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# 'OBSCURITY' AND MODERN FICTION

BY RAJ KUMAR

IN our century, the novel has been developing into something very different from the great popular fiction of the earlier centuries. Some of the new novelists are extremely sensitive and intelligent persons, and, of course, feelings and impressions are more important than events and things. The effect has been to dissolve life into a lovely shimmering mist, and the novel, in extreme cases, has become more akin to poetry than to the solid chronicling which was responsible for the great successes of the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries. Instead of presenting a broad picture of normal human experience, the modern novel, in its aim at representing certain subtle and specialized effects, has become something like abstract painting which also, in recent times, has become more incomprehensible and less interesting to the ordinary man than it has ever been before. Like a painting by Salvador Dali, or a statue by Epstein, Virginia Woolf's writing is also 'difficult', which means that it will yield its motive, its clear and luminous core, only to a reader who is ready to empty himself of preconceptions and to become, in the highest degree, receptive, patient and searching. It is shallowness to try to explain 'obscurity' as a disguise for a void which the author tries to fill up with symbolism and psychological bric-à-brac.

The 'obscure' or difficult writers of the experimental period in the 'twenties and 'thirties were not simply iconoclasts but were creating new conventions and colonizing new areas of experience. An epic should not be condemned as a sterile piece of literature only by reason of its baffling obscurity. There are books which require keys, and, once we have the key, the satisfaction and pleasure derived is all the greater. No writer indulges in conundrums without a reason. Puns, anagrams, foreign words, portmanteau nouns and a coined vocabulary are used in the modern novel, not because the writer wishes to isolate himself from the common interest of human beings in communication, but because he is at-

tempting to communicate what had hitherto been regarded as incommunicable—the symbolism of Freud and Jung, the notions of primitive experience and the collective or racial unconscious. It is the problem of perceiving and presenting new and unsuspected aspects of human nature, and establishing new and constantly interchanging relationships between those aspects.

Part of the difficulty arises from a desire on the part of the writers of fiction to be technically accurate. In popular science fiction, for example, Jules Verne or H. G. Wells could give free rein to their imagination and produce a Round the World in Eighty Days or The Time-Machine without bothering too much about the technical details so long as the credibility gap could be bridged over psychologically, but the contemporary writer of science fiction knows that the reader has become so well-informed and sophisticated that he had better check up his main premises with an expert.

It is in fiction, more than in any other form of literature, that the more marked and original developments of any period are reflected and influence the popular practitioners of the art. A few examples from the modern novels may be cited to illustrate this tendency. The serious novelist is a conscious artist and not a mere tale-spinner. He is fully conscious of his high purpose—to confront and explore the problems of human destiny. The mental life thus assumes a greater importance, and the province of fiction and psychology almost coincide, because the business of the psychologist is also to investigate that which we call internal experience, that is, our own sensations and feelings, our thought and volition, in contradistinction to the objects of external experience, which form the subject-matter of natural science. The arrival of the New Psychology had much of the excitement that attended the arrival of the New Learning at the Renaissance. The novelist employs psychology and psychological terms in the practice of his art: we see the progeny of Freud, for example, scattered in their pages.

✓ 'Reflex Movement' is defined thus by Titchener: 'To reflex movement there is no motive at all. The impulse has died out altogether; there is no perception of object, no idea of result, however dim and fleeting. The movement has

become, by long habit, ingrained in the make-up of the nervous system; so that when a stimulus is presented, movement follows, without the arrival of any mental process; the ingoing excitation is turned back, reflected outwards, in the form of movement,—the whole series of events taking place quite automatically and unconsciously.' (*A Primer of Psychology*, pp. 171-72)

The above description of 'Reflex Movement' is illustrated in the following passages from Elizabeth Bowen's novels: ✓✓

'You were splendid', said Captain Vermont when their set finished.

'Oh no, I wasn't,' said Lois by reflex action, and wished all the other things to which she was always replying, 'Oh no, I didn't,' or 'Oh no, I'm not,' were half as true.  
(*The Last September*)

Emmeline is at the dinner-table with Markie when:

Once, by some reflex to his attention, her eyelids fluttered, she opened her lips to speak, as though some strange partner at dinner, dependent on her politeness, were by her side.  
(*To the North*)

Portia is with Eddie in the restaurant:

By making herself so much his open piano that she felt her lips smile by reflex, as though they were his lips, she felt herself learn and gain him: this was Eddie.  
(*The Death of the Heart*)

'Conditioned Reflex' is explained thus in James Drever's *A Dictionary of Psychology*: 'Conditioning: a process by which a response comes to be elicited by a stimulus, object, or situation other than that to which it is the natural or normal response. The term was originally used of the case where a reflex, normally following on a stimulus A, comes to be elicited by a different stimulus B, through the constant association of B with A. The phenomena appear to have been first noticed by Twitmyer, and subsequently followed up by

Bechterev and Pavlov (q.v.), especially the latter, who made the conditioned reflex, as he first called it, the principle of explanation of many complex behaviour phenomena.'

As an illustration, the following passage in George Orwell's novel would not convey much to a reader unacquainted with the complexities of the *conditioned reflex*:

The next moment I heard something. And at the same moment, if you'd happened to be there, you'd have seen an interesting instance of what I believe is called conditioned reflex. Because what I'd heard—there wasn't any question of mistake—was the whistle of a bomb. I hadn't heard such a thing for twenty years, but I didn't need to be told what it was. And without taking any kind of thought I did the right thing. I flung myself on my face. ✓✓

(Coming up for Air)

A knowing reader would at once see that, though the novelist puts the phrase 'conditioned-reflex' in the mouth of George Bowling, the phenomenon described is 'reflex action' and not 'conditioned reflex'.

Numerous instances could be quoted but, apart from the superficial effects of the New Psychology in enriching the language and vocabulary of the fiction-writers by providing new words and phrases, the study of psychological literature (particularly psycho-analytical literature) made them take new liberties with vocabulary.

When psychoanalysis revealed the human mind to be like a misbehaved and disordered menagerie, and not something ordered or logical, it was natural that fiction-writers should feel that new tools had to be invented, or at least the old tools had to be re-shaped and sharpened, if they were to continue to depict faithfully the workings of the human mind. The narrative should also be disorderly if it was to convey thoughts which did not come out of the mind in well-balanced sentences and ordered paragraphs.

For generations, written English had been gradually becoming more and more prolix, more pompous. The tendency had continuously been towards discussing and explaining rather than presenting the object itself. The language was

overburdened by a load of words, but the real job was not being performed as well as it might have been. In order to contact the object, the reader had often to wade through a cavernous gloom of explanations, discussions and philosophizings. James Joyce was a man with an axe who cut out the forests of verbosity and got back to the clean fundamental growth by hacking off comments, explanations, discussions, metaphorical floweriness, dead clichés, until the few, sharp scintillating words restored the direct pictorial contact between the eye of the reader and the object. Everything that could blur the vision was mercilessly excised. Into the jaded over-worked vocabulary, like cigarette-stumps floating in the gutter, James Joyce infused a new vitality and brought back some kind of music. James Joyce obviously thought that ordinary grammatical language could not fully express the flux of ideas passing through the mind of Leopold Bloom or Buck Mulligan or Gerty Macdowell. The rapid succession of images in the mind is indicated by single words, half-formed sentences and twisted quotations. The language is distorted in this way in an attempt to depict faithfully the external life and also, at the same time, the internal life as it gushes up from the depths of the unconscious in all its wild disorder. Joyce sees humanity in the raw, and mostly on the seamy or ridiculous side, but what vast vistas are opened out even in a single twisted and fantastic word like manorwombanborn! Matthew Arnold's phrase 'to see life fully' is misquoted in *Finnegan's Wake* as 'to see life foully', but the purpose of the misquotation is clear. Only a superficial view of life can mislead anybody as to its reality. To see life 'fully' can only mean seeing it 'foully'.

The growth of the English language was phenomenal but, like other things, it had succumbed to the tyranny of the impersonal. It did not express individual ways of looking at things but was the product of the impersonal life of commerce, mass education and the life of the great cities. Stuffed with the generalizations of national propaganda, the medicinal manner of speech could not even express properly. The modern novelists have served the cause of art well by repudiating inert language, and showing, in place of abstract ideas, human beings in concrete situations, thus allowing

the reader to draw his own conclusions. They know the dangers of categorizing human beings and thinking of them apart from the living, feeling individuals, and therefore attempt to reveal the infinite complexity of human life and the uniqueness of human personality in contrast to the abstract generalizations, and to disclose the movements of the soul behind the over-precise formulations. They are conscious of their great mission, like D. H. Lawrence who said: 'Being a novelist, I consider myself superior to the saint, the scientist, the philosopher and the poet, who are all great masters of different bits of man alive, but never get the whole hog.' We begin to see what Lawrence meant when he said that only the novelist could get the whole man alive.

