, that such an undertaking would have been 'diametrically opposed' to his well-known advocacy of the strategic advantages of the 'active defence'. Yet if such sophistry were calculated to provoke the Lieutenant-Governor, how much more so was Chelmsford's explanation, which he now set out, for keeping his instructions for raids over the border secret from the Natal Government. It was the presence of 'numerous spies that are believed to infest the colony', claimed the Lieutenant-General, and from whom by imputation the Natal Government was incapable of withholding any information of value, that had forced him to take the course he had. Chelmsford had at least admitted that he had kept Bulwer in the dark about the projected raids; but his explanation, besides being insulting, was clearly nothing more than a conscious attempt to divert attention from the fact that he had deliberately flouted Bulwer's known attitude towards raiding. Chelmsford concluded his provocative and dishonest letter with what was nevertheless a clear articulation of what had by then emerged as the central issue in his exchange with the Lieutenant-Governor:

> 'If I am to be considered fit to be entrusted with the conduct of the war,' he wrote, 'I contend that the command of the colonial forces assembled along the border of Natal for its defence should be placed unreservedly in my hands, and that I should be permitted to employ them within or without the

> border in whatever manner I may consider best in the interests of the Colony'.[41]

In his final letter to Frere before setting off for the front on 22 April for his second, and ultimately successful invasion of Zululand, he underlined the same point, stating vehemently that it was high time that 'the danger of divided command . . . be done away with'.[42] The letter that contained those words had been an attempt to elicit Frere's aid in gaining the sole command of the troops along the border; but Bulwer had not been idle either in marshalling his support. On 23 April he laid Chelmsford's contentious letter of 18 April before his Executive Council for their consideration.[43] Their conclusions he reported to Chelmsford in an impeccably polite, but extremely cool despatch, which he prefaced with his reiterated and categorical statement that at Pinetown he had never given Chelmsford leave to send the levies over the border. As for the Executive Council, while emphatically objecting to the expediency of further raids across the river (mainly on the original grounds that they would provoke retaliation and harden Zulu resistance), they had nevertheless conceded that Chelmsford might indeed employ the border levies in sorties into Zululand if he thought it 'imperatively necessary for military reasons.' Though prepared through his Executive Council to compromise so far, Bulwer would not abandon his claim to exclusive command of the border levies, nor could he refrain from emphasising to Chelmsford that his Executive Council's concessions had been most reluctant, and against their 'decided opinion'.[44] Neither did Bulwer fail to communicate their position to Frere.[45]

While the Natal Government was working out its grudging and circumscribed semi-capitulation to Chelmsford's demands, the Lieutenant-General himself was undergoing a change of mind over the dependability of the border levies, and their ability to raid effectively.[46] Reports emanating from the middle border opened his eyes to their lack of morale and low military capability — as shown during the demonstrations and raids of March and April — and persuaded him, as Frere had been as early as February, that they were really useless instruments with which to wage the 'active defence'. Picture then Bulwer's astonishment when, after all the Lieutenant-General's previous vehemence over the absolute necessity of raiding across the river with the border levies, he received Chelmsford's letter of 7 May, in which he was informed that with troops of such inferior calibre 'it would be absurd to attempt any military operations across the border', and that it would now be 'only under very exceptional circumstances' that they would ever be called upon to serve in Zululand.[47]

But Bulwer's partial concessions, and Chelmsford's sudden change of front concerning the employment of the border levies, by no means resolved what persisted as the fundamental issues at stake. It had not as yet been proven that Chelmsford's policy of raiding had been a mistaken one, as Bulwer and his supporters would have had it; while the question of the ultimate command of the border levies still remained open. It was this latter which first received a definitive answer, and both Bulwer and Chelmsford were humilated. On 19 May Hicks Beach sent Bulwer a telegram, informing him that it was the British Government's decision that the 'full command of any forces, whether European or Native . . . must of course be with the General, with whom the responsibility for the operation rests.'[48] Yet Chelmsford's triumph was destined to be almost instantly blighted. The British Government had also decided to solve once and for all the problems inherent in a divided command in Natal by creating a single, unified command: and it was not Chelmsford who was selected to fill the post. Hicks Beach again telegraphed Bulwer on 28 May, this time to let him know that the chief civil and military authority in South-East Africa was to be placed into the hands of General Sir Garnet Wolseley.[49] As a full General he out-ranked Chelmsford; as Governor of Natal he subordinated Bulwer; and as Governor of the Transvaal and High Commissioner for South East Africa he displaced Frere from his supervision of affairs in Natal and Zululand.[50]

Hicks Beach wrote to Frere in an attempt to soften the blow of the proconsul's demotion, and in doing so spelled out his Government's reasons for its decision. He explained that the obvious ineffectiveness of the Pinetown meeting between Bulwer and Chelmsford, coupled with their subsequent barrage of mutually recriminatory despatches, had shown

> 'the danger that must result from such a state of affairs, the mischief that must, I fear, already have been done, and the urgent necessity for change. In fact, a dictator is required.'[51]

Wolseley, the British Government's choice for the post of dictator would, however, still be some time in arriving in South Africa. This allowed sufficient space for the original protagonists, who had wrangled themselves out of their independent commands, to bring the outstanding issue of their smouldering dispute to an appropriate conclusion.

On 20 May, Major Twentyman, in command of the forces stationed along the middle border, led a full-scale raid into Zululand. Clearly, he must have been unaware of Chelmsford's revised estimation of the quality of his troops, for it was on his own initiative, yet in accordance with the Lieutenant-General's appa-

rently still unrescinded commands of March and April to raid across the river whenever possible, that he decided to create a diversion in favour of the Second Division, then about to commence its advance on Ulundi. In the course of his operation he did considerable damage to Zulu homesteads directly across the river; but in the estimation of Mr Wheelwright, whose border levies significantly had remained on the Natal bank while the other units crossed to make their raid, the exercise had been unlikely to achieve anything except to stir up a frontier that had in fact relapsed into quiescence.[52] Bulwer was predictably aghast at news of Twentyman's raid, but this time so too was the officer to whose discretion Chelmsford had delegated the option of making further raids into Zululand while he was away with the Second Division. Major-General the Hon. H.H. Clifford had been as unaware of Twentyman's intentions to make a raid as had Bulwer, and came out firmly against any repetition. But as Bulwer lamented in his indignant report to Frere, the raid had already had the effect of provoking minor retaliatory Zulu forays over the border, and more could now be anticipated.[53] Nor was he mistaken. On 25 June the Zulu launched a well-coordinated and destructive counter-raid into the Tugela valley near Middle Drift which pitilessly exposed the inadequacy of the Natal border defences and the impossibility of doing much to rectify the situation, especially since the border levies had been left utterly demoralized.[54] Bulwer's longstanding and dire predictions, about which he might be excused for reminding Hicks Beach,[55] had been amply vindicated. Chelmsford's policy of raiding had finally proved to be as self-defeating as Bulwer had always feared it would.

Sir Garnet Wolseley arrived in Pietermaritzburg on the afternoon of 28 June, and was welcomed by Bulwer whom he immediately discovered to be 'charming', 'pleasant' to work with, and altogether 'a Gentleman'. Nor could he find much to fault in the Lieutenant-Governor's handling of affairs during the crisis brought on by the war, except his treatment of the border levy issue. There Wolseley considered him to have made the 'mistake of rather trying to interfere with military matters'. Though rather indulgently confiding to his Journal that Bulwer's 'conduct on this point was silly', he nevertheless jotted down that in mitigation he considered the Lieutenant-Governor to have been 'so bullied' by Frere and the military over the border levies that he could be forgiven for rather having 'lost his head'.[56] Be that as it may, Wolseley was fully prepared to endorse the stand Bulwer had taken over the inadvisability of mounting raids across the river, and stated so officially. The commencement of raids into Zululand from Natal, he declared both to Bulwer and to the Home Government, 'was objectionable and mistaken in policy'.[57]

If Chelmsford had won a Pyrrhic victory in his demand for an undivided command over the troops stationed along the border, then Bulwer had emerged resoundingly justified in his condemnation of the Lieutenant-General's policy of the 'active defence'. Yet Bulwer, as the thorough gentleman that he undoubtedly was, resisted the temptation to crow. At a dinner given at Government House in Pietermaritzburg in honour of Chelmsford, then on his way home to face his many critics in England, Bulwer sat next to the Lieutenant-General. 'We are on very good terms,' he wrote afterwards to his brother, 'but of course we did not touch on the subject of our difference.'[58]

University of Natal,
Pietermaritzburg

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The collections of letters and unpublished official documents referred to below are all deposited in the Natal Archives, Pietermaritzburg.

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4. Chelmsford to Frere, 11 August 1878 (quoted in French, *Lord Chelmsford,* (p. 43); Chelmsford to Frere, 11 September 1878 (quoted in Ibid., p. 47); and extract from letters from Chelmsford to Frere, no date (quoted in Ibid., pp. 51–2).
5. Chelmsford to Frere, 11 September 1878 (quoted in Ibid., p. 48).
6. J.P.C. Laband and P.S. Thompson, *A Field Guide to the War in Zululand 1879* (Pietermaritzburg, 1979), pp. 1–2.
7. Frere to Hicks Beach, 20 August 1878 (quoted in Basil Worsfold, *Sir Bartle Frere* (London, 1923), pp. 86–7).
8. John Benyon, *Pronconsul and Paramountcy in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg, 1980), pp. 152, 154, 358–9.
9. Chelmsford to Frere, 11 September 1878 (quoted in French, *Lord Chelmsford,* pp. 47–9).
10. Colonial Secretary's Office (henceforth CSO) 1972, no. 4237/78: Lt.-Governor to Colonial Secretary, 15 November 1878; and *Natal Government Gazette,* vol. XXX, no. 1739, 26 November 1878.
11. The two Sub-Districts consisted of the Colony's two metropolitan centres, Pietermaritzburg and Durban. The other Districts were based on the Counties into which Natal had been divided for administrative purposes, and were essentially rural.
12. CSO 2629, no. 4237/78: Circular, Instructions for the Colonial District Commanders, 21 November 1878.
13. *British Parliamentary Papers* (henceforth *BPP*) LIII of 1878–9 (C. 2318), enc. 18 in no. 1: Minute by Bulwer, 28 February 1879.
14. Government House (henceforth GH) 1221, no. 67/79: Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 16 April 1879.
15. GH 1413, no. 4909/78: Bulwer to C.B.H. Mitchell, 20 December 1878; and GH 1326, no. 160/78: Chelmsford to Bulwer, 30 December 1878.
16. GH 1423, enc. in no. 1222/79: Memorandum by Chelmsford, 20 February 1879.
17. *BPP* LIII of 1878–9 (C. 2318), enc. 7 in no. 1: Bulwer to Chelmsford, 7 February 1879. Bulwer was not served well on this score by his Attorney-General,

who subsequently advised him that in his opinion the Lieutenant-General was justified in directing the Colony's blacks to perform 'any military service which the General Commanding in Chief may assign to them or order them to engage in.' (Attorney-General's Office 1/16/1, p. 405: Memorandum by M.H. Gallwey, 14 March 1879).

18. GH 1326, no. 6/79: Bulwer to Chelmsford, 13 January 1879.
19. CSO 1926, no. 1356/79: Bulwer to Chelmsford, 28 February 1879.
20. *BPP* LIII of 1878–9 (C. 2318). enc. 10 in no. 1: Minute by Frere, 11 February 1879.
21. Ibid., enc. 19 in no. 1: Extracts from the Minutes of the Proceedings of the Natal Executive Council, 1 March 1879.
22. Ibid. LIV of 1878–9 (C. 2374), enc. in no. 9: Bulwer to J.W. Shepstone, 8 March 1879.
23. Ibid. LIII of 1878–9 (C. 2318), no.18: Chelmsford to Bulwer, 18 April 1879; and J.P.C. Laband and P.S. Thompson, *War Comes to Umvoti* (Durban 1980), p. 45.
24. J. Mathews, 'Lord Chelmsford and the Problems of Transport and Supply During the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879 (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Natal, 1979), p. 87.
25. Frere to Hicks Beach, 15 February 1879 (quoted in Worsfold,*Frere,* p. 194).
26. Wood Papers II/2/2: Chelmsford to Wood, 3 March 1879.
27. GH 1326, no. 40/79: Bulwer to Chelmsford, 15 April 1879; GH 1221, no. 67/79: Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 16 April 1879.
28. Greytown Correspondence 21/3, no. 168/79: Minute by Chelmsford, 15 March 1879.
29. Wood Papers II/2/2: Chelmsford to Wood, 17 March, 1879.
30. Laband and Thompson, *Umvoti,* pp. 47–9. Downstream in Colonial Defensive District VI, Captain G.A. Lucas called out his border levies on 27 March and demonstrated at the flooded Tugela drifts. (P.S. Thompson 'Captain Lucas and the Border Guard: The War on the Lower Tugela, 1879', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* vol. III, 1980, pp. 39–40).
31. GH 1221, no. 67/79: Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 16 April 1879.
32. Ibid.
33. CSO 1926, no. 1880/79: Wheelwright to Colonial Secretary, 2 April 1879.
34. Ibid.: Minute by Bulwer, 9 April 1879.
35. GH 1326, no. 32/79: Bulwer to Frere, 9 April 1879; and *BPP* LIII of 1878–9 (C. 2318), enc. 1 in no. 13: Bulwer to Chelmsford, 9 April 1879.
36. GH 1326, no. 32/79: Bulwer to Frere, 9 April 1879.
37. Chelmsford to Duke of Cambridge, 11 April 1879 (quoted in French, *Lord Chelmsford,* p. 181).
38. *BPP* LIII of 1878–9 (C. 2318), enc. 2 in no. 13: Chelmsford to Bulwer, 12 April 1879.
39. GH 1326, no. 40/79: Bulwer to Chelmsford, 15 April 1879.
40. GH 1221, no. 67/79: Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 16 April 1879.
41. *BPP* LIII of 1878–9 (C. 2318), no. 18: Chelmsford to Bulwer, 18 April 1879.
42. Chelmsford to Frere, 21 April 1879 (quoted in French, *Lord Chelmsford,* pp. 212–3).
43. *BPP* LIII of 1878–9 (C. 2367). enc. 3 in no. 44: Extracts from the Minutes of a Meeting of the Executive Council, 23 April 1879.
44. GH 1326, no. 54/79: Bulwer to Chelmsford, 25 April 1879.
45. Ibid., no. 63/79: Bulwer to Frere, 30 April 1879.
46. Wood Papers II/2/2: Chelmsford to Wood, 25 April 1879.
47. GH 500, no. 2526/79: Chelmsford to Bulwer, 7 May 1879.
48. *BPP* LIII of 1878–9 (C. 2318), no. 11: Hicks Beach to Bulwer, 19 May 1879.
49. Ibid., no. 19: Hicks Beach to Bulwer, 28 May 1879.
50. Ibid., Appendix: Commission issued to Sir Garnet Wolseley, 28 May 1879. See also Edgar Brookes and Colin Webb, *A History of Natal* (Pietermaritzburg, 1965), pp. 143–4; and Benyon, *Pronconsul and Paramountcy,* p. 165.
51. Hicks Beach to Frere, 29 May 1879 (quoted in Worsfold, *Frere,* p. 258).
52. Laband and Thompson,*Umvoti,* pp. 56–62. In District VI during the first two weeks of May, the border levies had made a number of limited sorties into Zululand, and raided again on 28 May. (Thompson, 'Captain Lucas'. pp. 40–1).
53. GH 1326, no. 88/79: Bulwer to Frere, 24 May 1879.

54. Laband and Thompson, *Umvoti*, pp. 67–77.
55. GH 1221, no. 124/79: Bulwer to Hicks Beach, 2 July 1879.
56. Wolseley in his Journal, 28 June 1879 (Adrian Preston, ed., *The South African Journal of Sir Garnet Wolseley 1879–1880* (Cape Town, 1973), p. 47).
57. *BPP* L of 1880 (C. 2482), enc. 3 in no. 37: Wolseley to Bulwer, 26 July 1879; and Ibid., no. 37: Wolseley to Hicks Beach, 27 July 1879.
58. Bulwer to E.E.G. Bulwer, 26 July 1887 (quoted in Clarke, *Invasion of Zululand*, pp. 220–1).

A QUESTION OF COMPLEXITY: THE RUSSELL — LAWRENCE DEBATE

by P.H. JOFFE

During the turbulent early war months of 1915 when Lawrence, with messianic zeal, committed himself for the first and last time in his career to some form of direct political action in his hopeless attempt to create a new England, his intense relationship with Bertrand Russell was of central significance. The friendship ran its course in a single year and made so strong an impact on Russell that he meditated suicide, and then, nearly forty years later, still showing disturbance, accused Lawrence of Nazi beliefs which 'led straight to Auschwitz'.

Both Lawrence and Russell were alert to the debilitation of Liberal England in those early war years. The history of Liberalism in England in the years immediately preceding 1914 has been covered admirably by George Dangerfield in his excellent work, *The Strange Death of Liberal England.*[1] He discusses the death of the political party which men such as Gladstone had made so effective in the era of economic expansionism, and shows how 'it died from poison administered by its Conservative foes, and from disillusion over the inefficiency of the word "Reform", (p. 72). The outbreak of the first World War postponed the turmoil and unrest which was about to result in the first major general strike in England's history and to certain civil war in Ireland, but was the final nail driven in the coffin of Whig Liberalism. Lady Ottoline Morrell was convinced that her lover, Russell, in his opposition to the war, would find an ally in her new friend, D.H. Lawrence, and through her the two met and communicated, planning to create a series of public lectures and a new philosophy which it was hoped would offer some alternative to the war hysteria into which the country had plunged.[2]

Commentators on this venture tend to simplify the final opposition between the two by describing Russell as 'disembodied mind' and Lawrence as 'mindless',[3] though Paul Delany[4] in his recent excellent study of Lawrence during the war years offers material which reveals both men in much finer detail. My intention is to offer a study of the interchange of ideas between the two men to suggest that what was in radical opposition, finally, was not simply two opposing temperaments but two different and mutually exclusive intellectual traditions.

Russell's autobiography and Ronald Clark's biography[5] offer ample evidence of the turbulent emotional state in which Russell found himself at the time he met Lawrence. Delany describes the

mathematician-philosopher as 'tremulously susceptible to extreme passions' (Delany p. 66); the frustration and horror he felt at the war had shattered his earlier faith in the principles of reason and order, leaving him sensitive to the influence of someone as forceful as Lawrence.