Even in the case of comparatively minor novelists, the new influences have been beneficial. In Rosamond Lehmann's The Weather in the Streets, for example, the changes of person in the various sections of the novel are very effective. The shift from the third to the first person in Part Two produces the effect of blurred, close-up, climactic, subjective vision. The shift-back to the third person again in Part Three makes for sadder detachment and a sense of brutal collision with the outside world. The author discards technical uniformity in the attempt to come closer to psychological truth. The elliptical, staccato dialogue and oblique parentheses, combined with subtle clinical analysis, produce a filigree masterpiece with a neon-lit sense of characterization.

The modern novelist's attitude to the human situation is cool, unshockable and detached—an attitude which attaches more significance to moment-by-moment sensations—and he employs his fantastic imagination to wrap up his visions in a mass of words, sometimes distorted from their normal shapes and heaped together in tangled skeins which can be unravelled only so far as we can follow their mental gambols. As our century advances, nothing is left of the general body of accepted beliefs over which the mind could linger, and the ordinary working prose becomes plain and without ornament, intended for use. For centuries, the novel had staggered along under the weight of colossal, mechanical conventions. The author stood on the stage itself, not only giving the directions, but also making elaborate comments

on the intonation, flavour, emotion and meaning of the words uttered by the characters. Thus: 'he repeated it with such a snarl'; 'he retorted fiercely'; 'he remarked with such bitterness of spirit'; 'with a flush upon his face and remorse in his heart, he ventured to say'; 'she spoke as if she was swallowing something very hard'; 'said Mrs. Crupp, in a tone approaching to severity'; 'interposed with a smiling solemnity'; and so on. Wads of verbal padding were used to bolster up every novel. The modern novelist sweeps away all such conventions by making the words themselves express whether a character is feeling and speaking with anger, regret, pride, desperation, tenderness, or quickly, slowly, ironically, bitterly, calmly, emphatically, cheerfully, piteously; in other words, the psychological state of the character's mind.

The symbolism employed by the modern novelist is akin to the symbolism which makes poetry even more a matter of the sensations and emotions of the individual than had been the case with Romanticism. Symbolism represents a reaction against a mechanistic view of nature and a social conception of man. The symbols of the Symbolists are different from symbols in the ordinary sense. The ordinary symbols are logical, conventional and fixed as, for example, the Cross is the symbol of Christianity, or a lily is the symbol of virginity and purity. The connection is immediately apparent, but the symbols of the Symbolists are arbitrary and a kind of disguise for the personal ideas of the artist, as Mallarmé says: 'The Parnassians, for their part, take the thing just as it is and put it before us—and consequently they are deficient in mystery: they deprive the mind of the delicious joy of believing that it is creating. To name an object is to do away with the three-quarters of the enjoyment of the poem which is derived from the satisfaction of guessing little by little: to suggest it, to evoke it—that is what charms the imagination.'

The aim of the Symbolists is to intimate things rather than to state them. Every feeling or sensation of ours, every moment of consciousness, is different from every other, hence it is impossible to reproduce them through the ordinary, conventional and universal language of literature. To give expression to his unique personality, the writer has to find,

or to invent, the special idiom which alone will express his particular angle of vision—so personal, so vague and so fleeting that it cannot be conveyed by direct statement or description. Modern fiction has been greatly influenced by Symbolism, and the work of many novelists bears unmistakable evidence of this influence.

Traditions in social life, in morals, in religion, in literature, have broken their moorings, and the dislocation finds its noticeable expression in the work of real craftsmen whose intimations have become difficult and obscure. Clarity was a story of the Victorian days when the soul of man was supposed to be untroubled. Words are now strung together in an apparently meaningless concatenation in accordance with the writer's faith that experience is without meaning. A new aesthetic enrichment is discovered which makes reticence an outworn creed and proclaims that man is to gain his freedom by a parade of nakedness. Expression is achieved by subtle allegories and esoteric symbols and, out of a number of superimposed meanings; the ordinary reader might see one, whereas the others can only be reached by the initiated. In the new novel, we find the poet's or the mystic's apprehension of the universe, in which every perception of sense brings with it the intuition of truth. The hard, separate facts of existence are on the surface only. Below, the tide of sensation flows on in unceasing mystery.

Is obscurity the expression of intellectual arrogance or literary sloppishness? Is obscurity justified and if so to what degree? Some of the world's greatest writers have wrapped their work in a mantle of obscurity—obscurity of thought and expression. Browning wrote poems which he admitted only God could understand. T. S. Eliot wrote poetry which blazes with the authentic fire of a great talent, but which few people in the world can claim to understand. George Meredith through most of his career and Henry James in the latter part of his life wrote novels festooned with labyrinthine coils which present formidable obstacles to their readers.

The issue of literary obscurity is complicated by the difficulty of defining it. What is as dark as the Styx to a business executive may be as clear as spring water to a professor of English. It is absurd to insist that the novelist should write

books which everyone can understand, as Tolstoy did when he advocated writing books comprehensible to Russian moujiks; and Tolstoy did not practise what he preached in this respect. A degree of difficulty which demands intelligence, alert attention and considerable cultural background is not necessarily obscure. ✓ Graham Greene is a novelist whose cryptic work has been complicated by points of Catholic doctrine beyond the understanding of unbelieving readers. His best known book, The Heart of the Matter, hinges on a concept of grace which he does not explain to the ignorant. The result is a protagonist whose motivation seems bewilderingly mysterious, but it is not so for those who carry the right key. Many modern novelists, ✓ Thomas Mann, ✓ William Faulkner, ✓ Henry Green, ✓ Ivy Compton-Burnett, ✓ Elizabeth Bowen, shun the explicit and refuse to supply explanatory motivations. They may be symbolical, ambiguous, opaque, and their prose may sometimes be as viscous as molasses in January, but their books are free of mincing affectations. There is a method in the madness of their verbal acrobatics. Completely indifferent to conventional methods of narration and characterization, they are experiments in technique and subject-matter which may temporarily repel the average reader.

✓ What appears cryptic innuendo now, and a highly seasoned and exotic dish of caviare will be the common fare of tomorrow. Readers accustomed to the gaudier colours and broader, heavier lines of traditional fiction may find a little temporary difficulty in adjusting themselves to the pastel shades and the delicate draftsmanship of the new novel in which the secret places of the wounded heart and the emotional conflicts of the sheltered life are illuminated with brilliant flashes and insight. Our age is an age of fragments. When conventions and convictions are broken, novels must be fluid or fragmentary. Are not the delineators and analysts of the human soul to be preferred to the creators of characters and the portrayers of society or the external world?

## ENGLISH EPITHALAMIC VERSE OF THE EARLIER SEVENTEENTH CENTURY

BY MASOODUL HASAN

ORIGINALLY introduced by Spenser<sup>1</sup> and encouraged later on by a variety of social and literary factors, the vogue of epithalamic verse became particularly strong in England in the earlier seventeenth century. Nuptial masques and songs commissioned by interested parties became a common mode of aristocratic celebrations, and sometimes poets even came out with contributions of their own in honour of the marriage of some illustrious friend or patron. Soon the Universities of Cambridge and Oxford also adopted the custom of issuing anthologies of Greek, Latin and English epithalamions on occasions of royal marriages. For many years the fashion continued to enjoy remarkable popularity, and even influenced certain other forms of literature. Accordingly, one finds that English plays, epics and romances written during the first half of the century bear a larger number of hymeneal songs than those written at any other time in England. In this connection it is also interesting to recall that some standard catalogues of seventeenth-century publications<sup>2</sup> show a much higher frequency of nuptial titles during the first sixty years than in the later part of the century. It is, therefore, surprising that this important phase in the history of a minor, but nevertheless significant, genre has not generally received the attention that it deserves both for its own sake as an interesting and once popular form of literature and for the light that it sheds on contemporary literary taste. A brief account of some major specimens of the genre and of its leading trends may, therefore, serve to bring out their relative literary merits as well as the causes of their subsequent decline.

English marriage-songs may be divided into two major categories—the formal, independent poems written to celebrate some actual marriage, and the ornamental pieces introduced into plays, romances and narrative poems. Outwardly belonging to the latter category, the songs appearing in nuptial masques represent an intermediate type, yet be-

cause of their connection with some actual wedding, structurally they have much in common with the regular epithalamion, and may therefore be treated as such. Traditionally, the formal epithalamion was a highly stylized work, but even these subsidiary pieces followed certain well-established conventions that often make them look like fragments of some full-length epithalamion. Their central motives were generally either invocative (in honour of Hymen; e.g. *As You Like It*, V. iv; J. Rutter's *The Shepherds Holiday*, V. iv) or benedictory in nature (e.g. *The Tempest*, IV. i; Ford's *The Broken Heart*, III. iv). Some of the more sophisticated songs, however, even tended to approximate to the formal type as represented in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher (e.g. *The Maid's Tragedy* I. i; or *The Little French Lawyer*, I. i) or in Cartwright's *The Ordinary*, IV. v). Similar conventional motives and themes characterize the nuptial songs occurring in narrative poems which for obvious reasons are generally indebted to Dicus's marriage-song in *Arcadia* (Bk. III) and Spenser's verses in honour of the marriage of Thames and Medway (*F. Q.*, Bk. IV, canto XI).<sup>3</sup> Undoubtedly the subsidiary and ornamental pieces form a substantial part of English epithalamic verse, and most of them possess considerable literary merit, yet for a proper appraisal of the genre one has to turn especially to the superior category of the formal full-length epithalamions.

Long before its actual introduction in England the genre had acquired a respectable literary status both through the practice of earlier writers and the precept of the Renaissance rhetoricians. Scaliger and Pontanus had dealt with it in detail in their treatises on poetics, and among their English imitators Puttenham devoted one full chapter to it in *The Arte of English Poesie*. He defined the genre, prescribed its structural divisions, and even explained the hours of various ceremonies and their practical utility. Thus when Spenser wrote his famous *Epithalamion* (1594) and the *Prothalamion* (1598) he was not only inspired by certain classical and contemporary poets,<sup>4</sup> but in all probability had also the benefit of acquaintance with a couple of guide-books on poetic art. Accordingly he followed closely some of the long-established conventions derived originally from the Greek

and Roman poets of antiquity, and transmitted these influences to his own imitators. Theocritus's poem on the marriage of Menelaus and Helen (Idyll XVIII) is known to be the first formal and stylized nuptial poem that set the style and conventions of the genre which may be summed up as follows: (i) A song meant for singing in front of the bridal chamber in the early hours of night, (ii) the maidens' participation in this song, (iii) their praises of the couple, especially of the bride, (iv) a hint of the bride's new responsibilities, (v) and benedictions and blessings of Hymen for the new couple. To these Catullus added in his two nuptial songs (poems nos. 61 and 62) the following items: (i) A detailed reference to the Roman ceremonies of marriage—closely resembling certain Indian rites and customs—(ii) a witty sparring between maidens and youths, (iii) sly references to fescennine pleasures, (iv) and the use of some striking similes. Spenser inherited this fully developed machinery as slightly modified and refined by the French Pleiad, and consequently his fellow-poets of the seventeenth century found themselves under the same spell.

Jonson's two famous masques bear a nuptial song each. Of these the *Hymenaei* celebrating the ill-fated marriage of the Earl of Essex and Lady Frances Howard in 1605 is, on the poet's own admission, based on the classical model 'because I made it both in forme and matter to emulate that kind of poeme, which was called *Epithalamium* and (by the ancients) us'd to be sung, when the Bride was led into her chamber....'<sup>5</sup> He has introduced here the Roman customs of marriage—such as lifting of the bride over the threshold 'With prosperous *augury*', or snatching away of light in the bridal chamber by experienced matrons—and in a marginal note has acknowledged his debt to Catullus in particular. The song begins with the traditional invocation of Hymen, and urges the young couple to enjoy their 'mutuall joyes' and delights 'past number'. Towards the end the poet implores Juno and Venus to 'Informe the gentle wombe' and fructify the lovers' union. For its sheer gaiety of tone and sensuous descriptions the song surpasses Jonson's other kindred compositions in poetic effect. His next epithalamion—the one appended to the *Hadington Masque* (1608)—was remarkably

free from allusions to Roman customs, but it too followed the same structural pattern. Beginning with the invocation of Hymen, it exhorts the lovers to observe the night as Venus' Vigil, and concludes with a prayer for fertility and fruition. Unlike his previous song, however, Jonson has introduced here an additional quasi-religious theme of the superiority of the matrimonial state to virginity intermingled with references to erotic delight:

For now their raigne beginnes, and lasts till day.  
They sweeten Hymens warre,  
And, in that jarre,  
Make all, that married bee,  
Perfection see.  
Shine, Hesperus, shine forth, thou wished starre.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to these songs included in his masques Jonson also composed a delectable epithalamion on the marriage of Hierome Weston and Lady Frances Stewart. Although written in narrative style, it excels his earlier nuptial poems in architectonic quality. Closely allied to them in structure, it comprises four distinct parts—apostrophe to the sun, a vivid and colourful account of the bridal procession and church ceremonies (reminiscent of Spenser's song in honour of his own marriage), and the final benedictions. These conventions have been deftly intermingled with the predominant laudatory contents of the poem; for it abounds not only in praises of the couple but also bears copious references to the royal interest in their well-being and to the administrative acumen of the Lord Treasurer, the bridegroom's father. The poet's irrepressible moralistic bias, however, is brought out once again in his idealization of the institution of marriage (ll. 27-32) and eulogization of virtue (ll. 151-54); and even assumes religious overtones in the benedictions:

... Christians know their birth,  
Alone, and such a race,  
We pray may grace  
Your fruitfull spreading Vine,  
But dare not aske our wish in Language *fescennine*.<sup>7</sup>

Shorn of pagan mythology and rites—there is not even a mention of Hymen—the poem is remarkably rich in realistic touches which even provide a glimpse of contemporary life.

George Chapman and Thomas Campion also wrote a couple of marriage-songs for their respective nuptial masques. Chapman appended 'A Hymn to Hymen' to *The Middle Temple Masque* (1613) in honour of Princess Elizabeth's marriage with Frederick. As the very title suggests, it was intended to be a prayer to Hymen for whose sake each virgin

Puts Art's attires on, that put Nature's down,  
Sings, dances, sets on every foot a crown,  
Sighs in her songs and dances, kisseth air,  
Till, rites and words past, thou in deeds repair.<sup>8</sup>

Similar tenderness of feelings runs throughout the poem, but probably in consideration of its title the usual devices of a traditional epithalamion are skipped over, though the concluding lines do bear a reference to the bridal chamber and the 'nuptial battle's joys'.

Campion celebrated the same occasion with *The Lords Masque* interspersed with matrimonial dialogue-songs, a form distantly related to Aristophanes's dialogic epithalamion in *The Peace*. It may be observed here that though a common feature of pastoral poetry, the dialogue does not seem to have been used much in English nuptial verse before Campion. Previously too he had made an artistic, and still more effective, use of this device in *Lord Haye's Masque* (1607) by slipping into it several dialogue-songs which jointly represent the principal epithalamic conventions—strewing of the bridal route with flowers, blessings for fertility and constancy in love, invocation of Hymen, and a mention of amorous pleasures in the bridal chamber. It was an interesting innovation, not generally used in English epithalamions until its revival by Marvell at a later date.

Both for their intrinsic literary merit and for their close affinity with Spenser's famous poem in honour of his own marriage, Donne's nuptial songs deserve especial attention. They observe a set and stylized scheme of construction,

abound in graphic descriptions, and show occasional philosophic touches and frequent flashes of metaphysical wit. Written probably late in the 1590's, 'The Epithalamion made at Lincoln's Inn' briefly reproduces in an urban setting the main nuptial ceremonies—awakening of the bride, her apparelling, progress to the church, benedictions, feast, her going to bed, and the good night. Besides this general resemblance to Spenser's scheme of composition, a few verbal echoes are also readily recognizable. For example, Donne's opening line 'The Sun-beams in the East are spread' recalls Spenser's verses 'Early, before the worlds light-giving lampe/ His golden beame upon the hils doth spred' (ll. 19-20); or Donne's apostrophe to the 'Daughters of London' reminds one of Spenser's similar address to the 'Nymphes of Mulla' and the 'Merchants daughters'. Donne's philosophical and religious predilections are, however, reflected in the refrain idealizing the state of marriage 'Today, put on perfection and a woman's name', as also in the reference to the bride's 'pleasing sacrifice' on 'love's altar', and in his characteristic intermingling of the sacred and the profane, e.g.