Russell's early attitudes were strongly shaped at Cambridge by nineteenth-century Liberalism and humanism. In his autobiography he writes that at Cambridge he was a 'Liberal Imperialist' and believed 'in ordered progress by means of politics and free discussion' (*Autobiography* p. 86). He was a 'passionate Free-Trader' (p. 202), a concept central to the Liberal Party of the day, but his readings of his godfather, John Stuart Mill, whose 'disciple and friend' Russell's father had been, drew him initially to that aspect of Liberalism concerned with the ideal freedoms of the individual, rather than with larger concerns of economic and social organisation. Dangerfield has described the latter as having become based on 'an almost mystical communion with the doctrine of laissez-faire, and a profound belief in the English virtue of compromise' (Dangerfield, p. 23). Russell admitted that "before I went to Cambridge I had not read much except Mill" (*Autobiography* p. 82). Like Mill, Russell and his Bloomsbury associates whom he met through Ottoline and at Cambridge, were interested less in the older utilitarian concern with the greater good of the numerical majority, than with the necessity to find means to protect the vulnerability of the individual, and became drawn to Mill's particular emphasis on 'the culture of the feelings', in effect, the Coleridgean concept of 'cultivation', the 'harmonious development of those qualities and faculties that characterize our humanity".[6]

At the outbreak of war, a shocked Russell wrote to Ottoline that he felt

> all the weight of Europe's passion . . .
> It seems as if one must go mad or join the madmen . . .
> I am fixing some things in my mind . . .
> not to hate anyone, not to apportion praise or blame, not to let instinct dominate. The force that in the long run makes for peace and all other good things is Reason, the power of thinking against instinct.
>
> (Delany, pp. 66/67).

This sanguine liberal belief in the reasonableness of man was one he was forced to relinquish as the brute realities of the war intruded more and more. A letter from Lawrence, analysing E.M. Forster's 'inanation' and offering, incidentally, an accurate diagnosis of the powerlessness of rationalist liberalism when con-

fronted by the destructiveness the war had unleashed, perhaps attracted Russell by offering him a sense of alternatives to those principles the war seemed to be destroying:

> Forster is not poor, but he is bound hand and foot badly. Why? *Because he does not believe that any beauty or any divine utterance is any good any more* . . . Forster knows, as every thinking man now knows, that all his thinking and his passion for humanity amounts to no more than trying to soothe with poetry a man raging with pain which can be cured. Cure the pain, don't give the poetry. Will all the poetry in the world satisfy the manhood of Forster, when Forster knows that his implicit manhood is to be satisfied by nothing but immediate physical action. He tries to dodge himself — the sight is pitiful . . . But why can't he act? Why can't he take a woman and fight clear to his own basic, primal being? Because he knows that self-realisation is not his ultimate desire. His ultimate desire is for the continued action which has been called the social passion — the love for humanity — the desire to work for humanity that is every man's ultimate desire and need . . . So he remains neutral, inactive. That is Forster.
>
> (*Letters* p. 316).[7]

In the philosophy he was working on with Russell, Lawrence believed that man had to rediscover himself, 'realize' himself, so that he could move on optimistically and destroy the rotten social framework as it stood, so that all men could become free to act. The Liberal stance of Forster was now felt to be an anachronism; the idea of an ordered, sane society to which he devoted his faith and his 'social passion' had been made irrelevant by the changes that had made Germany outproduce England for the first time, by the war itself, and by the destructive passions this had unleashed in so many otherwise sane and rational men. Drawing closer to Lawrence's less optimistic belief in rational man, Russell wrote to Ottoline,

> It is strange how many illusions have been shattered by this war; I find myself growing cynical, full of pitiless insight into the hidden springs of beliefs and faiths and hopes, more and more impressed by the biological instinctiveness of man. Thought seems a mere bubble — no part of the stream, but a surface thing thrown up by the stream and showing its direction. Underneath I still have some faith in human possibilities, but it is slight — I feel very much as if I had been dropped from another planet into an alien race.
>
> (Delany, p. 67).

Russell was strongly drawn to Lawrence's faith that together they could forge a new philosophy which would offer some alternative to the dismal state of the English body-politic, and in March, 1915 he invited Lawrence to visit him at Trinity College where he held a tenuous position as lecturer, even though he was a Fellow of the Royal Society and co-author of the famous *Principia Mathematica*. There, Lawrence was to meet some of Russell's intellectual friends, and the novelist wrote, 'I feel frightfully important coming to Cambridge — quite momentous the occasion is to me. I don't want to be horribly impressed and intimidated, but am afraid I may be . . . I am afraid of concourses and clans and societies and cliques — not so much of individuals. Truly I am rather afraid' (*Letters* pp. 327–8).

Lawrence was preparing to meet Keynes and G.E. Moore, who, with Russell, were the most important philosophical thinkers associated with the dominant Bloomsbury of that period, and it is not surprising that he felt a little awed and apprehensive as he looked forward to meeting the men with whom he hoped to join forces to create a revolutionary philosophy which would revitalise England. To David Garnett he later wrote, it was 'one of the crises of my life'.

During the weekend of March 6–7, Lawrence met at Cambridge the philosopher, G.E. Moore, the mathematician, G.H. Hardy, and the economist, J.M. Keynes. John Maynard Keynes has described the encounter in *Two Memoirs*,[8] and he recalls Lawrence at the evening party sitting next to G.E. Moore in stony silence, but talking amiably with the lecturer in mathematics, G.H. Hardy. The next morning at a breakfast in Russell's rooms, both Keynes and Russell are described as trying to draw Lawrence out, but he was 'morose from the outset and said very little'. As he told Frieda, the men 'walked up and down the room and talked about the Balkan situation and things like that, and they know nothing about it'.[9]

It is interesting to note that Russell himself was strongly attracted to Lawrence's viewpoint and away, in recoil, from his Cambridge contemporaries. To Ottoline he wrote,

> Lawrence is gone, disgusted with Cambridge, but not with me I think. I felt that we got on *very* well with each other, and made real progress towards intimacy. His intuitive perceptiveness is *wonderful* — it leaves me gasping in admiration . . . Lawrence is wonderfully lovable. The mainspring of his life is love — the universal mystical love — which inspires even his most vehement and passionate hate. It is odd that his *thinking* is coloured by self — he imagines men more like him than they are . . . I love him more and more.[10]

To Russell Lawrence later wrote, 'It is true Cambridge made me very black and down. I cannot bear its smell of rottenness, marsh-stagnancy. I get a melancholic malaria. How can so sick people rise up?' (*Letters* p. 330). As Keynes wrote, 'it is impossible to imagine moods more antagonistic than those of Lawrence and of pre-war Cambridge.' Hoping to find men to join him in the formation of a movement to bring about an emotional and political rebirth in England, he found what he felt was only a homosexually oriented society, cut off from the frighteningly destructive realities of the war and the changed England, a brittle intellectualism and a puerile optimism. Lawrence came, ready to be impressed by the academic intelligentsia of England, and left a bitterly disappointed man. It is interesting to note that Keynes admits that they were 'disastrously mistaken' (*Two Memoirs,* p. 98) in the '18th century heresy' which they upheld: that by rational control England could be changed. 'We completely misunderstood human nature, including our own. The rationality which we attributed to it led to a superficiality, not only of judgement, but also of feeling.' (p. 100). Keynes goes on to write

> We lacked reverence, as Lawrence observed, and as Ludwig Wittgenstein with justice also used to say — for everything and for everyone . . . There may have been just a grain of truth when Lawrence said in 1914 that we were "done for".
> (*Two Memoirs* p. 103).

Keynes also somewhat complacently described Lawrence's reaction as 'jealousy' . . .

> Lawrence was jealous of the other lot, and Cambridge rationalism and cynicism, then at their height, were, of course, repulsive to him. Bertie gave him what must have been, I think, his first glimpse of Cambridge. It overwhelmed, attracted and repulsed him — which was the other emotional disturbance. It was obviously a civilization, and not less obviously uncomfortable and unattainable for him — very repulsive and very attractive.'
> (*Two Memoirs* p. 82)

There is no evidence in any of Lawrence's letters concerning his Cambridge encounter to suggest jealousy at what Keynes, in a rather self-congratulatory manner, describes as so 'obviously a civilization', one which, he suggests, Lawrence hungers after.[11] Keynes, like many others, underestimates Lawrence's critical intelligence, his not insignificant education, and what may possibly

be a wider experience of areas of life than Cambridge and Bloomsbury experience excluded.

In a letter to Ottoline, Lawrence described what he felt to be Russell's difficulty in coming to terms with Lawrence's demands for a radical rejection of the rationalist complacency he found at Cambridge. 'What ails Russell is in matters of life and emotion, the inexperience of youth. He is, vitally, emotionally, much too inexperienced in personal contact and conflict, for a man of his age and calibre. It isn't that life has been too much for him, but too little.' (*Letters* p. 351).

Lawrence was barely thirty, Russell in his mid-forties, but the latter's autobiography lends support to Lawrence's judgement. The callousness of many of Russell's emotional relationships resulted from 'the kind of fear', which, for many years, led him 'to avoid all deep emotion, and live, as nearly as I could, a life of intellect tempered by flippancy' (*Autobiography* p. 106).

Russell employed, it seems, the same rational, logical and scientific approach to social questions that he had used in the successful mathematical masterpiece, *Principia Mathematica.* Like Mill, he believed that by the exercise of the powers of reason and rational thought, men could be persuaded to lead better lives. Keynes, commenting on his Bloomsbury associates and on Russell, wrote that there was 'no solid diagnosis of human nature' underlying their views.

> Bertie in particular sustained simultaneously a pair of opinions ludicrously incompatible. He held that in fact human affairs were carried on after a most irrational fashion, but that the remedy was quite simple and easy, since all we had to do was to carry them on rationally'.
> (*Two Memoirs* p. 102).

In his first letter (12th February, 1915) to Russell, Lawrence wrote,

> I write to say to you that we *must* start a solid basis of freedom of actual living — not only of thinking. We *must* provide another standard than the pecuniary standard, to measure *all* daily life by. We must be free of the economic question. Economic life must be the means to actual life.[12]

He called for a socialist revolution to take care of the economic struggle for survival,

> a revolution in the state . . . We shall smash the frame. The land, the industries, the means of communication and the

> public amusements shall all be nationalized. Every man shall have his wage till the day of his death, whether he work or not, so long as he works when he is fit,

and the same would apply for women. 'Then, and then only, shall we be able to begin living' (p. 35). Lawrence's radicalism here grows, not out of a firm commitment to the forces of political socialism as understood by his friend Willie Hopkin, but rather from his desire to see the individual freed from the debilitating struggle with the industrial system for the basic material securities, so that he could then confront, for Lawrence, the more significant struggle for the fulfilment of the spontaneous, vital life. From the principles which Lawrence espouses, it can be seen that he can best be placed in that tradition of radical English thought which found its strongest expression in the nineteenth century in the work of Thomas Carlyle. Carlyle in the nineteenth, and Lawrence in the twentieth century, responded directly to the industrialism which they saw changing not only the physical but the spiritual and emotional lives of the English. They both recognised the effect the mechanical age was having on the values of people. Carlyle wrote

> Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also . . . The same habit regulates not our modes of action alone, but our modes of thought and feeling. Men are grown mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand . . . their whole efforts, attachments, opinions, turn on mechanism, and are of a mechanical nature.
> (Williams, p. 91)

Lawrence responded in a similar way:

> When pure mechanization or materialism sets in, the soul is automatically pivoted, and the most diverse of creatures fall into a common mechanical unison. This we see in America. It is not a homogeneous, spontaneous coherence so much as a disintegrated amorphousness which lends itself to perfect mechanical unison.[13]

Carlyle attacked the 'cash nexus' of society, which had been set up as 'the sole nexus between men and men', when there are 'so many things which cash will not pay' (Williams, p. 89); similarly, Lawrence felt that 'the industrial problem arises from the base forcing of all human energy into a competition of mere acquisition'.[14] Therefore, 'it is towards a higher-freedom than mere free-

dom from oppression, by his fellow mortals, that man dimly aims'. Both Carlyle and Lawrence shared the belief that all men should be given the opportunities for an equal share in the economic gains of the society, but that a democracy based on the laissez-faire spirit, in which each individual was free only to follow his own interests was not enough. Carlyle wrote, 'all men may see, whose sight is good for much, that in democracy can lie no finality; that with the completest winning of democracy there is nothing yet won — except emptiness, and the free chance to win' (Williams p. 92). The economic equalities were not enough: spiritual values were of central importance and it is on this issue that sometimes basic disagreement with Russell occurred.

Russell worked on his manuscript for a 'Philosophy of Social Reconstruction', and discussed his ideas with Lawrence either at Garsington Manor, Ottoline's Tudor house near Oxford, or by correspondence. These lecture plans were finally published as *Principles of Social Reconstruction* in 1916, and won approval from a large reading public. *The Nation* reviewed the book favourably, and stated 'We question whether a more brilliant statement of the Liberal philosophy has been written since the last world war created Liberalism'. In this work Russell presented a system in which he attacked what he called the 'possessive' impulse, and called for a move towards the 'creative'. He expanded his belief that 'the only thought which is genuine is that which springs out of the intellectual impulse of curiosity, leading to the desire to know and understand',[15] and the pages contain his highly cerebral attack on the abuses he clearly perceived in English society. He felt that 'socialism as a panacea seems to me to be mistaken . . . since it is too ready to suppose that better economic conditions will of themselves make men happy' (*P.S.R.* p. 43), and in this he was in no fundamental disagreement with Lawrence. Later in the book, he went on to place his faith in 'the ideals which inspired liberalism', and wrote of his concern with 'the problem of combining liberty and personal initiative with organization' (*P.S.R.* p. 71), a concern on which his mentor Mill had written. Russell believed that the State should have powers mainly to arbitrate in conflicts both within and outside the country, but that the ideal of 'syndicalism . . . is valuable as a check upon the tyranny which the community may be tempted to exercise over certain classes of its members'. He felt that 'all strong organisations which embody a sectional public opinion such as trade unions, co-operative societies, professions, and universities are to be welcomed as safeguards of liberty and opportunities for initiative' (*P.S.R.* p. 73). For Russell, 'the only powerful political force from which any help is to be expected in bringing about such changes as seemed needed is Labour' (*P.S.R.* p. 242), and

he concluded with the reminder that other changes had, in the past, originated from 'a few impracticable idealists — Mary Wollstonecraft, Shelley, John Stuart Mill', and that 'the power of thought, in the long run, is greater than any other human power. Those who have the ability to think, and the imagination to think in accordance with men's needs, are likely to achieve the good they aim at sooner or later . . .' (*P.S.R.* p. 326).

Lawrence wrote over Russell's manuscript, 'this which you say is all social criticism; it isn't social reconstruction' (*Russell Letters* p. 77), and what he found lacking in Russell's views was a 'sense of the absolute'. Russell believed that:

> if a majority in every civilized country so desired, we could, within twenty years, abolish all abject poverty, quite half the illness of the world, the whole economic slavery which binds down nine tenths of our population; we could fill the world with beauty and joy, and secure the reign of universal peace.[16]

As he wrote later, 'I remain an unrepentant rationalist',[17] and his sanguine views were too great a simplification for Lawrence, for they tended to ignore that most important of elements, the complex, and certainly not simply rational, nature of the human being.

Like Carlyle, Lawrence did not believe in the type of democracy envisioned by Russell, where each atomised individual would be free to follow his 'creative interests', or each group, protecting its sectarian interests, could confront any other group threatening these interests. He wrote to Russell, 'you must drop all your democracy. You must not believe in "the people". One class is not better than another. It must be a case of wisdom or truth'. (p. 50). For Lawrence, the 'societal instinct [was] much deeper than the sex instinct — and societal repression much more devastating. There is no repression of the sexual individual comparable to the repression of the societal man in me, by the individual ego, my own and everybody else's' (*Letters* p. 2990).

In *Women in Love,* Lawrence shows that this 'societal instinct' finds no outlet in the crumbling civilization of the world of the novel, and Birkin and Ursula abandon the sinking ship in order to salvage at least the living connection the two share; Birkin's desire for that further relationship with Gerald may be an indication of the first step towards establishing the societal bond with those outside the marriage relationship, but Lawrence shows how Birkin is unable to create social links in a world partly created by Gerald's destructive organization. It was this instinct of community which Lawrence felt Russell's liberalism ignored, in the concern

only with the freedom of the individual ego, and not with the individual's need for a sense of community with others, beyond merely the interests of a particular, specialized group.

> Primarily, you must allow and acknowledge and be prepared to proceed from the fundamental impulse in all of us towards the Truth, the fundamental passion also, the *most fundamental* passion in men for wholeness of movement, unanimity of purpose, oneness in construction. *This is the principle of construction.* The rest is all criticism, destruction.
> (*Letters* p. 354).

He told Russell that the war was 'going to develop into the last great war between labour and capital', and that instead of attacking society in his criticism — 'You are too old-fashioned. The back of your serpent is already broken' — Russell should 'work out the idea of a new state' (p. 53).

Carlyle believed that 'surely of all "rights of man", this right of the ignorant man to be guided by the wiser, to be gently or forcibly held in the true course by him, is the indisputablest . . . if Freedom have any meaning it means enjoyment of this right, wherein all other rights are enjoyed' (Williams, p. 93), and a belief in a governing body truly responsible to the people was something which Lawrence confessed to Russell. This belief in authority should not be confused simply with authoritarianism. Russell had lent Lawrence a copy of John Burnett's *Early Greek Philosophy,* on the pre-Socratic philosophers, and the writings of Heraclitus struck a sympathetic cord in Lawrence's thought. Lawrence's alienation from his early Nottinghamshire roots, his position as an artist who chose exile and the role of outsider to organised established institutions, contributed to a particular naïvety in Lawrence's political thinking. His career reveals how often a particular work, encountered by chance, would be subsumed by his fertile intellect and be utilized in confronting the particular issues with which he was engaged at the time. These intellectual gymnastics did not make for easily recognisable, logical patterns of development in his thought, and perhaps helped emphasise a certain shallowness in his political thinking, but they do reveal the vitality and imaginative force of his thinking. Constitutionally sympathetic to Heraclitus's dialectical thought and his belief, like Plato, in the organic but hierarchical state, Lawrence found reinforcement for his belief, shared with Carlyle, in an order looking to the aristocratic in spirit for direction. Emile Delevenay's[18] insistence that Lawrence should be associated, thus, with fascism and nazism should be recognised as tendentiously forced, ignoring Lawrence's contempt for Mussolini and the pecu-

liarly individualistic and independent nature of Lawrence's thought.