So, she a mother's rich style doth prefer,  
And at the Bridegroom's wish'd approach doth lie,  
Like an appointed lamb, when tenderly  
The priest comes on his knees t'embowel her;<sup>9</sup>

Rather unusually, the song bears a satiric note as well in the form of an attack on marriage annuities and in the description of London maidens as 'Our Golden Mines, and furnish'd Treasury' yielding 'Thousands of Angels on your marriage days'. Similarly the caustic reference to rich heirs ('wealth's deep oceans') and 'painted Courtiers, barrels of others' wit', though illustrative of the poet's social consciousness, is patently unprecedented. But these deviations are amply compensated by the fanciful suggestions for the bride's adornment:

Conceitedly dress her, and be assign'd,  
By you, fit place for every flower and jewel;  
Make her for love fit fuel  
As gay as Flora, and as rich as Ind;<sup>10</sup>

Donne's next contribution was in honour of Princess Elizabeth's wedding that fell on St. Valentine's Day when birds are supposed to choose their mates. Developing this theme of universal joy, he begins the poem with a long list of birds seeking their mates, which is evidently a thin variation of Spenser's cataloguing of flowers in the initial lines of his *Epithalamium*. After this enumeration, Donne proceeds to deal with the customary stages in a brief yet distinct manner, denoting his conformity to the traditional pattern, though in its spirit and tone the poem stands apart from the usual specimens of the genre. Striking conceits, such as the following reference to the disrobing of the bride, introduce an element of freshness and suggestiveness, but they also tend to impair occasionally the lyrical quality and immediacy of appeal generally associated with nuptial verses:

A Bride, before good-night could be said,  
Should vanish from her clothes, into her bed,  
As Souls from bodies steal, and are not spied.

(St. VI)

At least for once Donne made a successful excursion into pastoral poetry when he introduced his *epithalamion* on the marriage of Somerset and Frances Howard (1613) with an eclogue. It is not only one of his finest poems, but also one of the best among the English *epithalamions*. In the introductory eclogue *Allophanes*, a courtier, reproves *Idios* (i.e. the poet himself) for spending the Christmas season in the countryside where 'Flora herself doth a freize jerkin weare'. (A general resemblance to the situation in *Prothalamion* also depicting the poet walking along the Thames to ease his 'sullein care' and the 'discontent of my long fruitlesse fayre in Princes Court' is rather significant.) But *Idios* assures him that his absence from the court did not signify complete estrangement on his part—for 'reclus'd hermits oftentimes do know/ More of heaven's glory, than a worldling can/'—and adds that the real cause of his withdrawal was his incapacity to express his joy befittingly on the happy occasion. To atone for this lapse, however, he had composed a nuptial song which he recites to *Allophanes* and which forms the

main epithalamion. The latter contains eleven captioned stanzas of eleven lines each, describing the usual ceremonies in their order of performance. Though this schematic treatment follows the pattern of Spenser's *Epithalamion*, the swan metaphor used in the benediction reminds one of the same image used to describe the two brides in the *Prothalamion*. Donne's characteristic flair for ingenious arguments and paradoxical statements is once again in evidence here, especially in stanza 2, referring to a metaphorical interchange of their sexes, the bride being a man in courage and the bridegroom a maid in beauty. To sum up Donne's stylistic features, it may be said that he eschewed pagan mythology and the conventional invocations, and presented fescennine contexts in a subdued manner, paying particular attention to the treatment of ceremonies instead, and invariably used stanza-forms and refrains. He even christianized certain traditional motives, and in most of these experiments he seems to have benefited by Spenser's works. Presumably in matters of itemized treatment of ceremonies he himself inspired quite a few imitators.<sup>11</sup>

✓ Abridging some of these ceremonies and concentrating instead on the bride's emotional experience, Robert Herrick took Catullus and Jonson for his models. Consequently, he reintroduced Hymen and the Roman customs in his 'Epithalamies' on the marriages of Sir Thomas Southwell and Sir Clipseby Carew. There is an undoubted profusion of erotic touches which inclined Courthope to dismiss them as merely extravagant and libidinous verses, though, making due allowance for this flippancy as a conventional feature of the genre, they seem to possess considerable literary merit. Indeed their real drawback lies in certain far-fetched and tortuous conceits rather than in the sensuous imagery and fescennine elements directly traceable to Catullus' nuptial poems. To Herrick's credit, however, it must be admitted that he reintroduced genuine lyrical touches that had been missing from English epithalamions since the days of Spenser.

Based on Catullus's epithalamion for Julia and Manlius, the nuptial song on Southwell's marriage (no. 149 in *Hesperides*) visualizes the bridal procession returning from the temple, and refers to the bride's apprehensive anticipation

of a new experience—motives clearly borrowed from Catullus—which is attributed to her natural bashfulness:

These Precious-Pearly-Purling teares,  
 But spring from ceremonious fears.  
 And 'tis but Native shame,  
 That hides the loving flame: (St. 3)

A little later Hymen appears with his emblematic torch, and the poet tenderly urges the bride to move on:

Move forward then your Rosie feet,  
 And make, what ere they touch, turn sweet.  
 May all, like flowrie Meads  
 Smell, where your soft foot treads;  
 And everything assume  
 To it, the like perfume: (St. 7)

This is followed by a detailed account of her progress to the bridal chamber, the bedding ceremony and prayers for a prosperous and fruitful life. The Roman customs of lifting the bride over the threshold, anointing her sides as a charm against evil influences (St. 9), use of the virginal girdle (St. 10), and setting the boys to gather nuts at the chamber-door (St. 13) form the highlights of the ceremony. In the concluding prayer Herrick even introduces an oblique allusion to the Greek custom of sending the wool and spindle after the bride. But the charm woven to keep off the 'Fatal Owle' and 'furies' reminds one of Spenser's exorcising the 'hob goblins', the 'shriech Oule', 'mischivous witches' and other agents of evil from the nuptial chamber. Herrick's song is rich in tenderness of feelings and in lyrical touches, and in the apostrophe to the couch he seems to have given himself up to sheer sensuous delight:

And now, Behold! The Bed or Couch  
 That ne'r knew Brides, or Bride-grooms touch,  
 Feels in it selfe a fire;  
 And tickled with Desire,  
 Pants with a Downie brest,  
 As with a heart possest: (St. 14)

On the other hand, witty play on certain words provides only thinly veiled fescennine frivolity, such as the reference to the torch 'Half-wasted in the porch' (St. 6), or the circle and diadem conceit in stanza 13.

Reminiscent of a similar device in Spenser's *Prothalamion*, the poem in honour of Sir Clipseby Carew's nuptials (1625) begins with a distant view of the bridal procession, and contains the same motives and conventions as noted above in Herrick's other epithalamion. Once again, not only the same preponderance of Roman rites is noticeable, but there is even a thicker sprinkling of tortuous conceits, and occasional padding up like the reference to the 'codled Cook' running from his 'torrid zone to prie, and look/ And blesse his dainty Mistresse' (St. 7), or a mention of similar inquisitiveness on the part of the 'smirk Butler'. A casual splitting up of words for the sake of rhyme (e.g. 'Spicing' in line 15) also shows a rather jejune striving after effect. In fairness to the poet, however, it should be added that his characteristic lyrical touches, use of erotic imagery and fescennine strains go a long way to compensate for these defects, though in poetic effect this poem remains inferior to its predecessor. But a faint echo of the *Song of Songs* ('See where she comes; and smell how all the street/ Breathes Vine-yards and Pomgranats: O sweet!', St. 2) is a pleasant addition, and points to one of the principal conventions of some of the later English epithalamions. ✓

Thomas Carew's undated and short 'Hymeneall Dialogue', expressing the mutual love of the couple, is faintly reminiscent of the biblical motive referred to above. There is a pleasing tenderness of feelings introduced at the very outset:

Tell me (my love) since Hymen ty'de  
The holy knot, hast thou not felt  
A new infused spirit slide  
Into thy brest, whilst thine did melt?<sup>12</sup>

The metaphysical twist in the chorus, however, produces a rather anti-climactic effect. But his other poem, 'Hymeneall Song' on the marriage of Lady Anne Wentworth and Lord Lovelace (1638), is a regular epithalamion, beginning with

the waking up of the bride, and briefly mentioning all the relevant ceremonies. In the latter item the pervasive influence is readily discernible, but on the whole its excellence lies mainly in the use of striking, though rather complex, conceits—e.g. the intelligence and orb conceit in stanza 8, or the almanac metaphor in stanza 12)—suggesting the prevalence of metaphysical traits in occasional poetry as well.