To Russell, Lawrence confessed, 'I don't want tyrants . . .' and 'the electorate should be based on an "organic" conception of society, each group electing its immediate representatives, and so on upwards'. For this, he was attacked by Russell for being anti-democratic, but to Lady Cynthia Asquith, Lawrence wrote this important letter concerning Russell:

> He sent me a synopsis of the lectures, and I can only think them pernicious. And now his vanity is piqued, because I said they *must* be different . . . I am so sick of people: they preserve an evil, bad separating spirit under the warm cloak of good words. That is intolerable in them. The Conservative talks about the old and glorious national ideal, the Liberal talks about this great struggle for right in which the nation is engaged . . . Bertie Russell talks about democratic control and the educating of the artisan, and all this, all this goodness, is just a warm and cosy cloak for a bad spirit. They all want the same thing: a continuity in this state of disintegration wherein each separate little ego is an independent little principality by itself. What does Russell really want? He wants to keep his own established ego, his finite and ready defined self intact, free from contact and connection. He wants to be ultimately a free agent. That is what they all want, ultimately — that is what is at the back of all international peace-for-ever and democratic control talks; they want an outward system of nullity, which they call peace and goodwill, so that in their own souls they can be independent little gods, referred nowhere and to nothing, little mortal Absolutes, secure from question. That is at the back of all Liberalism, Fabianism and democracy. It stinks. It is the will of the louse. And the Conservative either wants to bully or to be bullied. And the young authoritarian, the young man who turns Roman Catholic in order to put himself under the authority of the Church, in order to enjoy the aesthetic quality of obedience, he is such a swine with cringing hind-quarters, that I am delighted, I dance with joy when I see him rushing down the Gadarene slope of the war.
> (*Letters* p. 360).

What Lawrence desired was a new spirit in opposition to the 'separating spirit' which he felt existed in the divided English society, and which he believed Russell's liberalism and reformism perpetuated. 'The spirit of the war is, that I am a unit, a single entity that has no *intrinsic* reference to the rest: the reference is ex-

trinsic, a question of living, not *being*. In war, in my being I am a detached entity and every one of my actions is an act of further detaching my own single entity from all the rest' (*Letters* p. 374). His confessed belief in hierarchy, in the aristocratic spirit which recognised that 'some are born fit to govern, and some are born only fit to be governed' (*Letters* p. 361), does not warrant a hasty condemnation of Lawrence as a supporter of a fascist dictatorship. His fundamental sanguine faith lies in the individual's prerogative to seek his own fulfilment, as free from the interference of others as is possible: 'the living self has one purpose only: to come into its own fulness of being' (*Phoenix I* p. 714), and this individual liberty, Lawrence suggests, is best sought, not in isolation, but in a social purpose which would realize the potentialities of all. He writes that 'The first great purpose of Democracy is that each man shall be spontaneously himself — each man himself, each woman herself, without any questions of equality or inequality entering in at all; and that no man shall try to determine the being of any other man, or of any other female' (*Phoenix I* p. 716).

What had to be recognized was the 'otherness' of others. To Russell he wrote,

> the drama shall be between individual men and women, not between nations and classes . . . and the great living experience for every man is his adventure into the woman . . . and the ultimate passion of every man is to be within himself, the whole of mankind — what I call social passion — which is what brings to fruit your philosophical writings. The man embraces in the woman all that is not himself, and from that one resultant, from that embrace, comes every new action.
> (pp. 36–37).

Russell and Lawrence are fundamentally opposed in their notions of social reconstruction because, whereas the former thinks in the sociological terms with which, conventionally, our discussions of social organization and change are couched, Lawrence refuses to think in the larger abstractions of social class or groups, but believes that change can only grow from the transformation within the individual, who, in his numbers, constitutes the social organisation. It is Lawrence's belief that until there is an acceptance of basic 'otherness', and reverence or respect between individual men and women, accompanied by a recognition that the mind is not the only seat of consciousness, that 'blood consciousness', another term for the more intuitive forms of knowledge we all have, is equally important, there could be no radical changes in the organization of society. Change would have to come from

within, and with human beings we could not use concepts such as equality, for they obfuscated the basic 'otherness' of individuals. Lawrence writes that

> We cannot say A = B. Nor can we say that men are unequal. We may not declare that A + B = C . . . one man is neither equal nor unequal to another man. When I stand in the presence of another man, and I am my own pure self am I aware of the presence of an equal, or of an inferior, or of a superior? I am not. When I stand with another man, who is himself, and when I am truly myself, then I am only aware of a Presence, and of the strange reality of otherness. There is me, and there is *another being* . . . There is no comparing or estimating . . . Comparison enters only when one of us departs from his own integral being, and enters the material mechanical world. Then equality and inequality starts at once.
> (*Phoenix I* p. 715)

This notion later makes its appearance in one of the intellectual debates which contributes dramatically to the themes of *Women in Love.* Lawrence felt that what civilization had done was to 'almost destroy the natural flow of common sympathy between men and men, and men and women. And it is this that I want to restore into life'.[19] He came finally to recognise, as was inevitable, that there was no way he could hope to introduce the changes he sought into the ailing society of wartime England. His naïvety in matters of political organization, and his messianic impatience made him particularly unsuitable for political action. He wrote to Russell, towards the end of their correspondence, that 'one must be an outlaw these days, not a teacher or preacher . . . What's the good of sticking in the damned ship and haranguing the merchant-pilgrims in their own language. Why don't you drop overboard . . . clear out of the whole show?' (p. 70)

It is in Lawrence's *The Crown* that we find him articulating most fully his metaphysical speculations on the state of humanity as he saw it during the distressing, and what he felt were the suicidal, war years. We also find that the 'philosophical' grounds for much of the debate with Russell that we have investigated above are given in this work. Lawrence writes in his introduction to the work,

> I knew then, and I know now, it is no use trying to do anything — I speak for myself — publicly. It is no use trying merely to modify present forms. The whole great form of our era will have to go. And nothing will really send it down but

> the new shoots of life springing up and slowly bursting the foundations. And one can do nothing, but fight tooth and nail to defend the new shoots of life from being crushed out, and let them grow. We can't make life. We can but fight for the life that grows in us.

This, in a sense, is what we are shown Ursula and Birkin doing in *Women in Love;* theirs is the struggle to defend the new shoots of life, which they discover in relationship with each other, from being crushed out. The novel does not attempt to provide any programme to offer social salvation (indeed, it is difficult to see, from his debate with Russell, just how his notions could ever assume flesh in practice); it is, rather, a novel in which the decadence of a self-destructive civilization is fully rendered and analysed, and, in so doing, it further illuminates the critical issues upon which Russell and Lawrence were unable to agree. Russell seeks social reform; Lawrence shows no interest in patching up the face of a society while leaving untouched the superstructure upon which it is based, the individual psyche itself. In *The Crown,* Lawrence expresses his belief in the radical breakdown within the individual human psyche, a breakdown whose most obvious result is seen in the chaos of the war. Because of the loss of the necessary tension within the individual, between the forces symbolised by the Lion and the Unicorn, those of the darkness and the light, the senses and the intellect, the flesh and the spirit, and because humanity has forgotten the Crown, symbol of the balance and polarity for which the Lion and Unicorn should strive, it is impossible to hope for meaningful change in society which is merely the collective expression of those de-polarised individuals comprising it.

In his particular age, during those war years in which he hoped that he and Russell could offer the philosophical justification for radical change, Lawrence came to believe that the ontological and psychological forces, represented by the Lion, had triumphed, ignoring the eternally necessary tension, the Crown, between the Lion and the Unicorn. This imbalance, the victory and crowning of one ultimate, had resulted in the dominance of the forces of wilful sensuality, a love of the flesh accompanied by an egoistic will-to-power. The individual had therefore become trapped within the womb of his era, the shell of assertive-selfhood had hardened, enclosing the potential vitality for consummate being, and forcing the vital energy to manifest itself in a self-destructive, demonically reductive process. As with the individual, so with the society itself: 'a million egos summed up under a crown are not *better* than one individual crowned ego. They are a million times worse' (*Phoenix II* p. 381), hence his disagreement with Russell on the latter's emphasis on a democracy concerning itself basically

with the freedom of the individual ego. Lawrence had come to see humanity as trapped in the flux of corruption and believed that it enjoyed its self-assertion of the ontological forces, represented by the Lion, as the only absolute; that, as he wrote in one of his letters above, 'they all want the same thing; a continuing in this state of disintegration wherein each separate little ego is an independent little principality by itself' (*Letters* p. 362). In *The Crown*, he writes that we have come actively to enjoy being threshed rotten inside: 'This is sensationalism, reduction of the complex tissue back through rottenness to its elements. And this sensationalism, this reduction back, has become our very life, our only form of life at all. We enjoy it, it is our lust'; and also that 'it became at last a collective activity, a war . . .' (*Phoenix II* p. 388). 'From top to bottom, in the whole nation', Lawrence felt, 'we are engaged, fundamentally engaged in the process of reduction and dissolution. Our reward is sensational gratification in the flesh, or sensational gratification within the mind, the utter gratification we experience when we can pull apart the whole into its factors' (*Phoenix II* p. 393) what he elsewhere calls 'analysis'.

In *The Crown,* Lawrence reveals his feeling that until mankind has lived through its desire for destruction[20] there cannot be the ultimate release into the state for which all should strive, 'consummate being' (*Phoenix II* p. 410), attained when Lion and Unicorn find perfect balance beneath the Crown, a revelation of the Holy Ghost, the other Lawrentian term representing the harmonious polarity of opposites. Ultimately, Lawrence comes to believe that there is a form of vital potential in the self-destructive powers unleashed by the loss of balance in the human psyche, and that from destruction there may arise new life. 'The spirit of destruction is divine, when it breaks the ego and opens the soul to the wide heavens. In corruption there is divinity' (*Phoenix II* p. 402). Lawrence hopes that, because 'sensationalism is an exhaustive process . . . the resolving down is progressive' (p. 398): a man, by giving himself fully to the destruction, may find that 'the near touch of death may be a release into life; if only it will break the egoistic will, and release that other flow' (p. 399). However, Gerald Crich is the only character in *Women in Love* who comes close to achieving this negative consummation, but the connection between 'the senses and the outspoken mind' (*Women in Love* p. 285) finally breaks and Gerald chooses to seek his death by perfect cold, becoming merely an inert, frozen lump, rather than releasing 'that other flow'. All the others, with the qualified exception of Birkin and Ursula, reveal mainly the corrupting influences of their immersion in the 'divine flux of corruption' and are exposed as true flowers of corruption, indicating what little hope Lawrence held out for those who determine on remaining static

within the 'glassy, insentient, insensible envelope of nullity' (*Phoenix II* p. 392). By clinging to their self-assertive egoism, 'the static will triumphs for a while' (p. 77), and they lose all chance of blossoming, concentrating rather on a prolonging of the sensationalistic moments of reducing the organic to its analysable parts. Lawrence opposes Russell's own efforts at 'sticking in the damned ship and haranguing the merchant-pilgrims in their own language' (*Russell Letters* p. 70), because, as he writes in *The Crown,* to do so is merely to 'preserve intact our complete null concept of life, as an envelope, around this flux of destruction, the war' (p. 404). He adds, 'to destroy life for the preserving of a static, rigid form, a shell, a glassy envelope, this is the lugubrious activity of the men who fight to save democracy and to end all fighting' (p. 404). Lawrence believes that it is because Russell, like so many others, replaces the difficult struggle 'to win a consummate being' (p. 410), with a concern merely for altering the shape of the rigid shell of the age in whose sterile womb mankind is seen to be trapped — 'social activity is largely concerned with reducing all the parts contained within the envelope to an equality, so that there shall be no unequal pressure, tending to rupture the envelope, which is divine' (p. 392) — that Lawrence finds himself radically at odds with his programme; and the stormy friendship between the two men was soon to end decisively.

It is interesting to note that in Russell's autobiography, the latter attacked Lawrence's withdrawal and used it as 'evidence' that the novelist 'had no real wish to make the world better', for, as Michael Holroyd writes, 'towards the end of 1917 Russell himself decided to withdraw from active pacifist agitation, believing that it was by then more important to wait and work for a constructive post-war peace'[21].

Russell's hectic activities as pacifist organiser were seen by Lawrence as a type of hypocrisy. Recognising the natural aggression which is shared by all human beings, he wrote to Russell, asking, 'Do you still speak at the U.D.C. of the nations kissing each other, when your soul prowls the frontier all the time most jealously, to defend what it has and to seize what it can. It makes me laugh when you admit it' (p. 43),[22] and later, concerning an article that Russell had sent him,

> I hate it . . . you in the Essay are all the time a lie. Your basic desire is the maximum of desire of war, you are really the super-war-spirit. What you want is to jab and strike, like the soldier with the bayonet, only you are sublimated into words . . . You are satisfying in an indirect, false way your lust to jab and strike. Either satisfy it in a direct and honorable way, saying 'I hate you all, liars and swine, and am out to set upon

> you,' or stick to mathematics, where you can be true — But to come as the angel of Peace — no I prefer Tirpitz a thousand times in that role. You are simply *full* of repressed desires, which have become savage and anti-social. And they come out in this sheep's clothing of peace propaganda. As a woman said to me, who had been to one of your meetings: 'It seemed so strange, with his face looking so evil, to be talking about peace and love. He can't have *meant* what he said . . .' It is the falsity I can't bear. I wouldn't care if you were six times a murderer, so long as you said to yourself, 'I am this' . . . It is *not* the hatred of falsehood which inspires you. It is the hatred of people of flesh and blood. It is a perverted mental blood lust. Why don't you own it . . .
> (pp. 59–60).

Lytton Strachey's letter to Vanessa Bell (17 April 1916) lends some credence to Lawrence's perception: 'Bertie has been here for the weekend. He is working day and night with the N.C.F., and is at last perfectly happy — gloating over all the horrors and the moral lessons of the situation. The tales he tells makes one's blood run cold . . .' (*Holroyd,* Vol. II, p. 174). Russell's tragedy, as Lawrence felt it to be, was that his 'mental and nerve consciousness exerts a tyranny over the blood-consciousness' (*Letters,* p. 63). This is a restatement of what we have read of Keynes' views and Russell in his own words earlier in this essay. In his autobiography, Russell admits that 'I desired the defeat of Germany as ardently as any retired Colonel. Love of England is very nearly the strongest emotion I possess', showing just how difficult, and therefore, admirable his pacifism was, though this is perhaps no more admirable than Lawrence's enraged grief at the tens of thousands who were slaughtered uselessly in the trenches for just such a 'love of England'.

In *Women in Love,* much of Lawrence's war-years experience is transformed into the artistic texture of the novel, and we find Sir Joshua Mattheson, one of the houseguests at Breadalby/Garsington, like Russell, arguing that 'the great social idea . . . was the social equality of man (*Women in Love* p. 114), to which Hermione, whom Ottoline insisted on recognising as herself, adds another ideal in her view that 'in the *spirit* we are all one, all equal in the spirit, all brothers there . . .' (p. 115). Birkin's reply to these broad abstractions is similar to the arguments Lawrence used to refute Russell's concepts of equality which the former believed ignored the individual's desire for a sense of community extending beyond merely the sharing of material equality:

> We are all different and unequal in spirit — it is only the *social* differences that are based on accidental material con-

> ditions. We are all abstractly or mathematically equal, if you like. Every man has hunger and thirst, two eyes, one nose and two legs. We're all the same in point of number. But spiritually there is a pure difference and neither equality nor inequality counts. It is upon these two bits of knowledge that you must found a state. Your democracy is an absolute lie — your brotherhood of man is a pure falsity, if you apply it further than the mathematical abstraction . . . In the spirit, I am as separate as one star from another . . . Establish a state on *that.* One man isn't any better than another, not because they are equal, but because they are intrinsically *other,* that there is no term of comparison . . .
> (pp. 115/6).

We recall Lawrence's debate with Russell and we note again in the novel, his central criticism of the plausible egalitarianism which turned the individual into a mechanical unit in a mechanical society concerned only with the ethics of production and consumption. Birkin is responding to the discussion, which is 'on the whole intellectual, and, artificial' (p. 114), by pointing out the brittleness of the views the others hold, for they all fail to concern themselves with the 'all too-difficult business of coming to our spontaneous — creative fullness of being' (*Psychoanalysis and the Unconscious*). Talk as they might about reform and equality, the individual is still largely ignored, and Birkin is like the reader in seeing that this leisured-class group are in actual fact living off the profits of the system, and by doing so, tacitly accept the system itself. The entire novel is a dramatic exposition of what this system does to its human beings, and the intellectual reformers in their emotional relationships are conditioned by, and are ultimately subservient to, the system.

At Breadalby we find a 'ruthless mental pressure, this powerful consuming, destructive, mentality that emanated from Joshua and Hermione and Birkin and dominated the rest' (p. 101), an attitude which is 'mental and very wearying' (p. 93). The quality of Bloomsbury conversations at Garsington is given in Gudrun's responses, and the violence submerged beneath the polished manners is also hinted at:

> The talk went on like a rattle of small artillery, always slightly sententious, with a sententiousness that was only emphasized by the continuous crackling of a witticism, the continual spatter of verbal jest, designed to give a tone of flippancy to a stream of conversation that was all critical and general . . .
> (p. 93)

Whereas many of the others find this destructive criticism wearying, only Sir Joshua, 'whose mental fibre was so tough as to be insentient' (p. 93) is thoroughly happy. Mattheson is a sociologist, as shown by his easy acceptance of categories into which human beings can be placed. His 'eighteenth century appearance' (p. 100) reminds us of the fixed, static quality of the knowledge to which he gives his faith, recalling that other optimistic age of reason. Birkin suddenly becomes aware of the group as petrified figures, like those in the Egyptian tombs. 'How utterly he knew Joshua Mattheson, who was talking in his harsh, yet rather mincing voice, endlessly, always with a strong mentality working, always interesting, and yet always known, everything he said known beforehand, however novel it was and clever' (p. 110). He also sees them as figures in a game of chess, with 'innumerable permutations that make up the game . . . but the game is known, its going on is like a madness, it is so exhausted' (p. 110). When most of the party bathe, Gudrun's response conveys the most charitable judgement that is finally made on the people of Breadalby. 'Aren't they really terrifying?' said Gudrun. 'Don't they look saurian? They are just like great lizards. Did you ever see anything like Sir Joshua? But really, he belongs to the primeval world, when great lizards crawled about" ' (p. 112). The Bloomsbury-like Breadalby group are like the monsters of the past; unable to evolve and change, they finally became extinct. The ethos of Breadalby is offered to the reader as an anachronism; the people seek to escape the realities of the changing world, but ultimately are doomed because of their inability to adapt or change. If we recall J.M. Keynes's statement, that 'there may have been just a grain of truth when Lawrence said in 1914 that we were "done for",' the full significance of Gudrun's words become apparent.