Andrew Marvell restored genuine pastoral quality to English epithalamic verse. His two marriage-songs in honour of the wedding of Mary Cromwell (1657) are fine examples of unostentatious and subtle literary artefact. Indeed they constitute a new experiment in so far as they jointly make a regular and complete epithalamion. Consisting of 29 couplets, the first song opens with a short speech of the chorus about the calm and moon-lit night, and proceeds as a duet between Endymion and Luna. Endymion pleads passionately:

*Cynthia, O Cynthia, turn thine Ear,  
Nor scorn Endymions complaints to hear.  
As we our Flocks, so you command  
The fleecy Clouds with silver wand.*<sup>13</sup>

To which Luna replies with disarming simplicity:

If thou a mortal, rather sleep;  
Or if a Shepherd, watch thy Sheep.

He is, however, not to be put off so easily, and argues that he had dedicated himself and his sheep completely to her, and that being touched by the 'immortal flame' of her love 'Nor merits he a mortal's name'. Eventually she yields to his importunities, though not without a feeble and half-hearted protest on account of the darkness of their meeting place. But Endymion sets her fears at rest by his ready wit:

Then none can espy:  
Or shine thou there, and 'tis the sky. (ll. 49-50)

It is a fascinating song, full of tenderness and lyrical impulses. Although the customary invocation of Hymen and direct

references to matrimonial rites are completely eschewed, Luna's initial hesitation and nominal protest are suggestive of the bride's natural bashfulness. Apparently unrelated to the first song, the second one presents three shepherds—Hobbinol, Phillis and Thomalin—discussing their felicitations to the 'Northern Shepherds Son' who had 'Menalca's daughter won'—faint echoes from Spenser's eclogues—but their interrelationship is/ certainly unmistakable; for the latter piece contains the two essential motives of a formal marriage-song, namely, praises of the bride, and benedictions. Thus Marvell's two songs jointly embody all the principal features of a regular epithalamion. This artifice and the air of suggestiveness (rather than direct statement) have added considerably to the literary excellence of these songs.

Although, as already noted, certain verbal echoes of Spenser are readily recognizable in Marvell's poems under reference, the pastoral imagery in the second poem seems to be indebted to the Bible as well. Hobbinol remarks about Luna's beauty:

Not our Lambs own fleeces are  
Curl'd so lovely as her Hair:  
Nor our Sheep new Wash'd can be  
Half so white or sweet as she.

This is fairly close to these extracts from the *Song of Solomon*: '... thy hair is as a flock of goats, ...' and 'Thy teeth are like a flock of sheep that are even shorn, which came up from the washing; ...' (IV. 1, 2).

As suggested earlier, the foregoing is only a selective and brief account, and consequently excludes a large number of lesser known poets and the numerous contributions to the polyglot University-anthologies of nuptial verse, especially those on royal marriages. But even this sketchy survey should indicate that quite early in the seventeenth century epithalamic conventions had been clearly laid down under classical and French influences, especially through Spenser who continued to exercise a fairly wide influence on English poets even later in the period when the Metaphysical vogue seemed to have otherwise retarded his popularity. The two dominant styles

were the dialogue form (pastoral or otherwise) and the lyrical description interspersed with choric songs or philosophical strains. Of these the latter style seems to have enjoyed greater currency. Themes and conventions were also firmly set, and though mythological references in many cases were played down, on the whole, classical motives and devices were generally retained and employed with necessary modifications. Usually this pattern comprised a description of marital ceremonies, references to season or background, or to birds and flowers, itemized praises of the couple, benedictions, and an apostrophe to time, sun or the maidens. Sometimes even a realistic note was struck, and an urban setting was provided; but it must be admitted that the finest specimens were invariably set in pastoral environments.

From a technical point of view some interesting experiments were made in the metric schemes, especially by Donne and Herrick. Regular epithalamions were written almost always in stanzas of varying length. Only Chapman and Marvell wrote their poems in the couplet form. Again, most of the poets used refrains as well for the sake of greater musical effect. In this respect too Spenser was the commonest model, whose pervasive influence was evident in more than one respect.

As the century advanced, the rhetorical trend began to decline, and there developed even a tendency to replace the conventional themes and devices with quaint ideas and learned conceits, and often the resultant product was the poorer for it. For example, William Hammond's two epithalamions published in 1655 are bereft of conventional themes and devices, and encumbered by several pedestrian lines like these:

Welcome, fairest, thee our rhyme  
Congratulates, rather than him.<sup>14</sup>

They are further marred by the use of fantastic conceits based on incest and the signs of the zodiac.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, some time later, Orinda (Katherine Philips) rejected the traditional paraphernalia of marriage-songs as 'a troublesome and empty noise', yielding 'not Joy, but Ostentation'.<sup>15</sup> Consequently on the marriage of her sister she contented herself

with giving plain advice, and expressing her good wishes in unadorned verses. The genre was evidently losing ground; its heyday was over, and the fashion of nuptial verse almost faded out of the picture.<sup>16</sup>

What were the causes of this decline? Divers factors seem to have contributed to this downward trend. Thus an explanation may be sought in the changed social conditions. The seventeenth-century English society, especially London society, was more closely knit than ever afterwards, and the genre could thrive only in a society whose interest and attention was centred on a few prominent persons. Royalty in England could never be what it was before the gruesome execution of Charles I in 1649. The changing pattern of literary patronage, and the increasing economic independence of writers might have also gradually diminished their interest in the genre. Moreover, the changed conditions of life, increasing facilities of publication, and the exigencies of a developing book-trade were bound to curtail the popularity of occasional verse of a purely personal nature. An appreciative essay or a notice in periodical literature was soon to replace the occasional poetry or *vers de societie* in a very palpable manner. Because of these various factors there set in a change in literary taste and fashions in Restoration England. Under the renewed French influence, while sophistry, superficial polish and refinement of wit were at a premium, the Englishman's old love for pageantry and his zest for direct, sensuous enjoyment of life began to cool down. Correctness and sublimity became the canons of taste and watchwords of refined society in the eighteenth century, whose antipathy to a form of poetry often resounding with fescennine and flippant notes is quite understandable. Moreover, towards the end of the seventeenth century, pastoral poetry gradually went out of vogue, and this attitude hardened further in the following age, as typified in Johnson's outright rejection of pastoral verse as merely affectatious. It is evident that such a climate of opinion could hardly be congenial to the allied tradition of epithalamic verse. In addition to these factors, it may also be recalled that the age became increasingly interested in heroic poetry and serious themes, and the renewed emphasis on hierarchy of literary forms under neo-

classical influence may have also accelerated the reaction against minor genres. Finally, the contemplative temper of this and the succeeding ages, and the rise of reflective verse tended to weaken the lyrical impulse, and the epithalamic tradition suffered consequently.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In chronological order Dicus's song in honour of the marriage of Thyrsis and Kala in Sidney's *Arcadia* (1593) Bk. III, and Bartholomew Young's version of the marriage-song in Montemayor's *Diana* (translated before 1598) preceded Spenser's famous *Epithalamion*; but in view of its intrinsic merit and wide influence the latter may be safely taken as the real progenitor of the genre in English.
2. Pollard and Redgrave, *A Short-title Catalogue of books printed between 1475-1640*; and Wing, *A Short-title Catalogue of books printed between 1641-1700*. Entries in the transcripts of the *Registers of the Company of Stationers* (ed. Arber, and Eyre and Rivington) also confirm this point.
3. Evidence of this influence may also be noted in the marriage-songs in Francis Quarles's *Argalus and Parthenia*, the anonymous *Uranus and Psyche*, and S. Sheppard's *The Loves of Amandus and Sophronia*.
4. e.g. Du Bellay and Buttet. For a detailed analysis of their influence on Spenser see the *Variorum* edition of his works, Vol. II, p. 653.
5. *Works*, ed. Herford and Simpson, Vol. VII, p. 225. Cf. Puttenham's definition of an epithalamion as 'ballades at the bedding of the bride'.
6. *Ibid.* p. 262, ll. 409-14.
7. *Poems of Ben Jonson*, ed. G. B. Johnston, p. 224, ll. 156-60.
8. *The Comedies of George Chapman*, ed. T. M. Parrott, p. 456, ll. 40-4.
9. *Poetry and Prose of John Donne*, ed. A. Desmond Hawkins, p. 158.
10. *Ibid.* p. 156.
11. For example, Christopher Brooke, a personal friend of John Donne, wrote an epithalamion (in captioned stanzas) bearing the subtitle 'Applied to the Ceremonies of Marriage'. This was published in the 1614 edition of *Englands Helicon*. Donne seems to have been the first English poet to use captioned stanzas in nuptial songs.
12. *The Poems of Thomas Carew*, ed. R. Dunlap, p. 66.
13. *The Poems and Letters of Marvell*, ed. H. M. Margoliouth, Vol. I, p. 119.
14. Saintsbury, *Minor Poets of the Caroline Period*, Vol. II, pp. 498-9. Also, see pp. 505-06.
15. *Ibid.* Vol. I, pp. 522-3.
16. In subsequent ages one may come across a few stray pieces like Shelley's three versions of a bridal song, or Southey's nuptial song in honour of Princess Charlotte's wedding; or in our own age Auden's 'Epithalamion'; but these are only literary curios, and quite different from the regular epithalamions in spirit, theme, mood and style.