Russell's response to the biting charges levelled at him by Lawrence — 'for twenty-four hours I thought that I was not fit to live and contemplated suicide' — is an indication of the unnerving power of the accusations and reveals, perhaps, a recognition of the veracity of some, at least, of Lawrence's analysis even though Lawrence may also have been projecting some of his own confused feelings about the war onto Russell. Russell's later reactions, however, are much more suspect. Forty years after the event, he wrote that 'At the end of that time, a healthier reaction set in' when he resolved to 'have done with such morbidness' and resist despair and, instead, work on the lectures Lawrence had criticized, and 'commit suicide in the spring, after my lectures [sic!]. That kept me happy till morning' (*Autobiography* p. 13). In what is Russell's strongest and most hysterical attack against anyone, he went on to accuse Lawrence of having 'developed the

whole philosophy of Fascism before the politicians had thought of it' adding, injudiciously, that Lawrence 'had no real wish to make the world better,' that 'he was his wife Frieda's mouthpiece', and from her 'imbibed prematurely' the ideas afterwards developed by Mussolini and Hitler, that 'he had such a hatred of mankind', and that, finally, Lawrence's theory of blood-consciousness 'led straight to Auschwitz' (*Autobiography* p. 13).

As Delany writes, 'this was a grotesque distortion of Lawrence's influence on modern politics' (Delany, p. 180). A fairer appraisal, I believe, would be that Lawrence, renegade as he often seemed, was also rooted firmly in a vital tradition of English thought, and as such was a living comment on the superannuated Liberalism which Russell represented. Lawrence's response to the brittle rationalism which attempted to revive a philosophy which the war and the concomitant changed conditions of English society had made anachronistic, can best be seen, not as the outpourings of a hater of mankind but as that of an intensely concerned and lucid social commentator.

University of Natal,
Durban.

NOTES

All references to *Women in Love* are to the Penguin edition.

1. George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England.* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961).
2. Lawrence's proposed lectures were never given, but were contained in the published work, *The Crown*, which appeared later.
3. See Harry T. Moore in *The Intelligent Heart;* and James L. Jarrett's 'D.H. Lawrence and Bertrand Russell', in *A.D.H. Lawrence Miscellany* (Carbondale, Ill.: South Illinois University Press, 1959), who both simplify the issues in this manner. See also, Michael L. Ross. 'The Mythology of Friendship: D.H. Lawrence, Bertrand Russell, and *The Blind Man*,' in *English Literature and British Philosophy* ed. S.P. Rosenbaum (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1971) pp. 285–315.
4. Paul Delany, *D.H. Lawrence's Nightmare: The Writer and his Circle in the Years of the Great War* (Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1979).
5. Bertrand Russell, *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell 1872–1913* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1967); Ronald W. Clark, *The Life of Bertrand Russell* (London: Jonathan Cape and Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975).
6. Raymond Williams, *Culture and Society 1780–1950* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963) p. 80. Acknowledgement must be made to Williams's chapters on Mill, Bentham, and Carlyle for many of the quotations used in this essay. All references signified by 'Williams' and page number.
7. Ed. Harry T. Moore, *The Collected Letters of D.H. Lawrence* 2 Vols. (New York: The Viking Press, 1962) pp. 327/8. All future references indicated by *Letters* and page number.
8. John Maynard Keynes, *Two Memoirs* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949).
9. Quoted in Harry T. Moore's *The Intelligent Heart: The Story of D.H. Lawrence* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1960) p. 238.
10. Delany, pp. 80/81.
11. F.R. Leavis, perhaps the most vituperative of the enemies of Bloomsbury's 'civilization', describes the latter as 'articulateness and unreality cultivated together; callousness disguised from itself in articulateness; conceit easing itself

safely in a confirmed sense of high sophistication; the uncertainty as to whether one is serious or not taking itself for ironic poise'. *The Common Pursuit* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1963) p. 257.

12. Ed. Harry T. Moore *D.H. Lawrence's Letters to Bertrand Russell* (New York: Gotham Book Mart, 1948) p. 29. All future references to any letters by Lawrence to Russell will be from this edition, and indicated by page number only.
13. 'Democracy' in *Phoenix I* (London: Heinemann, 1961) p. 716.
14. 'Nottingham and the Mining Countryside', in *Phoenix I* p. 138.
15. Bertrand Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1916) p. 15. All future references in the text indicated by *P.S.R.* and page number.
16. Bertrand Russell, *Political Ideals* (New York: The Century Co., 1917) p. 4.
17. Bertrand Russell, *Sceptical Essays* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1920) p. 123.
18. Emile Delavenay, *D.H. Lawrence: The Man and his Work: The Formative Years, 1885–1919* (London: Heinemann, 1972).
19. D.H. Lawrence, 'The Crown', from *Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine and Other Essays* in *Phoenix II* pp. 365–415, introduction. All references to 'The Crown' from this edition.
20. When he reads Thucydides, given to him by Lady Ottoline Morrell, Lawrence sees reflected a similar situation, 'of these wars of a collapsing era, of a dying idea' (*Letters* p. 454). Elsewhere he writes, 'The Peloponnesian war was the death agony of Greece, really, not her life struggle. I am just reading Thucydides — when I can bear it — it is too horrible to see a people, adhering to traditions, fling itself down the abyss of the past, and disappear' (*Letters* p. 466).
21. Michael Holroyd, *Lytton Strachey: A Critical Biography* Vol. II (London: Heinemann, 1968) p. 174.
22. The U.D.C. was the Union of Democratic Control, formed by Liberals such as Russell in an effort to fight the new Universal Conscription Bill of 1916.

THE DIVINE ABSENTEE: KARL BARTH AND THE DEATH-OF-GOD SCHOOL

by MARTIN PROZESKY

Can belief in the majesty and otherness of an utterly transcendent God and the belief that he is dead be two sides of the same coin? In this article I contend that they are by examining the logical links between the ideas of Karl Barth (1886–1968), the great Swiss protestant theologian who is the best known recent exponent of the first of these two beliefs, and the American Death-of-God school of the nineteen-sixties. And my conclusion will be that Barth's theological method leads inevitably but ironically to atheism for any who allow full scope to the empirical and the rational in matters religious. But before elaborating on this claim I must attend to three preliminary considerations in order to prepare for what follows.

First of all a distinction needs to be made between *concepts of God* on one hand and the ultimate reality in terms of which theists try to live on the other. The concepts are man-made; the reality evoking them (whatever it may be) is evidently not. This is roughly equivalent to the difference between map and countryside and has several advantages for our discussion.[1] It acknowledges that theology is a human venture and thus inhibits the endemic theistic tendency of making a god out of the doctrine of God. It recognizes that our concepts of God are as relative, provisional and error-prone as other concepts. And it reminds us that we are here discussing a chapter in the history of religious ideas in the west, not presuming upon the realm of the holy and being critical where reverence would be due. In this article I shall be confining myself entirely to a prominent map of the divine, so to speak, leaving the sacred landscape to the prophet and the diviner and any others who claim to know it at first hand.

The second preliminary point concerns what I would like to call the loss of the theistic consensus. Until recent centuries virtually all societies appear to have taken for granted the existence of a supernatural realm inhabited by one or more spiritual beings or gods. Belief in a god or in the gods was not something one had to consider and decide, it was part of a commonly held stock of notions. This is of course no longer the case. And in circumstances where not everybody believes in the gods, those who do will have to substantiate their theism, particularly if they say, as they usually do, that without belief in the true god no life can be complete. Moreover, in cultures where rationality and empirical evidence carry a great deal of weight, the case for theism can hardly

succeed without establishing itself on precisely rational and empirical grounds. To put the matter another way: contemporary theists must demonstrate rationally and empirically that there is in fact a divine countryside and that their maps are accurate renderings of it, capable of equipping would-be travellers to discover and enjoy the countryside for themselves. Naturally, such a requirement presents people who claim that there is indeed an imperceptible, supernatural realm with an intriguing but unavoidable difficulty, namely how to establish the existence of the imperceptible by means of the perceptible. If there really is a realm that is *completely* unlike the one we inhabit, how are we to find out that it is there, let alone what it is like? Conversely, can anything we have in fact discovered be legitimately described as "completely unlike" the world we know, as theists like Barth are apt to describe the divine? We shall see in the last section of this article how ill-equipped Barth's theology is to commend itself in a culture where there is no theistic consensus and where the rational evaluation of empirical evidence is regarded as the doorway to knowledge.

Thirdly, we must note the difference between the secular world-view and the traditional theistic view of the world as a place where God periodically intervenes to direct or redirect matters according to his own sovereign purposes. Such a view is clearly at odds with the naturalistic view of the cosmos which acknowledges only the interplay of natural phenomena, though the clash did not bother Karl Barth in the least. For others holding the same concept of God the clash is however worrisome. We will see in due course where it led the Death-of-God thinkers.

The two outlooks also differ in their estimate of man. The doctrine of divine intervention sees man in terms of subordination to and dependence upon a superior divine power. The secular view regards him as an intellectually independent being whose senses and brain can inform him reliably about the cosmos and enable him to tame and humanize it. Karl Barth was scornful of such confidence in humanity. Others who hold a concept of God similar to his are less certain that the brute in us will triumph over the saint unless there is supernatural help for the saint. As one contemporary theologian has observed, 'Far more . . . has been achieved by (the) scientific approach in dealing with the actual incidence of disease and misery than has ever been done or even claimed to have been done by prayer and miracle.'[2]

At issue here is a difficulty which the Indian religions acknowledge more openly than most Western theists: What is the point of human effort here on the earth if the only worthwhile benefits are beyond human achieving? Indeed, what is the point of earthly existence at all? Can one consistently hold a concept of God like

Barth's and admire a figure like Jesus of Nazareth, with his concern at physical suffering? Such questions cannot fail to trouble all theists who think that consistency and logicality are important in the religious life and who cannot bring themselves like Barth to dismiss those questions as irrelevant.

With these three points in mind — the humanness of our ideas about God, the importance of theists saying how they arrive at those ideas, and the contrast between interventionist and secular world-views — we may now proceed to explore the rise and fall of a twentieth-century protestant style of theology.

I

Karl Barth was born in Switzerland in 1886 and died there in 1968. Under his leadership an important section of modern protestant theology developed a doctrine of God which strongly emphasizes the idea that God is wholly other than all finite beings. It therefore also holds that God is knowable only in so far as he reveals himself and thus it claims to dispense with merely human notions about God. Until the First World War protestant theology had assumed that there was a religious endowment in man from which theologians could work by inference to the God who had implanted it in the first place. Moreover in the general optimism of the nineteenth century this type of theology entertained a favourable picture of man and his capacity for improvement and progress. Naturally this notion was severely undermined for many people, including Barth, by the shattering realities of the First World War.

Disillusioned with these views of man and God, Barth launched a theological revolution through the publication of his commentary on the *Epistle to the Romans* in 1918 and thereafter in his multi-volume *Church Dogmatics*. For our purposes his main contentions were these: firstly, that we may know God only as he discloses himself to us in Jesus Christ; secondly, the God thus revealed is one of sovereign majesty and grace before whom man stands as a helpless, fallen creature, and thirdly, man on his own can discover nothing of this God or of his gracious act of salvation in Jesus Christ from either the world or from his own experience. Thus Barth reversed the assumptions and methods of 19th-century theology in a powerful, internally consistent and uncompromising assertion of the transcendent majesty of God. The man-centred approach of the earlier theology gave way to a view which relegates man to the position of a divinely-rescued creature whose fallenness and alienation make him incapable of independent knowledge of God.

This of course means that Barth's theology posits a complete difference between God and man, and in the Preface to the second edition of his *Epistle to the Romans* Barth wrote:

> . . . if I have a system, it is limited to a recognition of what Kierkegaard called "the infinite qualitative difference" between time and eternity . . . "God is in heaven and thou art on earth."[3]

In the *Church Dogmatics* there are many comparable references. So Barth asks:

> Who and what is God Himself? . . . God Himself is in fact simply the One of whom all prophets and apostles explained that they had heard His voice and had to obey Him, executing the messages and tasks He laid upon them . . . And as they describe and explain these works of His and His dignity, they characterize Him as the One who is gracious and holy, merciful and righteous, patient and wise, but also omnipresent, constant, omnipotent, eternal and glorious.[4]

At times Barth employs religiously memorable words to describe the way in which God in his supremacy confounds and transforms the pretences of men. Thus he writes:

> This is the extent to which (God's) election is an election of grace . . . Judas who betrays Him He elects as an apostle. The sentence of Pilate He elects as a revelation of His judgement on the world. He elects the cross of Golgotha as His kingly throne. He elects the tomb in the garden as the scene of His being as the living God.[5]

Later in his career Barth slightly modified this stress on the otherness of God in an essay entitled 'The Humanity of God'. But even there his method remained radically theocentric as he sought, as he himself put it, 'to derive the knowledge of the humanity of God from the knowledge of His deity.'[6]

Directly related to this idea of the total difference between God and man is Barth's declaration that man cannot have independent knowledge of God but must rely instead on the miracle of God's self-revelation. Thus at the start of his treatment of the doctrine of election Barth contends that . . . it is by God that God is known.'[7] The medium of this divine self-disclosure is Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the flesh, in scripture and in the church's preaching. So Barth states that when '. . . our attention and thoughts . . . are directed to Jesus Christ then we see God, and

our thoughts are fixed on Him.'[8] Even then, however, there is no question of learning about God from the standpoint of a detached observer. Only in faith as a man finds himself a reconciled and saved being can he know anything of the reconciling and saving God whom Jesus Christ reveals.

Three points must be observed about this contention. Firstly it is a view which assigns the initiatives to God. It is He who reveals, not man who seeks. It is he who is active while man is passive. Thus Barth's doctrine of revelation is fully consistent with his concept of God: the utterly sovereign lord is sovereign also over the means whereby his subjects come to know him.

The second point to note is the passive role this doctrine assigns to man and its repudiation of any independent effort at knowing God. This is most clearly shown in the following passage:

> The act of God's revelation also carries with it the fact that man, *as a sinner who of himself can only take wrong roads,* is called back from all his own attempts to answer the question of true being, and is bound to the answer to the question given by God Himself.[9]

Thirdly, Barth's position is strongly focussed on Christ, a focus we shall find in the Death-of-God thinkers as well.

So we may summarize Barth's views as follows: God is *completely* different from anything else. Therefore man can know about God only on God's terms. Not only does this entail a subordination of man. It also means that neither the world nor our own experiences can independently furnish anything but delusions about God.

No one who has dipped into Barth's works with the patience and perseverance they require can fail to be impressed with the power and internal consistency of his theology. None the less his uncompromising insistence on the otherness of God and his rejection of the world and our experience as independent sources of knowledge about the divine inevitably isolate his teaching for those who take the world and their own experience seriously. Barth, one commentator has noted,

> restores autonomy to theology by putting it in splendid isolation . . . he so isolates theology as not so much to make it incredible as to make it impossible for us to know whether it is incredible or not.[10]

II

The phrase 'Death-of-God' covers a type of American theology which occurred in the nineteen-sixties, not all of whose exponents

either used or agreed with that designation. They preferred to be called 'radical theologians.' I shall summarize the ideas of three of them, William Hamilton, Paul van Buren and Thomas Altizer, in this section of the article.

William Hamilton was probably the best known of the Death-of-God theologians. His views contained a full-blooded assertion of the death of God and he was also a good commentator on the movement as a whole. With his lively style, Hamilton succeeded in popularizing its contentions sufficiently for the movement to reach the attentions of *Time* magazine.

His own position rested on two points. Firstly he abandoned the traditional picture of a transcendent, supreme God and a dependent, subject humanity. To epitomize this rejection Hamilton employed Nietzsche's phrase the "death of God". it is important to notice that what Hamilton abandoned is similar to Barth's doctrine of God.[11] Commenting on the death-of-God theologians, Hamilton wrote:

> It is really that we do not know, do not adore, do not possess, do not believe in God. It is not just that a capacity has dried up within us; we do not take all this merely as a statement about our frail psyches, we take it as a statement about the nature of the world and we try to convince others. God is dead. We are not talking about the absence of the experience of God, *but about the experience of the absence of God.*[12]

It is also important to notice that Hamilton explicitly linked the death of God with his *experience* that there is nothing he could call "God". It is equally important to notice that the kind of God Hamilton had in mind is precisely a transcendent, intervening being. Understood in this way his assertion concerns a particular concept of God which has indeed been widely held among Christians and others. Hamilton was far from explicit about this but it seems that he was not alleging the demise of *any* kind of theism but only of a transcendent, intervening deity who is wholly unlike everything else.

Hamilton's second assumption is that protestantism is a movement from the cloister to the world, '. . . from a place of protection and security, of order and beauty, to the bustling middle-class world of the new university, of politics, princes, and peasants . . .'[13] For him the Christian faith is a matter of this-worldly involvement, an assumption which is entirely in line with his lack of belief in a distant, heavenly God, utterly distinct from all other beings.

From these two starting points Hamilton defined the Christian faith in ethical terms as our being at the disposal of the neighbour

and the man in need, a quality best exemplified in Jesus of Nazareth. His view rejects 'any system of thought or action in which God or the gods serve as fulfiller of needs or solver of problems . . . '[14] This is the God who is dead.

In Paul van Buren's book *The Secular Meaning of the Gospel,* [15] the debate about God entered a slightly different area but it is still recognisably akin to that covered by Hamilton. Van Buren was the most philosophical member of the group and developed his thesis in a tightly-argued way. He accepted the disputed contention of recent linguistic philosophy that human language cannot accommodate theological assertions or for that matter any other kind of assertion which purports to deal with realities beyond the world. This led him to seek a secular interpretation of the Gospel, which he found in an ethical appraisal of Jesus of Nazareth. Freed of meaningless metaphysics, the Gospel, claimed van Buren, speaks to us not of heavenly salvation but of interhuman freedom and mutual service. As far as the concept of 'God' is concerned, van Buren enjoined silence, for 'God' is not the sort of reality with which words can deal.