# 'ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE' : THOUGHT AND IMAGE

BY S. B. MUKHERJI

## I

OF the many unresolved questions arising from a critical study of Keats's Odes, one that relates to the 'Ode to a Nightingale' may be summed up in the contentions of two critics, Douglas Bush and Richard Fogle. Bush says:

Keats's important poems are related to, or grow directly out of inner conflicts.... At first sight Keats's theme in the 'Ode to a Nightingale' and the 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' ... is the belief that whereas the momentary experience of beauty is fleeting, the ideal embodiment of that moment in art, in song, or in marble is an imperishable source of joy. If that were all, these odes should be hymns of triumph, and they are not. It is the very acme of melancholy that the joy he celebrates is joy in beauty that must die.

*(Mythology and the Romantic Tradition in  
English Poetry, p. 107)*

Professor Fogle holds a different view:

There are indeed conflicts in Keats's poetry, but in the odes cited by Professor Bush these conflicts are reconciled. The Odes do not express 'the very acme of melancholy' any more than they express the very acme of joy. They express an exquisite awareness of the existence of joy and melancholy, pleasure and pain, and art and life. They express a feeling that these are inseparable, ... and they express acceptance of this inseparability of the elements of human experience. In the 'Ode to a Nightingale' Keats portrays a state of intense aesthetic and imaginative feeling, too poignant for long duration, which arises with the song of a bird and vanishes when

the song is done. The poet records his emotion and its passing without comment.

(*English Romantic Poets*, ed. M. H. Abrams, pp. 380-83)

The controversy raises one of the most difficult questions regarding Keats's poetry: how far did the dynamic philosopher revealed in the letters triumph over the poet aspiring for the pure dream world? How far was the romantic poet able to reconcile himself to the realist thinker?

Let us consider the point of the controversy. Both the professors agree that the Ode expresses two opposed or contrasted experiences, one in the ideal world of imagination where happiness and immortality reign; the other in the sordid world of reality where death and decay predominate. While Bush maintains that the contrasted experiences stem from an inner conflict between the ideal and the real, Fogle believes that the Ode expresses no conflict but an awareness of contrast only, 'an exquisite awareness of the existence of joy and melancholy', an 'acceptance of this inseparability of the elements of human experience...without comment'. To put it in another way, Bush emphasizes the romantic Keats torn by inner conflicts, Fogle underlines the realist Keats accepting the dichotomy of the two worlds with calm resignation; the empirical humanist Keats looking at 'a world of pains and troubles' as 'a Vale of Soul-making'.

To resolve the contention, let us examine the poem and begin with the opening lines where the conflict is caught in a web of personal utterances. The poem opens with a series of paradoxes:

My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains  
 My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,  
 Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains  
 One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:  
 'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,  
 But being too happy in thy happiness...

Why this heartache, this drowsy, numbed pain when the poet is so happy in the happiness of the bird? Why 'as though of hemlock I had drunk' when he speaks of his happiness?

Why 'Lethe-wards'? What is it that the poet wants to forget? Why the modifying epithet 'too' with 'happy'? What suggestion does it carry? A right answer to these questions would be an answer to the controversy as well. It will prove or disprove the issue of conflict.

On the opening lines of the poem Fogle comments:

This is not from grief, or envy of the nightingale, but from 'being too happy in thy happiness'. As in the 'Ode on Melancholy', he declares that intense pleasure is almost indistinguishable from numbing pain.

Wordsworth speaks of 'aching joy'; Shelley of 'sweetest songs' 'that tell of saddest thought'. Indeed, Fogle's remark reminds one of a poetic thought common to the Romantics: ache and pain through excess of joy.

But the romantic tradition is no less potent in the other interpretation: the heart aches because it faces a sudden and violent contrast that rocks the poet's imagination—the empyrean of beauty that suddenly opens up above, the world of suffering that stretches below. This other interpretation would argue that this contrast is the fountain-head of the central conflict in the poem, and that conflict is set moving right from the opening lines. It would argue that the heart-ache, the numbing pain, the drink of hemlock, the evocation of Lethe, and last but not least, the modifying epithet 'too' before 'happy'—all indicate that the poem opens with an implicit conflict of the two worlds, the ideal and the real. It would argue that the ecstasy of joy in listening to the song is shot with painful memories that the poet wants to forget, that the dichotomy of the two worlds shakes him, bringing in the heartache, the pain, the cup of hemlock. It would argue that the dark biographical background only confirms this view—the tragic death of Tom Keats, his own fatal illness, the malignancy of the reviewers, the sense of frustration in love and life. It would argue that such a conflict precludes envy and Keats hastens to reject it because that would be untrue to his intense aesthetic experience—touched with anguish, darkened by a sense of pitiful contrast, but making no room for envy, for already the poet is in tune

with the ecstasy of the song. It would argue that the ache and the drowsy numbness stem from 'being too happy'—an adverb often ignored, often unthinkingly taken to mean 'very' which it does not, a qualifying word that sharpens as it emphasizes the causal relation between the ache and the happiness. It would argue that the poet is happy more than is admissible because the transporting joy of the experience is shadowed by the awareness of the reality; because the fountain-light that suddenly opens up has a dark background of memory; because, despite the darkness, the light and the joy are real. Fogle's interpretation—and he represents a school of thought—does not take in all this and he leans a trifle too heavily on the 'Ode on Melancholy'.

✓ But Fogle is nowhere more vulnerable than in the following lines:

Stanzas ii and iii, however, represent as it were a false start, after the mood has been established in i. The 'draught of vintage' by whose magic power Keats would escape 'the weariness, the fever, and the fret' of life is rejected.... The true beginning comes in stanza iv. Krats flies to the nightingale. ✓

This is too facile a statement; stanzas ii and iii are, on the contrary, organically linked with stanza i, and they develop logically its implicit mood and explicit desire—the mood of pain and conflict; the immediate desire, to 'escape', to 'fade', and particularly to 'forget'. ✓

All this is borne out in the succeeding stanzas. The vivid and powerful awareness of 'all that flesh is heir to'; the subsequent death-wish to consummate a rich and rare experience which would vanish soon leaving the poet 'forlorn'; the entire spirit of the last stanza tolling the poet back to the world of reality; the bleak desolation conveyed through 'my sole self'; the sadness, the regret and the yearning that cling to 'cheat' and 'deceiving elf'; the last parting 'adieu' and its significant repetition—all bear testimony to the melancholy regret, the 'grief' certainly, if not the 'envy' of the poet facing the dichotomy of the two worlds. Keats, therefore, is in no mood to burst joy's grape against the palate

fine. He is tasting 'the sadness of Melancholy's might'—sadness in the contrast of the human predicament 'here' where love and beauty perish, with the immortal world of beauty where the nightingale sings eternally.

[The Ode, therefore, expresses 'the very acme of melancholy' where the conflict remains unreconciled, and not merely 'an exquisite awareness of...joy and melancholy', 'an acceptance of their inseparability...without comment', as Fogle makes out.] The poet, to quote Eliot, transmutes 'his personal and private agonies into something rich and strange, something universal', but not something 'impersonal'. For the personal, melancholy 'comment' runs in the entire spirit of the poem and conflicting experiences 'proved upon the pulses' bring out that comment.