Where van Buren must be differentiated from other radical theologians is in the fact that while they asserted the death of God he kept silent. Being of the opinion that no metaphysical talk can be meaningful, it would clearly have been self-contradictory of him to assert the death of God, itself a metaphysical statement. Van Buren thus neatly avoided falling into a trap of his own making. Instead he posited the death of the *word* God. The movement of his thought is however away from the transcendent and towards the immanent and his ideas are strongly christocentric, so that his position is clearly akin to that of Hamilton.

We may conclude this tour of the radical camp with an inspection of the views of Thomas Altizer. Also an American, Altizer's eclectic, ambitious ideas were expounded in various works but most notably in his enigmatically entitled *Gospel of Christian Atheism* which appeared in 1966. Much of Altizer's argument in that book and elsewhere is very strange, provoking one commentator to say that his work is cast in '. . . the language of a visionary who is not always able to grasp what he sees . . .'[16] It is however possible to see past the obscurities to characteristics which also appear in Hamilton and van Buren: rejection of transcendental theism, interest in this world and interest in the ethical significance of Jesus of Nazareth.

The outlines of Altizer's argument may be traced in the following steps. He began by contending that Christianity is unique among religions. Other religions as typified by oriental mysticism tend to negate this world in favour of some allegedly higher realm, and tend to look back nostalgically to a lost paradise.

Christianity is at heart different. It sees the sacred as 'a dynamic, a living, and a forward-moving process.'[17] Thus in the Judaeo-Christian tradition God may be seen to have progressed from an original solitariness to an ever-growing involvement in the world. This process of involvement came to a climax in the Incarnation.

At this point Altizer's argument became highly novel. He maintained that Christianity (unlike him) had not yet recognised the full story about the Incarnation, which is that God transformed himself *totally* into Jesus Christ, thereby ceasing to exist as God at all. Christianity has failed to grasp this because of its 'bondage to a trancendent, a sovereign and an impassive God.'[18] It clings to things that in fact disappeared in the Incarnation.

The death of God for Altizer is thus an irrevocable and deliberate act of divine self-cancellation. God voluntarily ceases to exist and Altizer is able to greet this gracious act of divine self-annulment as a redemptive event which frees us from our pointless other-worldly fascinations.

Christianity's uniqueness lies, said Altizer, in its being essentially forward-looking. Therefore matters cannot be left with God's self-negation in the Incarnation, for to do so would leave us with an event in the past and commit Christians to a retrospective orientation. Altizer therefore took his argument a step further. Using semi-mystical notions borrowed from William Blake he developed a view of Jesus becoming incarnate in 'every human hand and face', till he is that 'universal humanity' which is the 'full coming together of God and man.'[19] In this way Christianity unfolds by continually cancelling its previous forms. The Incarnation in Jesus Christ negates God as a heavenly being, and the 'universal humanity', negates the particularity of Jesus Christ. So Altizer was finally constrained to declare that God, far from being the Unmoved Mover mediaeval Christian theism, is 'a perpetual and forward-moving process of self-negation, pure negation . . . or kenotic metamorphosis.'[20] ('Kenosis' is a biblical idea signifying self-emptying.) God has annihilated himself in a death that is total, real and final.

Altizer's ideas are not entirely clear or consistent. Sometimes he seems to say that there is a divine reality one of whose forms has ceased to exist while new forms continue to emerge. At other times he asserts the complete eclipse of the divine, implying that 'God' necessarily means 'a heavenly being'. He therefore fails in his attempt to develop a consistent theoretical framework within which to set forth the death of God as a redemptive event. But his proposals remain provocative and are analogous to those of the other radical theologians. Especially striking is his strongly disjunctive understanding of things. For him the sacred is either a transcendent deity or an immanent process, but not both. Reli-

gion is either backward-looking or forward-looking, but not both. Therefore Altizer interprets the Incarnation not as a sign that God may be both transcendent and immanent but as the sign that transcendence has been replaced by immanence.

Finally there is an element of expectation which concludes Altizer's argument. Since the sacred is a "perpetual and forward-moving process of self-negation" it will always take on new forms, for which scripture and ecclesiastical tradition give us no preparation. The best way to be wrong about religion is thus to cling to what has been handed down from previous generations. Only by being willing to receive new forms of the sacred can one escape bondage to the empty shells of bygone beliefs. Altizer's argument here appears to become self-destructive, for unless future forms of the sacred come to us in some continuity with previous forms we could not recognize them. New knowledge is possible only in relation to existing knowledge, not in complete disjunction to it. Altizer would have done better without his severely disjunctive outlook; it injures an otherwise important plea for less captivity to the past in religion.

III

When one reviews salient aspects in the thought of Karl Barth and the Death-of-God school an impression of extreme contrast initially forms. On point after point their respective views seem as different as possible. Consider for example their attitudes to the world. Barth shows no interest in the world as such. Only as God's creation and as the scene of his gracious Incarnation is it important in his theology. Hamilton, van Buren and Altizer, on the other hand, are involved in and esteem the world on its own terms and not just from a theological perspective. They are also responsive to the secular spirit of our time. These radical theologians thus stand on the secular side of the division between natural and interventionist world-views that we noted earlier. Barth's views place him firmly on the other side of that division.

The historical background to Barth and the radicals may likewise be contrasted: the trauma of war and the collapse of the 19th century confidence are markedly different from a culture more and more rooted in the urban, in technological achievement and in the secular. This is not, of course, to allege that all was well in the 1960's or that our own decade is free of tragedy and trauma. None the less many people believe that many of our most pressing problems are fundamentally man-made, will be rectified by man rather than by God, and are thus the occasion for intelligent effort rather than prayer or miracles.

Regarding the source of our knowledge of God the contrast between Barth and the Death-of-God group becomes more subtle

but is none the less real. Barth contends that knowledge of God is possible only for him who receives it faithfully from God in Jesus Christ. When he turns his gaze upon Christ he sees the divine. But when the Death-of-God theologians look at Jesus Christ they do not see God. They see a great ethical figure whose love and freedom are models for our own conduct. They see a figure of very great relevance to human affairs. But they do not see God. Neither Barth nor they find evidence of God in the world or in their own experience. According to Barth it can come only by means of miraculous, divine revelation. For Barth it was forthcoming. For them it was absent.

Pointed though these contrasts are we must not be misled by them into confusing contrast with difference. In other words, it would be mistaken to place Barth and the Death-of-God theology in unrelated camps. Instead, I submit that they are opposite extremes of the same fundamental theological position, a position which contrasts and separates God and the world. Both Barth and the Death-of-God theologians assume that 'God' means an *extramundane* being whose actions must be radically differentiated from workings of the world, so that one is either for God or for the world, either attentive to the voice of God or to the summons of the world, but not to both. God cannot be known from the world and the world is not mirrored in God. This way of thinking I wish to call a theological disjunction between God and the world. It works like a see-saw: stress the divine, and the world is relegated to unimportance; stress the world and the divine seems incredible.

Barth superbly exemplifies this concept of the divine as something other-worldly, though he is of course by no means its only exponent. Hamilton, van Buren and Altizer, it will now be seen, stress the worldly side of the alternative. Deeply engrossed in the challenge of living in the world, they find no echo there of an other-worldly, transcendent deity. And naturally enough they do not seek another concept of the divine. Having lost the supernatural God, they have lost theism, for in terms of the concept of God which they share with Barth there is simply no other kind.

Barth thus occupies one extreme and Hamilton, Altizer, and Van Buren the other. But both extremes presuppose that the divine and the earthly must be set against each other and this gives the two positions an underlying unity.

So it transpires that far from being a genuinely radical or revolutionary theology, the Death-of-God movement is merely the logical outcome for secular-minded people of a fundamentally conservative and traditional theistic assumption. When Hamilton, van Buren and Altizer served their theological apprenticeship, protestant thinking was completely dominated by Barth's doc-

trines, in which there is no hint of other ways of validly conceiving of the divine. That the world must be sharply differentiated from the divine, as Barth held, is a notion which found expression in such authoritative earlier theologians as Augustine and Luther and there are some signs of it in the writings of St. Paul. But it is not the only view of the divine, either in Christianity or in the other great religions. Thomas Aquinas, for one, held that divine grace completes rather than negates nature.

Furthermore, the Death-of-God cannot strictly mean what it says. It is a declaration born of a theological position which separates God and the world. Therefore information about God could only come from God; but a dead God can reveal nothing, least of all word of his own demise. This has led some theists to ridicule the ideas of Hamilton and Altizer. Among those who do so I have yet to find one who is also willing to dismiss the kind of other-worldly theism which they took for granted and whose barrenness they so graphically demonstrate. How can one consistently dismiss Hamilton, van Buren and Altizer but retain Karl Barth? Indeed, can one consistently accept Jesus of Nazareth and Barth's God? Not if consistency matters. And if consistency does not matter, then circles are square and good is evil. This of course does not let Hamilton and Altizer off the hook when they proclaim the death of a God who is the only source of any information about himself. They strikingly demonstrate the impasse of a position which cannot logically say what it humanly must: that the Heavenly Intervener is no longer credible. The solution to the impasse is to drop the disjunctive, other-worldly concept of God, of which Barth has been the greatest modern guru, and to stop supposing that otherness and difference are the hall-marks of the divine. To do this means abandoning a set of ideas that go back to Kierkegaard, Kant and beyond, but that is another story,

So we may interpret the Death-of-God theology not as the end of theism but as the demise of a human concept according to which the divine is nothing if it is not wholly other. Karl Barth gave us a theological map which makes theism other-worldly and the world atheistic. In the Death-of-God school it reaches an inevitable, atheistic outcome. Only outright miracle remains for the Barthian to invoke, but that is of course to tender suspect currency in a secular world. Small wonder then that some of us prefer other tactics like the investigation of religious experience which Friedrich Schleiermacher began in the Berlin of 1799. That too is another story. For the time being it is enough to end by observing that Karl Barth and the Death-of-God school are alike involved in a theology of divine absence from the world. For Barth this is of no account. In the writings of those who took his position to its logical conclusion, other-worldly theism competes with

involvement in the world, and the world wins. Some of us would say, 'thank God'.

University of Natal
Pietermaritzburg

NOTES

1. Cf. Gordon Kaufman, *God the Problem* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972) p. 82 ff.
2. D.E. Jenkins, 'The Debate about God' in *Lambeth Essays on Faith,* edited by the Archbishop of Canterbury (London, 1969) p. 12.
3. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London, E.T. 1933) p. 10.
4. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, p. 458.
5. Op. cit. II/2, p. 164ff.
6. Karl Barth, *The Humanity of God* (London, 1961) p. 38.
7. *Church Dogmatics* II/2, p. 3
8. *Op. cit.* p. 54.
9. *Op. cit.* II/1, p. 262. (Emphasis added)
10. D.E. Jenkins, *Guide to the Debate about God* (Philadelphia, 1966), pp. 79 and 81.
11. W. Hamilton, 'The Death of God Theologies Today' in *The Christian Scholar* 48 (1965) p. 27 ff.
12. *Op. cit.* p. 31. (Emphasis added)
13. *Op. cit.* p. 37
14. *Op. cit.* p. 40
15. Published in London in 1963.
16. J. Sperna Weiland, *New Ways in Theology* (Dublin, 1968), p. 135.
17. T. Altizer, *The Gospel of Christian Atheism* (London, 1967). p. 40.
18. *Op. cit.* p. 42
19. *Op. cit.* p. 72.
20. *Op. cit.* p. 84. Altizer makes much of the idea of *kenosis* but understands it as self-negation rather than as self-humbling, the usual interpretation of the biblical source of the concept in Philippians 2:8.

WORDSWORTH'S BLANK MISGIVINGS

by F.J. HUGO

In *Tintern Abbey* the words 'I felt a presence' lead to a carefully constructed account of the harmonious diversity of the natural world. That vision is the culminating construction of steadily evolving experience. The poem, however, begins with a suggestion of the 'blank misgivings of a creature',[1] which recur in Wordsworth's life; and one senses that the firm structure answers to the poet's need to fortify his mind against those experiences. In this relatively early poem inward obscurity is set against outer clarity, but in the course of time Wordsworth's experience of inner uncertainty begins to emerge in his experience of the outer world as well.

The structure of the poem and, one might suppose some of Wordsworth's confidence, appears to owe a good deal to the philosophy of Hartley. We can hardly do better, here, than turn to the summary given by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones.[2]

> It may be argued that the framework of *Tintern Abbey* derives from Hartley and presupposes an empiricist philosophy. The transition in the poem is certainly from a time when sensory pleasures were all important and
>
> . . . . . had no need of a remoter charm
> By thought supplied, or any interest
> Unborrowed from the eye,
>
> to a more mature wisdom when these 'wild ecstasies' have given way to a sober pleasure which is the source of moral strength. In other words, Hartley's account of how the mind moves from sensation through perception to thought, is turned into an analogy of how the individual passes from childhood through youth to maturity.

However, they go on to point out that 'attractive as this may be' a difficulty is created by the phrase

> both what they half-create
> And what perceive

This, the authors believe, is consonant with the thought of the mature Coleridge, rather than with Hartley. Brett and Jones describe Hartley as a 'rigorous empiricist', and it is on the implications of that phrase we need to dwell, it seems to me, if we are to

proceed much further with this matter. When Hartley speaks of the mind's progress from sensation to simple ideas and on to complex ideas, he is referring to the pure 'mechanics' of cognition. The process he is concerned with is performed automatically as a natural function by all normal minds, regardless of intelligence, temperament or environment. By contrast Wordsworth is always concerned with the quality and value of experience: he feels 'sensations sweet' or he is 'haunted' as though by a passion. These experiences are far removed from Hartley's characterless operations of perception.

We need to understand that Wordsworth appropriated a diagram of cognition and applied it to rather different purposes. According to the scheme presented in *Tintern Abbey,* the natural world appeals to the child's sense of value and, what is more, the appeal deepens in quality as the needs of the child grow to maturity. The imaginative receptiveness which such experience presupposes must not be confused with the mechanical passivity which is the domain of rigorous empiricism. In fact it is hardly possible to avoid concluding that Brett and Jones mislead us when they refer, on the one hand, to the attractiveness of the Hartleian theory and, on the other, quote the 'half-create' passage, with the suggestion that it anticipates the mature Coleridge. The significant issue before us is not a choice between empiricism and idealism, but a poet's recognition of the creative value of early experiences of the natural world. Perhaps there is some point in adding that, as Coleridge's poetic sensibility receded, he became more and more convinced that the external world is merely 'fixed and dead'.

The poem begins with a reference to five years of absence. They are not presented as a time of temporary separation, filled with longing but alleviated by an anticipation of return; rather they are treated as years of wintry deadness, dark years of loss and deracination. The blank hopelessness of such a time is reflected in the telling repetitions.

> Five years have past; five summers, with the length
> Of five long winters!

The lines that follow wonderfully evoke the quality of convalescence: the tender reception of the returning powers of life.

> and again I hear
> These waters rolling from their mountain-springs
> With a soft inland murmur.

From a source of perennial freshness a strong current of life flows inward, reviving the withdrawn mind, as it gently spreads its influ-

ence with 'a soft inland murmur'. In this way a recognition of place is subtly made to reflect a momentous experience of recovery.

Wordsworth continues to trace the unfolding convalescent experience. The newly-revived eye of the poet-narrator explores the scene before him, reaching out to make contact and to re-establish connections. The time of wintry deadness is not wholly past, something resistant continues to retard his re-emerging thoughts and the re-emerging landscape. Accordingly there is a feeling of grateful relief, of resistance overcome, when the awakening experience settles itself for the moment in the encompassing impression of the 'quiet of the sky'.

> Once again
> Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
> That on a wild secluded scene impress
> Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
> The landscape with the quiet of the sky.

A suggestion of the wintry past is still present in the image of the dark sycamore, but now the darkness is that of repose, of consolidation of strength before a change, rather than of the dim resistance of alienation.

> The day is come when I again repose
> Here, under this dark sycamore, and view
> These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,
> Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,
> Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves
> 'Mid groves and copses.

The narrator calmly looks out on a diverse rural scene, harmonised by comprehensive greenness. The green of the landscape expresses a principle which pervades, not only the quiet landscape, but also the repose of the onlooker. Active in quietness, it harmonises and restores. It is recognised and appreciated with the poignancy of convalescence.

The moment of awakening described in the first paragraph of the poem restores the poet-narrator's relationship with his past. The light of renewed confidence allows him to re-interpret the period of deracination. He comes to understand, we see, in the second paragraph, that certain isolated, apparently detached experiences during that period were actually vital demonstrations of the underlying continuity of his life. In other words the second paragraph deals with another form of illumination derived from the experience of deracination.

There is nothing Hartleian (or for that matter essentially Coleridgean) about the deep faith Wordsworth reveals in the 'artesian' quality of early creative experience. Perhaps one can say that it is authentically poetic. From a source deeper than memory and the conscious conservation of value, the poet receives unsummoned 'sensations sweet' and 'feelings' of 'unremembered pleasure'. But this resource chiefly expresses itself in the irresistible onset of a buoyant mood of peace and joy. Wordsworth uses the analogy of restful sleep to suggest the poised freedom from inward and outward pressure, enjoyed during such a time.

> 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:

Brett and Jones regard this as a 'mood of passivity'. It is true that the body sleeps and the eye becomes quiet; but that condition is achieved through power, the power of harmony and joy. The quiet eye, in this context, is the most profoundly active, because it achieves the most profound insight.

> While with an eye made quiet by the power
> Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,
> We see into the life of things.

Nor is there any need to regard this moment as mystical or unearthly: Wordsworth presents a moment of fusion which is analogous to the salient quality of many works of art.

The convalescent nature of the poem is perhaps most fully emphasised in the opening lines of the fourth paragraph. Wordsworth returns to the experience described in the opening paragraph, making plain what was mainly present in the form of suggestion before, the confused hesitancy, the dragging inertia which trouble the experience of radical recovery.