But we have to grasp the form and spirit of that comment more deeply. That the Ode is 'the very acme of melancholy', as Bush affirms, I have tried to argue, though not for the same reason which he gives, as we shall see presently. But is that melancholy comment the ultimate one in the poem? I think it is not. I think, though both Bush and Fogle deny it, that the poem is also 'a hymn of triumph'. What else is the spirit, however momentary, of the main body of the poem from the fourth to the seventh stanza—and particularly the seventh stanza—the affirmation of the bird's immortality, a vision that asserts the eternity of life and beauty in the spiritual world in spite of death and decay in the real? The poem moves on two planes—the dialectical thought could build itself up so magnificently because of these two planes—the imaginative and the realistic. [On the imaginative plane Keats proclaims the immortality of the bird and her song. His vision transcends death and decay, and he sings 'a hymn of triumph'. On the realistic plane the poet, neither affirms nor denies the truth of the vision. He only implies that the escape on the wings of fancy by cheating the harsh realities of life, 'the giant agony of the world, for a while, does not endure. What the vision grasps on the imaginative plane is not an illusion; only it does not survive on the real.] And it is for this reason that I cannot agree with Bush when he says: 'It is the very acme of melancholy that the joy he celebrates is joy in beauty that must die'. The joy the poet celebrates

is joy in beauty envisioned on the imaginative level—beauty that defies death. It is 'the very acme of melancholy' that both the joy and the beauty must die when the poet descends to the level of life and reality.

The Ode, therefore, is at once 'a hymn of triumph' and 'the very acme of melancholy', read on different levels. Or rather between the 'triumph' and the 'melancholy', between the ecstasy and the regret, the poem hangs exquisitely balanced. Indeed, it is here that, paradoxically enough, the contentions of Bush and Fogle ultimately converge. The unreconciled conflict the former speaks of is in the poem, but it is so subdued, the dialectical thought is articulated in such fine balance, that the poem seems to be, as Fogle remarks, 'simply an imaginative reflection of the complexity and intensity of human experience' recorded 'without comment'. My contention is that the poet records his emotion with 'comments' so eloquent, so sharply balanced on both sides, that he seems to make none and take none. The poem is an ecstasy of joy in the imaginative experience; it is also a lament over 'all naked truths' where 'the miseries of the world are misery'. Joy and melancholy are woven in the intricate pattern of its thought and that pattern grows out of inner, unreconciled conflicts, either in the poem or just outside it.

## II

The 'chameleon Poet' was a superb artist. Coleridge alone is his rival in artistry, and even Coleridge would have been proud of that famous utterance of Keats on poetic imagery and its organization:

Its touches of beauty should never be half-way, thereby making the reader breathless instead of content. The rise, the progress, the setting of Imagery should, like the sun, come natural to him, shine over him, and set soberly, although in magnificence, leaving him in the luxury of twilight.

My theme in this section is 'the rise, the progress, the setting'

of Imagery' in the Ode; my aim is to pursue the poet's thought through the images.

The Ode is dialectically built on a series of intricately contrasted images, of light and darkness, sound and silence, movement and stillness. It is fascinating to watch in the poem the subtle interplay of these contrasted images as they are related to the central antithesis in the thought: light and sound and movement evoking the ideal world of imagination; darkness, silence, stillness in the world of reality.

The poem, we have marked, begins in paradox, and the paradox is caught in an interplay of opposed imagery. The first quatrain moves slowly around images of silence and darkness conveyed in subtle overtones: 'drowsy numbness', 'dull opiate', 'Lethe-wards'. The last four lines break that silence and darkness, first by the flash of an image of movement: 'light-winged Dryad of the trees'; and then by chequered images of colour and darkness (beechen green: shadows numberless).

The second stanza resumes images suggestive of silence and darkness again:

O for a draught of vintage, that hath been  
Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth

They are first relieved softly by a suggestion of colour again in 'country-green', and then suddenly broken by a tumult of movement, sound and light:

Dance, and Provençal song, and sunburnt mirth!

—a movement which unites with the mood and spirit of 'Singest of summer in full-throated ease'. The 'beaker full of the warm South' now contrasts happily with vintage 'Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth', and images of light and colour are tied in a knot as it were in the next lines:

With beaded bubbles winking at the brim,  
And purple-stained mouth;

They fade away in the last two lines into the dark 'of the forest dim', reinstating darkness, outer and inner.

The image-motif repeats itself in the opening lines of stanza iii: 'fade', 'dissolve' and 'forget' carry on the suggestion of silence and darkness. Over the rest of the stanza, on the panoramic vision of human suffering and the impermanence of love and beauty, the spirit of darkness and of silence intermittently broken by dark, muffled images of sound and colour, like 'fret' and 'groan', 'grey' and 'pale', falls like a shroud. The cluster of images is splendidly concentrated in the final 'full of sorrow and leaden-eyed despairs' which fuses together both 'silence' and 'darkness', and across which flashes for a moment in the next line, for the first time in the stanza, light from the ideal world, the 'light' from Beauty's 'lustrous eyes'. It vanishes immediately in images of pain and transience: 'pine', 'beyond to-morrow'. They bring back once more the overtones of darkness and silence. The ordering of the images so far, their 'rise, progress, setting', has been in tune with the pattern of the thought—the dichotomy of the two worlds, the ideal and the real, has been symbolically imaged as it were in the antithetical light-darkness, sound-silence, movement-stillness.

In stanza iv, the thought turns. The shift of the thought is caught in the shift in the image. The longed-for escape into the ideal world is being realized now. Instead of images of silence-darkness-stillness, symbolic of the poet's mind and the world of reality, we find now images of movement, sound and light in succession: 'fly', 'charioted by Bacchus and his pards', 'viewless wings', 'the Queen-Moon.... Clustered around by all her starry Fays'. Significantly, the attainment of the world of imagination is being voiced in images bathed in a soft haze. While images of silence-darkness-stillness shroud one world, those of sound-light-movement illumine the other. In the first tercet of the stanza, Keats conjures up his vision of the ideal world of Beauty, to which belongs the nightingale, of which her song is a symbol:

Already with thee! tender is the night,  
And haply the Queen-Moon is on her throne,  
Cluster'd around by all her starry Fays.

In the following stanzas the poet explores the broken arcs

of this vision in the sensuous and in the mythical-romantic world.

To come back to the last tercet of the stanza. The glorious vision of the Queen-Moon is immediately negated by an emphatic utterance confirming the sad, sharp contrast between the two worlds:

'But here there is no light.'

I do not see why the utterance should be taken, as it is commonly taken, only in the physical sense. Keats is speaking here both literally and figuratively. What was an intangible suggestion breathing around the 'silence-dark' images so far, crystallizes into a positive statement: 'here' (we are reminded of 'here' in the previous stanza), 'there is no light'. Is not the poet saying: while the ideal world of imagination is bathed in light, darkness envelopes the real? There is no light 'here', save the scattered fragments of beauty in the visible world, 'what from heaven is with the breezes blown'. And the poet says so because he has now 'stepped into a sort of oneness', has been led 'by degrees to the chief intensity'. The sensuous Keats, now attuned to the spiritual world, wakes up fully. The enchanting loveliness of the natural world was once to him:

An endless fountain of immortal drink,  
Pouring unto us from the heaven's brink.

(*Endymion*, I, 23-24)

The immortal fountain pours now 'from the heaven's brink'—

Save what from heaven is with the breezes blown  
Through verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways.

'Light', scanty and intercepted, reaches 'darkness'! It is indeed tempting to allow the 'figurative' a clean sweep here. The stanza, as also the next, gains on us as it never could if we confined ourselves merely to the literal.

The intimations of Beauty kindle the poet's sensuous imagination in stanza v; he dotes on the delights of nature.

Images of darkness and of silence persist however: the quatrain is indeed 'embalmed in darkness' relieved by neither sound nor colour nor movement. And then, in the second half of the stanza, colour and fragrance, sound and movement break in one after another: 'white hawthorn', 'pastoral eglantine', 'fast-fading violets', 'the musk-rose full of dewy wine', 'the murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves'.

v. 9 The stanza, it is necessary to repeat, is no mere sensuous imagination in luxuriance as often affirmed by critics. It is the Keatsian imagination 'in fellowship with essence', discovering 'the richer entanglements'. Bowra's words in this context are revealing:

✓ Through the imagination Keats sought an absolute reality to which a door was opened by his appreciation of beauty through the senses. When the objects of sense laid their spell upon him, he was so stirred and exalted that he felt himself transported to another world.... Sight and sound and smell awoke his imagination to a sphere in which he saw vast issues.... The more intensely a beautiful object affected him, the more convinced he was that he had passed beyond it to something else.