> And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,
> With many recognitions dim and faint,
> And somewhat of a sad perplexity,
> The picture of the mind revives again:

These four lines rise out of hesitancy to vigorous and exultant affirmation. The momentous value of the revived 'picture of the mind' is made luminously clear to us. Wordsworth can now look back confidently to the past and so hopefully to the future. The present moment at once reveals and re-establishes the continuity

of his experience. The past, the present, and the future are united in a scale of values which supports and fortifies the poet against personal misgivings and also the destructive influences of society.

> 'tis her privilege,
> Through all the years of this our life, to lead
> From joy to joy; for she can so inform
> The mind that is within us, so impress
> With quietness and beauty, and so feed
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgements, nor the sneers of selfish men
> Nor greetings where no kindness is, nor all
> The dreary intercourse of daily life
> Shall e'er prevail against us.

Four years after *Tintern Abbey* Wordsworth wrote another poem, *Resolution and Independence,* which deals with personal crisis. In *Tintern Abbey* the poet-narrator overcomes the sombre experience of deracination by simply returning to one of the sources of his imaginative life, the valley of the Wye. However irresistible it may have seemed, the oppressive power was a function of particular and limited circumstances. Once the narrator re-enters the valley he finds himself able to respond imaginatively and, in so doing, he recovers the deep resource of personal imaginative experience. The crisis recorded in *Resolution and Independence* implies a greater threat. The poet discovers or re-discovers an obscurity within himself which sets him apart from the joyful birds and animals around him. At first the poet shares their mood and so, by implication, at once benefits from and renews the resource of past experience. But suddenly he is struck by one of those 'blank misgivings': his apparently complete and sufficient mood is strangely upset from within. In spite of the spontaneity of his joy and the depth of his resource of personal experience, he is utterly vulnerable. Later, however, his response to an old leech-gatherer, whom he meets by providential chance, puts him in touch with a resource deeper even than personal experience.

Wordsworth began composing *Resolution and Independence* on 3rd May, 1802 and finished it on 4th July. During this time (May 9–11) he composed *Stanzas Written in Thomson's Castle of Indolence.* In this intermediary poem Wordsworth brings out how close he and Coleridge were in temperament, though also acknowledging significant differences. He presents them both as having a great capacity for joy but, at the same time, a susceptibility to moods of depression. The joyfulness of their lives is expressed in these terms.

And, sooth, these two were each to the other dear:
No livelier love in such a place could be:
There did they dwell — from earthly labour free,
As happy spirits as were ever seen;

We are told of Coleridge that his face ought to have carried a blooming expression but was often depressed by 'Phantasy'.

With him there often walked in friendly guise,
Or lay upon the moss by brook or tree,
A noticeable Man with large grey eyes,
And a pale face that seemed undoubtedly
As if a blooming face it ought to be;
Heavy his low-hung lip did oft appear,
Deprest by weight of musing Phantasy;

Wordsworth's image of himself indicates a far more serious susceptibility to depression. If it were not for the unmistakable signs of identity (large grey eyes, pale face), we would be inclined to confuse the two poetic figures: there can be little doubt that Coleridge was in fact the more troubled spirit. Dorothy records in her journal on 10th November, 1801 her anxiety concerning him: 'I eased my heart by weeping — nervous blubbering, says William. It is not so. O! how many reasons have I to be anxious for him'.[3] The extent of Wordsworth's actual anxiety is made clear when Dorothy later describes how a ' sad melancholy letter' from Coleridge had 'prevented us all from sleeping'. Perhaps the first poet-figure in *Stanzas* is best understood as a compound of both poets, an embodiment of the ominous aspect of their friendship. Perhaps Wordsworth is trying to come to grips with the thought that, besides the joy of the friendship, there is a tragic affinity also.

The first poet-figure is presented as generally secure in a world of enjoyment.

For never sun on living creature shone
Who more devout enjoyment with us took:

But he is subject to unpredictable fugitive impulses.

But go tomorrow, or belike today,
Seek for him, — he is fled; and whither none can say.

He seems to lead a double-existence, living in both the worlds of light and dark at the same time. Often he would appear driven by a dark, unexplained force, even in full day-light.

> Oft could we see him driving full in view
> At mid-day when the sun was shining bright;
> What ill was on him, what he had to do,
> A mighty wonder bred among our quiet crew.

His duality of imagination is most strikingly expressed in the following image.

> Out of our Valley's limits did he roam:
> Full many a time, upon a stormy night,
> His voice came to us from the neighbouring height:

One cannot say whether he contends against the powers of the storm or exults in them, or whether he does both together as King Lear does. But the Shakespeare character who is specially relevant is Hamlet. If the poet-figure reflects something of Coleridge, then it is not a long step to recognising something of Hamlet too. Among Coleridge's many reasons for associating himself with Hamlet must have been Hamlet's recurring sense of the ambiguity of experience. If we turn to the other artists of the Romantic period, Keats immediately comes to mind as being pre-occupied with this theme. But in my view Mozart (for all his classicism) provides the best analogy. Often the inter-play of light and shade is so subtle in a particular work that it may be described in quite contradictory terms by different critics. So for one mind the last piano concerto (K.595) is 'magically gay and light-hearted', while for another 'Much of the music has a restless, foreboding quality, enhanced by the use of incessant modulation and a strongly chromatic style'.

In *Stanzas* Wordsworth evokes a quiet social background in order to throw the poet's divergent fate into relief. The poet is seen from the point of view of the wondering 'quiet crew', that is, at a slight distance; and his duality of imagination accordingly appears vaguely suspect. In *Resolution and Independence* Wordsworth presents the stream of the poet's inward experience, with all its propulsive force and unarguable immediacy: there is little room for standing back and wondering. In this respect the 'Spenserian' archaic simplicity of the style can be seen to help evoke the ingenuous moment-to-moment character of experience. In a word, interest shifts in *Resolution and Independence* away from attitudes of mind to the texture of experience itself.

The opening passage of *Resolution and Independence* resembles that of *Tintern Abbey* in evoking the expansive influence of the natural world. The sun is conceived as a rising power which irresistibly calls out individual joy and collective harmony. The stock-dove broods over its own voice but contributes at the same time

to various antiphonal effects. These are balanced against the background choral sound of thousands of rills and streamlets filled by the rain of the night before. Here especially we sense how significant a role a gift for subtle stylised qualities plays in the achievement of the poem's simplicity. That sense is reinforced when we recognise that these lines owe a good deal to the suggestions of the symphonic stanza which appears so memorably in Spenser's account of the 'Bower of Bliss'.[4]

> But now the sun is rising calm and bright;
> The birds are singing in the distant woods;
> Over his own sweet voice the Stock-dove broods;
> The Jay makes answer as the Magpie chatters;
> And all the air is filled with pleasant noise of waters.

These musical responses lead to the visual correspondence of the luminous cloud of spray to the hare's bursts of joy.

> The hare is running races in her mirth;
> And with her feet she from the plashy earth
> Raises a mist; that glittering in the sun,
> Runs with her all the way, wherever she doth run.

The poet-narrator feels that he belongs wholly to this unified world of responses and correspondences; except that he is able to withdraw mentally whenever he wishes to.

> I heard the woods and distant waters roar;
> Or heard them not, as happy as a boy:

The disturbing implications of that human ability to be both present and absent at the same time are dramatically suggested by the following stanza.

> But as it sometimes chanceth, from the might
> Of joy in minds that can no further go
> As high as we have mounted in delight
> In our dejection do we sink as low;

The birds and animals are able to escape the dark and confusion of the storm, but the past and present co-exist in the narrator's mind, though one or other can be temporarily suppressed. Now the past, bringing darker tones along with it, re-asserts itself all the more forcibly for having been ignored. However, it is not sufficient to discuss the stanza in these broad, synoptic terms. The moment is 'felt in the blood'. The dramatic change is presented as

being like an involuntary physical reflex. The implication seems to be that an impulse towards darkness, after too much unmodulated light, is felt reflexively by the imagination. When this happens the experience of darkness may be fearfully intense.

> And fears and fancies thick upon me came;
> Dim sadness — and blind thoughts, I knew not, nor could name.

Matters become worse when the mind fully co-operates with these undermining forces and turns upon itself in ferocious criticism.

> My whole life I have lived in pleasant thought,
> As if life's business were a summer mood;

He reaches the point, in the headlong momentum of destructive thought, of regarding intellectual and artistic gifts as inevitably bringing 'despondency and madness' down upon themselves.

The reign of inward darkness is checked by a meeting with a leech-gatherer. In one sense the meeting is an everyday occurrence, in another it is not. The landscape changes character in accordance with the new 'visionary dreariness' of the narrator's experience. The old man is seen as a 'huge stone' on the 'top of an eminence', revealing the extent to which the narrator's mind is held and dominated by the unexpected encounter.

> As a huge stone is sometimes seen to lie
> Couched on the bald top of an eminence;
> Wonder to all who do the same espy,
> By what means it could thither come, and whence;
> So that it seems a thing endued with sense:
> Like a sea-beast crawled forth, that on a shelf
> Of rock or sand reposeth, there to sun itself;

The image of the stone carries latent suggestions of monumental endurance and integrity but, primarily, it conveys an overwhelming sense of wonder. In the case of both stone and old man, one is irresistibly drawn to the mystery of their emergence from an indeterminate background. The stone suggests a geological mystery, the old man the mystery of life itself. The image of the stone gives way to an image of a sea-beast, which has come out into the sun from the obscure, unknown region of the sea. The mythical waters of life are brought as close, and made as real, as the old man himself. There is nothing fugitive about the experience Wordsworth records: the old man is close-up and accessible, a direct revelation of the mysterious, sustaining powers of life. One needs to add that the dark and destructive thoughts of stanzas IV

to VII are not answered, in the first place, by a moral admonition but by an image of a deeper, more encompassing darkness than that first encountered.

The narrator's blind thoughts are not dispelled, only set in a new relationship. Their continuing significance is reflected in the almost grotesque frailty of the leech-gatherer.

> Himself he propped, limbs, body, and pale face,
> Upon a long grey staff of shaven wood:
> And, still as I drew near with gentle pace,
> Upon the margin of that moorish flood
> Motionless as a cloud the old Man stood,
> That heareth not the loud winds when they call;
> And moveth all together, if it move at all.

The image of the cloud seems to have a transitional value. Stately and remote, poised in the upper reaches of the sky, beyond the reach of the warring winds of the lower atmosphere; it helps to preserve a connection with the earlier image of the huge stone. On the other hand the intangibility of the cloud seems to prepare for the introduction of the intellectual and spiritual character of the old man in the following stanzas.

The narrator is half-consciously subjecting the old man to a moral test in asking the questions he does. He is more than convinced by the evidence of the old man's stately and orderly speech, but his expression of spontaneous surprise contributes to that conviction.

> His words came feebly, from a feeble chest,
> But each in solemn order followed each,
> With something of a lofty utterance drest —
> Choice word and measured phrase, above the reach
> Of ordinary men; a stately speech;
> Such as grave Livers do in Scotland use,
> Religious men, who give to God and man their dues.

Wordsworth brings out a moral quality which owes a good deal to religious culture. This is far removed from a Pre-Raphaelite dream of religion: the old man's biblical speech is an organic part of a simple, austere, elemental way of life, In other words we recognise a vital relationship between this stanza and those which evoked the high cloud and the huge stone. It would be useful at this point to refer back to some characteristic trains of connection in *Tintern Abbey* 'sensations sweet,/Felt in the blood . . . passing even into my purer mind', and 'the language of the sense . . The anchor of my purest thoughts'.

Stanza XVI brings a reinforcement of the experience and a consolidation of the exposition of the experience. The old man's words blend into a quiet stream of sound, as the narrator recovers the imaginative authority of the experience and, at the same time, assimilates it as a whole.

> The old Man still stood talking by my side;
> But now his voice to me was like a stream
> Scarce heard; nor word from word could I divide;
> And the whole body of the Man did seem
> Like one whom I had met with in a dream;
> Or like a man from some far region sent,
> To give me human strength, by apt admonishment.

He is presented as an apparition, not because he seems a tenuous or alien presence, but because of the revelatory impact of the organic powers he embodies. The suggestion that he comes from a mythical 'far region' helps to confirm the sense that his sustaining powers emerge from an elemental, primordial source.

The poem ends on a cheerful note of moral uplift, which seems curiously out of place. The narrator's experience of ambiguity has not been resolved: it remains a part of himself. There is nothing to indicate that the 'blind thoughts' and 'dim fancies' may not recur at any time. The narrator has been made aware, though, of a common, elemental human power. It has sustained the old man through the 'dire constraint of pain'; it has sustained the narrator through an onslaught of destructive thought.

It has been possible to suggest many links between *Tintern Abbey* and *Resolution and Independence*; and, in spite of the more sombre tone of the later poem, they can be seen to express essentially the same imagination. The first four stanzas of *The Immortality Ode* date from the same year as *Resolution and Independence,* but the bulk of the poem was composed at a later time (1804–6), and the spirit of the whole is at variance with Wordsworth's earlier work. In the *Ode* the experience of 'blank misgiving' is not treated as a prelude to broader insight but as itself the centre of insight. That moment is interpreted as revealing that one is an exile in the natural world and, so it follows, that any faith one may have in a source of organic human strength is an illusion.

Geoffrey Hartman[5] in a well-known book takes the view that the *Ode* represents the culmination of the poet's imaginative career, not a defection from it. He argues with a good deal of wit and imagination that Wordsworth's poetic experience follows a gradual process of negation, which eventually carries him through to a higher truth, beyond nature. But it seems wilfully paradoxi-

cal, in the end, to attempt to evoke an image of Wordsworth dismantling his distinguishing imaginative capacities as he proceeds. Individual poems are also presented in a rather attenuating way. For example, the significance of 'apocalyptic thoughts' (those that cast out nature) is stressed in *Resolution and Independence.* Hartman does recognise a precarious balance between vision and matter-of-fact, but he does not do justice to the remarkable vision of the 'whole body of the Man', which brings together various human qualities, including the religious, in a resistant organic unity.

University of Natal
Pietermaritzburg

NOTES

1. *Ode. Intimations of Immortality . . .* line 148.
2. ed. R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones: *The Lyrical Ballads.* Methuen, London, 1965.
3. ed. E. de Selincourt: *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth.* Macmillan, London, 1941.
4. Spencer: *The Faerie Queene,* Book II, Canto XII, Stanza lxxi (ed. R. Morris & introd. J.W. Hales, Dent - Everyman's Library, London, 1964).

   The joyous birdes, shrouded in chearefull shade
   Their notes unto the voice attempred sweet;
   Th'Angelicall soft trembling voyces made
   To th'instruments divine respondence meet;
   The silver sounding instruments did meet
   With the base murmure of the waters fall;
   The waters fall with difference discreet,
   Now soft, now loud, unto the wind did call;
   The gentle warbling wind low answered to all.
5. Geoffrey Hartman *Wordsworth's Poetry.* Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 1965.

All quotations from Wordsworth are taken from *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth* revised by E. de Selincourt (Oxford Standard Authors).

TWO OPERAS FOR BEGGARS: A POLITICAL READING

by RICHARD J. SALMON

J.C. Pepusch's music in *The Beggar's Opera* (1728) is seldom discussed in music histories, but its extreme popularity was undoubtedly a major reason for the opera's success. Actually, not a single air was composed especially for the opera; all were already well known and were chosen from a variety of sources. Some were by well-known composers and had been heard in earlier stage-works; others were folk songs — English, Irish, Scottish and French. Many of the airs became widely known through the publication of 'broadside ballads', i.e. songs printed on single sheets of paper which were very common in seventeenth-century London and which became an important source of mass communication. They often related political propaganda or accounts of historical or natural events, as the demands of popular taste determined.

Since, as most authoritative accounts agree, it was the librettist, John Gay, who chose the airs, Pepusch's job as the 'composer' was greatly reduced — he composed only the overture and the basses to the airs. Following the popular style of the airs, Pepusch set most of them in a simple binary form, often composed of a four-bar phrase which is repeated and then approximately eight bars moving from a dominant chord to the tonic. Although the music was chiefly effective because of its popular nature, it is also expressive of Gay's texts. Some of the settings are specifically appropriate: for example, successively rising chromatic alterations in Air XLI reveal Lucy's excitement when she remembers Macheath's kisses. In Act III, scene xiii, Macheath sings a medley of extracts from ten different airs, and the variation in metre, key and mood in these extracts clearly reflects his moods as he fluctuates between grimness and the false optimism which a bottle of alcohol gives him.

Pepusch's accompaniments sometimes seem incomplete: four songs end in keys different from those in which they begin, and Air XXXIX ends on a dominant chord. In the broadside ballad tradition, both introductions and conclusions to songs were omitted from the printed sheets and it seems likely that Pepusch's rather simple accompaniments were elaborated in accordance with the demands of the songs.

The Beggar's Opera was not an isolated phenomenon. It followed in the tradition of popular theatre art, e.g. the masque, and its example was followed by numerous other writers, e.g. Henry Fielding. The masque was also a popular entertainment including

songs and instrumental music and was the fashionable entertainment of the aristocracy at first, but was taken over by amateur groups after 1642, when stageplays were prohibited by the Puritan Commonwealth. Masques were allowed private performance because they contained music and could be disguised as concerts. Both the masque and early English opera were soon overshadowed by the importation of Italian opera, which was extremely popular. Many Italians came to London, e.g. Bononcini, but in the early eighteenth century the major influence on English theatre was G.F. Handel, who wrote as many as thirty-six Italian operas for London audiences.

The production of *The Beggar's Opera* in 1728 represented a restatement of a tradition essentially British — that of the masque. Its impact cannot be appreciated without having a sense of what this tradition implied. One of the most common functions of the amateur masque had been burlesque, which had directly satirized plays and later operas. 'Ballad operas', of which *The Beggar's Opera* was the first, displayed many characteristics of the burlesque, and these would have been apparent to contemporary audiences. The most significant of these characteristics was probably the use of popular 'street-tunes' as well as melodies from current operas for the purposes of parodying their original texts.

Gay makes it perfectly clear to his audience that *The Beggar's Opera* intends to satirize Italian operatic conventions: In the introduction to the opera, the Beggar says:

> I have introduced the similes that are in all your celebrated operas: the swallow, the moth, the bee, the ship, the flower etc. Besides, I have a prison scene, which the ladies always reckon charmingly pathetic . . . I hope I may be forgiven that I have not made my opera throughout unnatural like those in vogue; for I have no recitative.
> (Introduction, lines 16 to 24)

The similes which the Beggar mentions are used in airs XXXIV, IV, XV and VI respectively, and are meant to satirize that operatic convention whereby characters developed elaborate parallels between themselves and seemingly appropriate, but usually banal images. The Beggar's images, however, are used to convey rather non-operatic subject-matter: the singed moth and the wilted flower represent lost virginity; the busy bee is seen as the free-hearted lover who sips the pleasure of every available 'flower'! In this way Gay revitalizes the exhausted imagery of Italian opera. His prison scene, in which Macheath is confronted by his competing 'wives', is set in the reality of Newgate and is the antithesis of scenes in which a delicate heroine visits a brave hero.

The competition between Polly and Lucy for Macheath's love is Gay's way of ridiculing the fierce competition between virtuoso singers in conventional opera. Vocal 'showpieces' were usually created for the benefit of singers who wished to demonstrate their virtuosity. Italian operas were also notorious for their contrived happy endings and Gay satirizes this by having his Beggar contrive an arbitrary reprieve for Macheath:

> In this kind of drama 'tis no matter
> How absurdly things are brought about.
> (Act III, scene xvi, lines 11 to 12)

The reprieve is a low-life *deus ex machina* and represents an abandonment of poetic and moral justice.

That Gay should choose a cast of low-life characters singing common street-tunes is a satirical means of mocking the pseudo-heroic nature of Italian operatic characters. Furthermore, Gay's characters affect the airs and elevated language of heroes. Like his friend Alexander Pope, he appreciated the critical potential of the 'mock-heroic'. Peachum says of Macheath:

> Your case, Mr. Macheath, is not particular.
> The greatest heroes have been ruined by women.
> (Act II, scene v, lines 5 to 6)

Polly, of course, is the devoted heroine of the plot.

Macheath is seen as something of a military leader, and constantly points out to his gang that they cannot doubt his "courage", "honour and truth to the gang", (Act II, scene ii, lines 12 and 14). This sense of honour is expressed in the Peachum family as well. The parents speak of Polly's "duty" to them — her duty to hang Macheath for the reward that would be earned! Marriage is also repeatedly under attack in *The Beggar's Opera* — Gay's satirical response to the ideals of 'courtly love' as expressed in Italian opera. Mr. Peachum asks Polly:

> Do you think your mother and I should have lived comfortably so long together, if ever we had been married?
> (Act I, scene viii, lines 13 to 15)

If *The Beggar's Opera* were significant only for its satire of Italian opera, it would not merit much attention. But Gay took his satire beyond opera to the society which patronized opera, and most of his most biting remarks are of a political nature. The corruption and decadence in *The Beggar's Opera* are not mere invention. Peachum and Macheath are based on the characters of two

popularly known criminals who had recently been executed: Jonathan Wild and Jack Sheppard. Jonathan Swift, Gay's friend (who it seems suggested the idea of a 'Newgate pastoral' to him), described his purpose in dealing with such thugs as follows:

> The author takes the occasion of comparing the common robbers of the public and their several stratagems for betraying, undermining and hanging each other, to the several arts of the politicians in time of trouble.[1]

A good starting point in discussing Gay's political quips is to point out that Air XLVII was a popular tune called 'Walpole'.[2] (This tune is also the one used by Pepusch in the overture.) The Prime Minister of Britain at the time was Sir Henry Walpole. Neither Peachum, Lockit nor Macheath consistently represents this character, but there is no doubt that much of Gay's satire is directed against him. Walpole was a Whig, and destroyed his Tory opposition by imprisoning former Tory minister Oxford, and in effect exiling Bolingbroke. Despite his unscrupulousness, or rather because of it, Walpole's reign was materially very successful, and he was returned to power even after the death of his admirer King George I in 1729. Industry flourished, and cities expanded.

Gay's character Peachum brings out likenesses between the thug, Jonathan Wild, and Walpole: their success in duping the public, their duplicity and their bland materialism. Walpole's society, and that of *The Beggar's Opera*, reflect Thomas Hobbes' view that:

> Men do not come naturally together for the common good, but rather for a variety of selfish reasons: for honour, dignity, passion, glory, gain.[3]

Lockit expresses this idea slightly differently:

> Lions, wolves, and vultures don't live together in herds, droves, or flocks. Of all animals of prey, man is the only sociable one.
>
> (Act III, scene ii, lines 4 to 6)

The Beggar's Opera extends its satirical attack beyond the party-political to an attack on the classes which supported the government — the aristocracy and the upper-middle class. It criticizes the rich for implementing double standards of morality: one for themselves and one for the poor. This is summed up by Macheath in Air LXVII:

Since laws were made for ev'ry degree,
To curb vice in others, as well as me,
I wonder we han't better company
Upon Tyburn tree![4]

But gold from law can take out the sting;
And if rich men, like us were to swing,
'Twould thin out the land, such numbers to string
Upon Tyburn tree!

(Act III, scene xiii, lines 22 to 29)

There are similarly many examples in the text of the corruption and decadence of 'polite' society, and of the similarities between that society and the criminal world, e.g.

Macheath: When my friends are in difficulties, I am always glad that my fortune can be serviceable to them. (Gives them money.) You see, gentlemen, I am not a mere court friend, who professes everything and will do nothing.

(Act III, scene iv, lines 2 to 5)

Through remarks such as this, Gay exposes the mercenary amorality of high society, and especially the grim realities of some high-society marriages. His wit, together with the familiar airs of the opera, made *The Beggar's Opera* so popular that Italian opera was temporarily eclipsed from London theatre.

I

Kurt Weill's music in *The Threepenny Opera* (1928), like that of *The Beggar's Opera,* is discussed in scant detail in most of the relevant literature. Most of it is based on the simple forms of popular music: the songs are usually strophic, often include a refrain and are based on simple AB or ABA structures. Some of the items seem to lack codas and conclude in an 'unfinished' manner, either because they are irregularly phrased or because they conclude with irregular harmonies.

The music is orchestrated so as to be performable by ten somewhat versatile players, most of whom play two or three instruments. The instrumentation need not always be adhered to rigidly, for Weill offers alternatives where one instrumentalist might not be available. The most significant feature of Weill's orchestra is the inclusion of instruments associated with popular music. e.g. the saxophone, trumpets, banjo, guitars and the accordion.

The orchestration is subtle. Vocal lines are usually doubled but by varying the doubling instruments and successively adding more instruments, Weill creates variety and a climatic build-up from verse to verse. Climatic tension and variety are also created by the use of counter-melodies played by the orchestra in either contrapuntal imitation or merely secondary motives. Instrumental doubling of vocal parts is sometimes used for characterization, e.g. Mr. Peachum is usually accompanied by the harmonium, which is used to get a bland, barrel-organ effect, reflecting the rather laboured solemnity of Peachum's didactic messages.

In addition to the popular influences on Weill's music reflected in the use of popular instruments and in the flexibility in the instrumentation, there are other popular characteristics:

(i) The use of blues harmonies and 'blue' notes in the melodies — flattened thirds, sevenths and even fifths;
(ii) the use of the percussive jump-bass and the dotted rhythms of ragtime;
(iii) the use of such popular dance tempi as the Boston (a slow waltz), the tango (characterized by accompanimental syncopations) and the shimmy. These tempi are specifically marked in items 8, 13 and 14 of the score, respectively.

Weill's harmonies in *The Threepenny Opera*, in addition to showing the popular influences described above, are highly chromatic, often resembling what jazz musicians call 'dirt': the deliberate improvisation of non-chord-tones so as to create dissonance. Weill's music, however, is never improvised, a feature which clearly distinguishes it from pure jazz. Only item 14 has a key-signature, and only items 2, 3, 9, 12, 13, 19 and 20 begin and end in the same key. The others wander through a variety of keys, and many end in keys remote from their openings.

Weill's chromaticism is expressed in several ways:
(i) seemingly careless cross-relations;
(ii) sustained seconds, sevenths, ninths, elevenths and thirteenths;
(iii) the alternation of major and minor modes;
(iv) the use of chromatic vocal lines.

Another prominent feature of Weill's music is the extensive use of parallel fifths and octaves, and the use of 'bare' or 'open' fifths. The latter are used to create a hollow, non-directed effect. Weill's rhythms are more than merely catchy. Although often syncopated, they are also highly regular and are sometimes designed to be monotonous, as in the song which Macheath's bored gang sings with embarrassment at his wedding, (item 5). Such rhythms

provide for a homophonic texture in which the clarity of the words sung is most important.

Despite the apparent freedom of Weill's chromaticism and his use of popular idioms, his music in *The Threepenny Opera* is restrained by the Classicism which he respected in the work of his teacher, Busoni. The Overture is a prime example of such Classicism. Its form is simple:

A — 25 bars; homophonic.
B — 25 bars; contrapuntal.
A^{1} — 17 bars; homophonic

Section A is strictly organized harmonically, although there is no key-signature. The first twenty-four bars are structured according to a repeated harmonic pattern. Bar 25 is a link to section B, which is a short fugue, after which another link bar returns to section A. The overture, which began in C minor, ends in C major.

The music of the 'Third Threepenny Finale' is the furthest removed from popular influences of all the music in the opera. A chorus is used for the first time (except for some refrains to earlier songs). Rushing semiquavers introduce the chorus, who contribute to the building tension in the rather conventional manner of singing 'Hark! Hark! Hark!' on successively higher pitches. The male and female parts then diverge creating a sense of a more diversified crowd. The excitement generated is reminiscent of so many 'arrival scenes' in conventional opera. The King's messenger arrives, accompanied by a *Largo* fanfare, reminiscent of operatic fanfares in operas from Handel's time to Wagner's. The police chief, Brown, then begins his announcement using a Baroque-style recitative. This is the first avoidance of spoken dialoque in the opera — the only point at which the drama moves on *during* a musical number. On announcing that Macheath is free, the latter, accompanied by 'ecstatic' semiquavers, exclaims in pitches rising higher than he has yet had to sing: 'Saved! Saved!' His subsequent arietta is truly operatic: a high-pitched, lyrical melody over a homophonic accompaniment in Classical tonal harmonies. The remainder of the Finale is through-composed, although it includes comments by the Peachums and the Chorus. The only divergence from operatic finale convention is that this finale does not have a grandiose conclusion. It ends with a hymn — no longer a part of operatic parody, but part of a bitter satire.

Weill's music represents a very particular response to the musical crisis of the early twentieth century — the search for an organizational procedure other than traditional tonality. His contemporaries developed other 'solutions': the neoclassicism of *Les Six* in Paris, the rhythmic innovations of Stravinsky and the serialism

of Schoenberg. Weill had already experimented with atonality, but he felt strongly that his music should have a broader-based audience. Not only did the music of *The Threepenny Opera* challenge musical tradition, through the use of popular idioms and of parody, but it also contacted its audience — it was the key to the exceptional popularity of the work. It was akin in spirit only to the operas of Ernst Krênek and the *Gebrauchsmusik* of Paul Hindemith.

II

The only music in *The Threepenny Opera* which is based on that of *The Beggar's Opera* is 'Peachum's Morning Hymn', which uses the melody of Air I. All other similarities in the music of the works are of a general nature.

The music of *The Threepenny Opera* has much of the simplicity of that of *The Beggar's Opera,* e.g. strophic forms, implying frequent repetition. But Weill's songs are longer and fewer. Both works are based on popular styles, but the music of the earlier work is more consistently sensuous and entertaining. Much of the music of *The Threepenny Opera* is monotonous, with unstable harmonies and frequent dissonance, and could not be described as 'popular'. Several songs have a deadpan nature which is no part of *The Beggar's Opera.*

Both of the operas have carefully constructed overtures, but *The Beggar's Opera* has none of the extended finales which end each act of *The Threepenny Opera.* The first and third 'Threepenny Finales' consist of sections sung by different characters, but these sections are not separated like a succession of numbers. Clearly, the later opera was less determined by popular convention, and more determined by the single creative organisation of the composer, i.e. it has greater autonomy. However, the music of each opera relies heavily on its libretto for its success. Weill's music is not viable without Brecht's texts — it cannot stand on its own. Brecht insisted that the melodies of the operas should not be followed blindly — that singers should 'speak against the music'[5], independently of melody and even of rhythm. This is quite unlike *The Beggar's Opera,* in which melody is paramount. This is not to say that Gay's song texts are unimportant, for they are frequently highly topical, but most of his songs are simple expressions of love or jealousy, and are therefore not crucial. In both operas the accompaniments to the songs are largely homophonic, allowing clear enunciation of the texts, but in *The Beggar's Opera* these accompaniments also cater to the supremacy of the melodies and demand no attention in themselves.

In both operas the music, or at least some of it, was very popular, but while *The Beggar's Opera* actually used popular melo-

dies, *The Threepenny Opera*'s popularity lay in the reworking of jazz, dance-rhythms and ragtime. The use of the language of jazz, especially blues, gives to Weill's music something of a political taste which *The Beggar's Opera*'s music lacks — an association with oppression. 'Blue' harmonies were less alienated in the 1920s from their origin in expressing the oppression of American Blacks than they are today. The music of *The Beggar's Opera,* although popular, has no such political significance. Its melodies did not grow out of the suppression of the working classes in the eighteenth century.

Both works are concerned with satirizing opera. In *The Threepenny Opera,* however, such satire is less important than in *The Beggar's Opera,* where it is mainly evident in the 'Third Threepenny Finale'. However, it is the music itself which in the later work is the means of parody, whereas in *The Beggar's Opera* it is Gay's texts which satirize opera. The music of the earlier work does little more to imitate opera than to reflect personality clashes between *prima donnas* in jealousy duets such as Air XXXVIII. Both operas parody traditional 'happy endings' by introducing a *deus ex machina,* but Brecht exaggerates his more than Gay does; not only is Macheath reprieved, but he is made a peer and given a substantial amount of property! Brecht insisted that the messenger who brings the reprieve must be mounted, dignified and serious, so that those people in the audience who respect such authority figures may remain 'undisturbed' in their 'appreciation of even the most intolerable conditions'.[6] Thus Brecht's satire is aimed against a bourgeois audience which does not appreciate the ludricrousness of the situation and object to Macheath's reprieve.

III

Both operas are set in Soho, London, but Brecht's version is located in the nineteenth century at the time of the coronation of the queen. Many of Brecht's characters, although based on Gay's, are updated.

Gay's Peachum is a rogue who lives by dishonesty. He is an image of corrupt aristocracy and professionalism. Brecht's Peachum, however, is no thug. His business is clothing beggars and distributing them about London in such a way that they provoke the maximum amount of sympathy, and earn more in alms, of which Peachum gets a substantial percentage. He is of the unemployed proletariat and his only crime is the commoditization and exploitation of misery. Peachum monopolizes the begging industry in London — as he soon explains to Filch, who dares to beg without his permission. Brecht's Peachum resembles Gay's Pea-

chum only to the extent that he resembles exploiters amongst the ruling class, whose ways he apes. The contradiction between this behaviour and his actual position in the economy possibly reflects the extent to which bourgeois business instincts have penetrated the consciousness of the proletariat.

Brecht uses his Peachum as a means to ironic suggestions about Christianity. His 'Morning Hymn' points out the hypocrisy of many 'Christians' who, because of their involvement in competitive business, are as good as criminals:

> You ramshackle Christian, awake!
> Get on with your sinful employment
> Show what a good crook you could make.
> (Act One, Scene One, page 5)[7]

Soon afterwards Peachum explains that the signs which he gives to his beggars — to help break the hearts of moneyed passers-by — use quotes from the Bible, which nevertheless are seldom successful. This constitutes a bitter comment on the irrelevance of religion to the plight of the poor, and also on its impotence in combating the establishment. Religious satire such as this is not part of *The Beggar's Opera.*

In both operas, Macheath has the airs of a gentleman. In *The Beggar's Opera* this is a means of satirizing operatic heroes, and also of making comments about polite society. In *The Threepenny Opera,* Macheath and his gang are representatives of bourgeois society, and Brecht's intention is that they should demonstrate the similarities between criminals and the bourgeoisie.[8] That Macheath assumes the airs of an aristocrat demonstrates something of the alliance between the bourgeoisie and the landed aristocracy in the nineteenth century. Ironically, he is accepted into the aristocracy at the end of the opera, when he is reprieved and 'raised to the hereditary peerage' (Act Three, Scene Nine, page 78).

Brecht's characters Brown and Smith, the police chief and a constable, are representatives of bureaucracy. Both Brown and Gay's Lockit are corrupt, but Brown is a more modern phenomenon, especially in the split between his private and public lives: privately, he is an old friend of Macheath and appears 'unofficially' at his wedding; publicly, he is forced to have Macheath arrested. His relationship with Macheath reflects the intimate but paradoxical connection between bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie — both interdependent and antagonistic.

Both *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Threepenny Opera* are cynical about love and marriage: 'Marriage', says Brecht's Peachum, 'is disgusting', (Act One, Scene One, page 10). His Macheath is equally pessimistic about love: 'love will endure or not endure',

he says fatalistically (Act Two, Scene Four, page 39). In both operas sex is commoditized, being granted in exchange for money by the prostitutes or for prestige by society ladies. In competitive society even the most intimate and spontaneous behaviour becomes debased by commercial motivations.

Whereas Gay chose criminal society as a reflection of the morality of politicians, Brecht showed criminal society to be equivalent to bourgeois society. Gay's was a criticism of the politics of the Walpole government; Brecht's is a social criticism of a system now more than three hundred years old: capitalism.

IV

The English Civil War of the 1650s terminated the feudal basis of the English economy by establishing a greater autonomy of the growing bourgeoisie. This new autonomy provided for the development of commerce based on the exchange-value of goods. Thus the London of Gay's *Beggar's Opera* was the largest commercial centre of a new economy — one based on capitalism. Enlightenment philosophy also reflected a new autonomy of individuals. Through a reliance on Reason, Man was deemed naturally capable of discerning principles of morality and thus of perfecting himself. The Restoration after the Civil War was likened to that of Augustus Caesar in Rome after the defeat of the Republicans. John Gay was a close ally of the Tories who, under Queen Anne, hoped to build a London like Augustus' Rome. However, Gay and his friends lost influence under the Whig government established under George I in 1714. Prime Minister Walpole's government catered to and encouraged the new competitive commercialism, and Gay witnessed London's steady decline into a base market-place. In this society love, honour and decency were weaknesses, for only the fittest survived. Gay's Peachum and Macheath represented two ways of survival: bourgeois competitiveness, and pseudo-aristocratic aloofness.

Gay's Augustan values are very clear in *The Beggar's Opera.* The Augustan criterion of naturalism is mentioned in the introduction to the opera — the Beggar apologises for not having made his opera 'unnatural like those in vogue', (Introduction, lines 23 to 24). The growing split between urban and rural life in the early eighteenth century is reflected in the opera's setting in the most squalid area of London — Soho — and in its being characterized as a 'mock-pastoral'. 'Gay believed in the moral function of satire as an instrument for exposing folly and vice and so for correcting all those deviations from the standards he upheld', says Peter Lewis.[9] Gay's Augustan belief that moral behaviour determines the nature of society manifests itself in the fact that his social critique is primarily a moral critique.

Gay's critique is essentially reactionary. Although he is dissatisfied with the *status quo,* he is not a rebel but a reformer wishing to put society *back* on the right lines. He wants to return to pre-capitalist days, to reverse history. (At the level of form, this is reflected in Gay's restatement of the tradition of the masque.) Gay is not interested in beggars as much as he is in abstract moral values. He preaches harmony between rich and poor — a medieval feudalism. Although his beggars are humanely portrayed, his suggestion that low-life heroes have much in common with the elevated characters of romance is patronizing. His depiction of the sub-bourgeois world is sentimentalized.

Pepusch did nothing to add any true social criticism to *The Beggar's Opera.* Burney described him as a scholarly man who devoted much of his time to studying ancient music.[10] He was not an innovative composer, and his music therefore supports Gay's reactionary stance by its adherence to tradition.

Another reactionary characteristic of *The Beggar's Opera* is its pessimistic expression of the Hobbesian view of men as essentially selfish and anti-social. The opera fails to create a sense of the origins of human behaviour in social conditions. Furthermore, the entertainment-value of the opera, residing chiefly in Gay's wit, tends to temper his satire. This is because his satire was directed specifically against the ruling class of his own time. *The Beggar's Opera* is not addressed to beggars but to the rich and to the politicians in power in the 1720s. Its audiences were largely of the middle classes, but nobility were also present. Workers were excluded from cultural activities by virtue of their status, and so although *The Beggar's Opera* was 'popular', it was mainly the bourgeoisie that patronized it. This division between the 'educated classes' and the 'ignorant masses' was typical of the Enlightenment.

Georg Lukàcs said of the eighteenth-century English social novels that they are the product of a 'realistic instinct' more than of a clear historical understanding.[11] Gay's ballad opera is not reactionary to the extent that it, too, reflects social contradictions. But his realism fails to locate the source of these contradictions in the development of capitalist society.

Ironically, *The Beggar's Opera* may have had more political impact through its parody of Italian opera than through its political satire. This is essentially because Italian opera in the 1720s was itself fostered by the capitalist economy. Despite the aristocratic origins of opera, aristocratic audiences soon merged with bourgeois audiences in the eighteenth century. (According to Michael Robinson, there were commercial opera houses in Venice as early as 1637.[12]) Opera houses became the fashionable places in which to be seen. Boxes were rented by the rich, who treated them not

as a vantage point for viewing opera, but as a venue for entertaining guests.

English opera became a business under such manager/impresarios as William D'Avenant and G.F. Handel himself, who catered to audiences' whims. The commoditization of opera led to the demand for virtuosity in singers, and the consequent competition for status amongst singers led to quarrels over fees and performances. It was these very characteristics of conventional opera that *The Beggar's Opera* undermined, and in so doing, Gay unwittingly and indirectly attacked a feature of capitalist society.

V

In 1888, Wilhelm II inherited the German empire, and during his rule Germany experienced unprecedented economic growth, characterized, as in most late nineteenth-century Western countries, by 'monopoly capitalism'. Germany became one of the great imperialist powers. Economic growth brought a growth of the working classes and of the German Socialist movement. After the first world war, which ruined the German economy and swelled the Socialists' numbers to a near-majority in Parliament, the Kaiser was replaced by a conservative Social-Democratic government bolstered by American capital under the Dawes Plan. The Socialists were successfully thwarted.

This was the background to Brecht's early years in Berlin, the time of his cynical, even nihilistic poetry of the chaos of urban living conditions. But in 1926, he started studying the writings of Karl Marx. He started writing for the left-wing theatre manager, Erwin Piscator, and became interested in Soviet 'agit-prop'. At the same time Kurt Weill was finding frustration in the limited audience for modern, atonal music, and was turning to the more popular idioms of music.

The Threepenny Opera was written during 1927 and was the second collaboration of Brecht and Weill. Brecht's Marxist commitment in it is apparent in the analysis of the opera in section II, above: Peachum is a desperate proletarian and Macheath is a bourgeois 'criminal'; the social system rewards the latter and cheats the former. That Brecht is dealing with monopoly capitalism is also apparent: Macheath complains that even his type is being 'swallowed up by big corporations backed by the banks', (Act Three, Scene Nine, page 76).

Brecht's attack is largely against the exploitation of 'morality' in capitalist society. He emphasizes that the working classes are too poor to obey the law, and that the laws are made by the ruling class for their own benefit. Peachum says:

> The law was made for one thing alone, for the exploitation of those who don't understand it, or are prevented by naked misery from obeying it.
>
> (Act Three, Scene Seven, page 61)

Perhaps the most famous line of the play expresses the proletarian viewpoint more succinctly:

> Food is the first thing. Morals follow on.
>
> (Act Two, Scene Six, page 55)

Man has a right to happiness, Peachum suggests, but in the conditions in which the proletariat live, this right is denied. Brecht's work, then, is revolutionary in intent — in presenting social conditions in a critical light and suggesting that they are not unalterable, the opera might be described as a 'call-to-arms' to the proletariat.

But *The Threepenny Opera* does not achieve such revolutionary implications because of several contradictory and reactionary features. The unmistakable pessimism which underlies much of the text is incompatible with Brecht's revolutionary intent. Such pessimism is reflected in several remarks about the bestial nature of Man, but is most apparent in the 'First Threepenny Finale', which first affirms that the poor would like to "practise goodness" if their conditions allowed it, but which then concludes fatalistically and resignedly:

> So that is all there is to it.
> The world is poor, and man's a shit.
>
> (Act One, Scene Three, page 33)

Furthermore, Brecht's gibes at business, although frequent, are somewhat random and do not convey more than a delight in cynicism. There is an element of 'showmanship' in *The Threepenny Opera* which makes it too entertaining to be truly revolutionary. Weill's role as 'music director' is too readily apparent; the music is not taken seriously. Theodor Adorno has complained that Weill 'flirts' with chromaticism (and with twelve-tone technique in other works), in order to posture as thoughtful.[13] As an aesthetic entity, the music of *The Threepenny Opera* does not stand up on its own — it leans on the literary success of the libretto. In directing his music at a broader-based audience, Weill had to acquiesce to that audience's demands to be entertained. To this extent his music is neutralized in its attempt to reflect his critical perspective, i.e. in its attempt to gain autonomy from popular assumptions.

Brecht's libretto also caters to showmanship in the opera. It is full of superfluous flippancies. Several of the songs are repetitious and make their point within the first lines only. There are several blatant jokes in the text, which only succeed in distracting one. And Act Three, Scene Eight, in which Polly and Lucy try to discover from each other the whereabouts of Macheath, contains no social comment whatever and could be omitted.

The Threepenny Opera is 'well-tailored', having a formal balance that is not derived from *The Beggar's Opera*. It is divided into three acts of three scenes each. The spontaneity of the numerous scenes in Gay's third act is controlled in Brecht's last act, which combines them all in three scenes. But the unity achieved is exploited for the sake of 'slick' performances. It is not a form which grows out of the content of the opera; it is not a 'beggar's opera', and this sets up a contradiction which is central to the failure of *The Threepenny Opera* to achieve any persuasive commitment to social change.

The reactionary content of *The Threepenny Opera* was evident in the public response to it. It appealed largely to the middle-class it was criticizing, and it is a hit in New York even in the 1980s. Bourgeois audiences seem to delight in its cynical view of their institutions, but they are not prompted to change them. They seem to enjoy the excursion into prostitution and crime because it is 'daring', and they enjoy the 'traditional tie to and the attraction of the old *Singspiel* [and] the cabaret.'[14]

Brecht even catered to bourgeois audiences, undoubtedly unintentionally, by elevating the messenger who brings the reprieve in Act Three into an authority figure. As pointed out above, this encourages audiences to find some bizarre poetic justice in Macheath's reprieve!

What can one conclude about the revolutionary content of *The Threepenny Opera*? It fails to make it clear to the socially unaware that social injustice can be done away with. Only to those already socially aware is it in any way revolutionary. This makes it clear that Brecht in 1927 was still only beginning to understand the implications of Marxism for the theatre.

It should be observed in passing that two points can be made in favour of *The Threepenny Opera* as revolutionary art. Firstly, Peachum is presented as a figure of potential power by virtue of the fact that he has at his service the rest of the proletariat. For example, he uses the threat of numbers to persuade Brown not to arrest him. This suggests the potential strength in numbers for the proletariat which is one of their major strategic weapons against governing institutions. Secondly, it is significant that Brecht does employ actual beggars in his opera. His sympathy with the poor is undeniable. The masses are a reality in the opera; they are there

in the Prologue, and they are there in the Peachums and the beggars, and in Jenny and the other whores. Brecht's humanity is undoubtedly communicated, even to resistant audiences.

It is apparent from the above discussion that one of the basic failings of *The Threepenny Opera* is that it allows audiences to empathize with its characters — it is because they can empathize with the characters that audiences find the opera so entertaining. It would have been Brecht's intention in later years to avoid such empathy, for he advocated a 'sobriety', both of the performers and the audience, which would create a critical distancing. He hoped to achieve this sobriety through a technique which he called the 'alienation-effect'. To identify with characters is to accept their point of view, says Martin Esslin.[15] Since Marxism is based on the theory that social being determines individual consciousness and not *vice versa*, Brecht chose to deal with external and not internal realities. This is apparent in his choice of street and crowd scenes, in which individual psychological experiences are obscured. What is seen acted out in Brecht's plays, especially once he had developed his theory of 'epic theatre' in the 1930s, is the 'conflicts in individuals of external pressures.'[16] As Brecht himself has said: 'The epic theatre is chiefly interested in the attitudes which people adopt towards one another, whenever they are socio-historically significant (typical)'.[17] This constitutes the political potential of epic theatre: audiences are forced into a sobriety during which they are confronted by socially significant behaviour.

The Threepenny Opera predates Brecht's true epic theatre, but his techniques of alienation are nevertheless apparent. The social significance of the plot has already been discussed. The major 'epic prop' in the opera is its music, for a number of reasons. The songs interrupt the drama, preventing the audience from being swept along by the plot. Brecht emphasized that 'nothing is more revolting than when the actor pretends not to notice that he has left the level of plain speech and started to sing.'[18] Music and drama are strictly separated, emphasized by (a) the visibility of the orchestra on-stage; (b) the re-arrangement of lighting, especially the illumination of the orchestra, before each musical number; (c) changes in the actors' positions for the duration of songs; and (d) projections on to screens or the lowering of signs giving the titles of the songs. The non-resolving jazz harmonies and strange, unstable chromaticism are also alienating, although this effect, as discussed above, is not as powerful as it might have been. Furthermore, the variety of musical sources — classical and romantic tradition, atonality, jazz, blues, ragtime and popular dance — creates a 'montage' effect, preventing listeners from responding in any one particular and familiar way, and requiring

them to reflect on and relate the various musical components which they hear.

There are several non-musical epic-effects in *The Threepenny Opera*:

(i) The use of placards and mottoes. In Act One, Scene One, a sign is lowered saying: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive' (page 6). In Act Three, Scene Seven, a beggar bears a sign saying: 'A Victim of Military Tyranny' (page 60).

(ii) The direct address of the audience. At the beginning of Act One, Scene Two, Matthew is inspecting the 'stable' by touring along the footlights, (i.e. looking at the audience). Macheath asks: 'Well, is there anybody?' and Matthew replies: 'Not a soul' (page 12). The direct addressing of the audience is also a feature of several musical numbers, especially the finales.

(iii) Advance information is given on the plot so that the audience cannot become distracted by suspenseful excitement. Most scenes are introduced by narrations, e.g. Act Two, Scene Five:

> Before the Coronation bells had died away, Mac the Knife was sitting with the whores of Turnbridge! The whores betray him. It is Thursday evening.
>
> (Page 41)

(iv) There is a montage effect in the opera as a whole — much of its material is derived from the eighteenth-century *Beggar's Opera;* much is adapted to nineteenth-century Soho; much is relevant to twentieth-century Berlin; and the music is partially derived from New World cultures very different from German culture.

Part of the political impact of epic theatre is its capacity for shocking audiences. Peachum remarks in his first speech that people need shocking before they will give to the poor, (Act One, Scene One, page 5). Later he says that 'only an artist can tug at anyone's heart strings nowadays' (Act One, Scene Three, page 30). Brecht, the artist, attempts to do just this in *The Threepenny Opera.*

The political potential of *The Threepenny Opera,* however, has already been shown to be restricted. In conclusion, it should be remarked that the major significance of Brecht's and Weill's opera was its establishment of a 'new' genre to the extent that it revitalized the tradition of the ballad opera in the form of 'epic theatre'. This new genre was open to greater political possibilities than were achieved in *The Threepenny Opera.* The challenge which it presented was, and still is, more difficult for bourgeois audiences to assimilate than the cynical gibes at business and capitalism. In conjunction with the ideas of Walter Benjamin, this

early epic theatre prefigured a "complete cultural and sociological re-evaluation."[19]

VI

Both *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Threepenny Opera* were attacks on capitalist society, although in the former Gay was not aware that it was capitalism that was the source of social injustices. Brecht clearly realised that the development of capitalism in the eighteenth century (reflected in *The Beggar's Opera*) was the beginning of a process which was also evident during the Victorian era (in which he set *The Threepenny Opera*) and which was relevant to the Weimar Republic of the 1920s.

I have tried at all times to avoid any suggestion that an analysis of the operas' impact on their respective audiences could be simple or unambiguous, for both operas contain contradictions between their intended effect, their content and their actual effect. Although the music of *The Threepenny Opera* was more autonomous and more inherently political than that of *The Beggar's Opera,* both operas are so 'entertaining', in a superficial sense, that they distract their audiences from the real issues in question. They both attracted middle-class audiences and were thus popular with the wrong class if they hoped to effect social change. Brecht's opera at least deals with beggars and is addressed to them; *The Beggar's Opera* is not actually involved with beggars at all, and was directed at the ruling class. Gay's critique is primarily a moral one, for he believed that moral behaviour determined the nature of society. Brecht differed strongly on this point, for, as a Marxist, he believed that the nature of society determined individual consciousness and thus moral conduct. However, because Brecht failed to communicate this idea, *The Threepenny Opera* also acts more as a moral than as a social critique. The main reason for his failure is the resigned pessimism which seems to underlie much of the opera. Both operas have pessimistic moments, but whereas Gay's Augustan ethic saw Man as essentially 'fallen', Brecht too often describes Man's nature as irretrievably bad.

Both *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Threepenny Opera* attacked conventions in opera. In both the 1720s and the 1920s opera was the popular entertainment of the ruling class, and in taking part in the ideology which perpetuated that class dominance, was incapable of criticizing that class. Both operas struck at the hierarchy in the arts (with opera at the top) and proposed a new aesthetic. Like his earlier work, *The What D'Ye Call It,* Gay's Beggar's Opera is a 'Tragi-Comi-Pastoral-Farce.'[20] It is unclassifiable and open-ended and as such it prefigured Brecht's epic theatre. *The Threepenny Opera* displays several features of epic

theatre, and it is to this extent that it is most political in its attack on established values.

It is essential to understand that neither of these operas can be categorized as either 'reactionary' or 'autonomous' or 'politically progressive'. Each has reactionary, autonomous and progressive features, and one needs to assess this internal dynamic before one can assess the political impact of the works.

It is a favourite remark in the literature on these two operas to conclude that in *The Threepenny Opera* history repeated itself. This idea reflects a naïve sense of historical processes. Although Gay's work might be said to have prefigured Brecht's, and although Brecht found inspiration in Gay, *The Beggar's Opera* and *The Threepenny Opera* each grew out of their own, particular sociological circumstances.

Durban.

NOTES

1. R. Fiske, *English Theatre Music in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973): p. 97.
2. Manfred Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era,* quoted in a footnote in Fiske, *op. cit.*, p. 101.
3. Thomas Hobbes (1588 to 1679), quoted by Ian Donaldson, "A Double Capacity": *The Beggar's Opera,* in Y. Noble, ed. *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Beggar's Opera* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1975): p. 77.
4. Tyburn tree: the tree from which criminals were hanged.
5. Bertolt Brecht, 'Notes to the Threepenny Opera', contained in R. Manheim and J. Willett, eds. *Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays,* Vol. 2, Part 2, *The Threepenny Opera,* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979): p. 96.
6. Bertolt Brecht, *op cit.*, p. 96.
7. All page references to the text of *The Threepenny Opera* are to the edition by Manheim and Willett, *op. cit.* I have found this translation to be free in details, but accurate in spirit.
8. Bertolt Brecht, *op cit.*, p. 92.
9. Peter E. Lewis, *John Gay: 'The Beggar's Opera'* (London: Edward Arnold, 1976): p. 60.
10. Charles Burney, *A General History of Music,* Vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1957): pp. 985–987. (Originally published in 1789).
11. Georg Lukàcs, *The Historical Novel,* trans. H. and S. Mitchell (London: Merlin Press, 1962): p. 21.
12. Michael Robinson, *Opera before Mozart* (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1966): p. 35.
13. T.W. Adorno, *Introduction to the Sociology of Music* (New York: Seabury Press, 1976): p. 191.
14. Frederic Ewen, *Bertolt Brecht: His Life, His Art and His Times* (London: Calder & Boyars, 1967): p. 177.
15. Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd* (New York: Anchor Books, 1961): p. 360.
16. Michael Chanan, in a review of a production of *The Threepenny Opera, Music and Musicians,* Vol. 20, No. 8 (April, 1972): p. 62.
17. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre,* ed. John Willett (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964): p. 86.
18. Bertolt Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre, op. cit.*, p. 86.
19. R. Manheim and J. Willett, eds. *Bertolt Brecht: Collected Plays,* Vol. 2, Part 2, *The Threepenny Opera* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1979): p. xvi.
20. This is the sub-title which Gay gave to *The What D'Ye Call It.*