(*The Romantic Imagination*, p. 16)

In the present stanza objects of sense lay their spell upon him and exalt him to another world. The beauty of visible things heavy with colour and fragrance becomes the window of the senses through which he glimpses the ultimate reality.

Stanza vi opens in darkness again, but with a difference: 'Darkling I listen' touches two worlds like 'forlorn' later: the world of physical darkness sitting in which the poet listens, of mental darkness with which the poem opened; and the world of illumined vision which 'listen' now evokes.

✓ The two worlds meet and are fused in the stanza. The image-motif of 'darkness', therefore, is now radically transformed: it has gained a new richness and fulness that finds expression immediately:

and, for many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful Death.

It is this rich, full, radiant darkness—if I may say so—that the darkness-image throbs with now, and all this is concentrated in its intensity in the death-wish symbolizing the consummation of the poet's happiness:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain.

✓ One recalls the last four lines of the sonnet 'Why did I laugh tonight?' composed a couple of months earlier:

Yet could I on this very midnight cease  
And the world's gaudy ensigns see in shreds.  
✓ Verse, fame and Beauty are intense indeed  
| But Death intenser—Death is Life's high meed.

'The phrase "rich to die" is of the very essence of Keats's emotion,' remarked Rossetti. This rich, soft, darkfulness is also the very essence of the imagery in the stanza: it clings round 'take into the air my quiet breath', 'cease upon the midnight with no pain', and culminates in:

While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy!

The verse attains to a new winged quality in sharp contrast to the soft, heavy movement of the preceding lines. The pattern of the contrasted image, now brought back, is accentuated in the last lines:

✓ Still shouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod.

The quick play on contrast—the antithetical 'sing' and 'ears in vain', 'high requiem' and 'sod'—revives the sound-silence motif.

✓ In the first quatrain of stanza vii, poetry soars on the wings of passion, on the swift, panting iambic feet. Passion and life and movement breathe into the sweeping historical vision:

Thou wast not born for death, immortal bird!  
 No hungry generations tread thee down;  
 The voice I hear this passing night was heard  
 In ancient days by emperor and clown.

The scene is transformed suddenly: from dynamic life and movement we come to two pictures of stillness and desolation, one from the mythical world, the other from the world of Romance, both shot through with mystery, beauty, sadness.

It is interesting to note how hard consonants variegated by long vowels make for the power and passion of the first four lines. In the rest of the stanza the consonants become softer and the vowels longer and more brooding. They conjure up the intangible atmosphere of desolation and stillness pervading the last six lines.

A couple of questions may arise here. First, what leads the poet to assert the immortality of the bird the way he does? Second, why the images of Ruth and of charmed magic casements? What is the plausible psychological source of the images, Claude Lorraine or Mrs. Radcliffe or Spenser's story of Marinell? The answer to the first is in the preceding three stanzas: the flight into the unseen spiritual world, the sense of supreme fulfilment, 'the fellowship with essence', break into the vision of the bird's immortality. The bird and her song belong to the timeless world where beauty is eternal. The world of spirit conquers death though death conquers the real world.

My answer to the second question is that the vision of the bird's immortality evoked and affirmed in the opening line is pursued in pairs of contrasted images—two negative and two positive in character. *Negative* images—'hungry generations', 'emperor and clown'—lend a contrast to the bird's immortality; they are symbolic of 'death', the mortal, the temporal. They establish by contrast the immortality of the bird. The second pair of images (Ruth, standing 'in tears amid the alien corn'; 'charmed magic casements, opening on the foam of perilous seas') is, on the contrary, *positive* in character, implanted once more on the two worlds, the ideal and the real. They belong to the latter, for they too are 'passing'; they too are temporal in essence—the reason why

a mist of sadness, stillness and desolation envelops them. But they also partake of the other world: they also bear the impress of immortality; they lead the poet on to the deathless principle, the intimations of immortal beauty, in the mythical-romantic world, just as he has guessed each sweet in the sensuous. He is reminded of the intimations—first in the Biblical world where the heroic sacrifice of Ruth lives for ever; and then in the magical world of Romance and love. They also, in a way, develop the vision of immortality.

✓ We remember Keats's famous statement: 'I have loved the principle of Beauty in all things'. ✓

✓ The spell breaks in the last stanza as the poet is tolled back to the reality. 'The wakeful anguish of the soul' now revives fully. The 'plaintive anthem fades'; it is 'buried deep'. As Brooks points out: 'he would fade into the bird's song, but at the end, it is the bird's song that fades away from him'. ✓  
(The Major English Romantic Poets, ed. Thorpe, Baker and Weaver, p. 250). It is the poet who wished for death and ✓ burial; it is the song, endowed with immortality a moment ago, that is buried. The poem has come full circle, and so have the images. They 'set soberly' now, 'although in magnificence'. The poem fades into silence with the song and brings ✓ back the 'silence' image. To the poet 'the rest is silence'.

## 'ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE': A RE-INTERPRETATION

BY SATYANARAIN SINGH

THE five Odes written in the space of about a month (April-May 1819) and To Autumn written in September have been unanimously considered to be Keats's major artistic achievements. Attempts have been made to interpret the Odes in terms of tension and conflict between the ideal and the actual or between romance and reality or between art and life, and to treat them as variations on a basic theme. J. R. Caldwell's analysis is a typical example of this approach. Referring to the *Grecian Urn*, he says that it is

...not an isolated poem, but stands in specific relationship to other poems. It is, in fact, one of a group of five Odes...all...homogeneous in mood, with ideas and images that interrelate and recur... Most closely related in time of composition, in poetic substance, and in logical statement are the 'Nightingale', 'Melancholy', and the 'Urn'. In this trilogy the middle poem stands as a comment on the experience of beauty in general; the other two give directly and dramatically specific illustrations of this experience. The structure of the events in the 'Urn' and in the 'Nightingale' conforms precisely to the description in 'Melancholy' of all such events.<sup>1</sup>

This is a very confident affirmation. There is no doubt about some similarities in mood and imagery of the three Odes but to make these similarities a basis for assimilating all three into one pattern of meaning appears to be somewhat arbitrary. So that apart from the merits of Mr. Caldwell's own reading of 'Melancholy' and his application of that meaning to the 'Nightingale' and the 'Urn', it is difficult to be convinced of the soundness of the approach itself. It tends to flatten out the individuality of each Ode and we miss its peculiar excellence. We similarly distrust Mr. John Holloway's theory about the Odes in his article<sup>2</sup> in the

*Cambridge Journal* (April 1952). He holds that the Odes collectively are 'a psychological document... of unique interest' because they 'prove to be a complex and detailed poetic revelation of what Keats knew himself as the creative mood', and he finds the main evidence for this view in certain repetitions of phrase which he thinks establish a distinctive unity for the six Odes. We share Mr. Kenneth Allot's<sup>3</sup> misgivings about this thesis. Though this kind of study may contribute to some understanding of Keats's creative process, it is difficult to agree with Mr. John Holloway's assertion that his own viewpoint makes for 'a more sensitive, balanced, comprehensive interpretation of each poem by itself'. Perhaps it is not so necessary to make a general formulation in order to appreciate or interpret 'each poem by itself'. What may better repay a reader's study is the fact that despite some links of thought and feeling between the Odes, each poem is vitally different from the other and artistically self-sufficient. Perhaps the only justification for another such study of the Odes is to explore further the 'uniqueness' of the poet's experience in each Ode and examine the artistic integrity he is able to achieve in it. Such an interpretation, we think, may be more in keeping with the spirit of Keats's own observations on poetry.

The two Odes that have aroused the liveliest disagreement with regard to their central meaning are the *Nightingale* and the *Grecian Urn*. In explaining what they are about, critical opinion is so varied that there is always a temptation to turn from the poet to his critic in order to understand the principles or prejudices that are implicit in his judgment. Such a pursuit, besides making the service greater than the God, will probably leave us none the wiser about the poem in question. Although we have gained some valuable insights from the different commentaries, in this case, it appears that the Odes contain much more than what the critics have tried to tell. Now to mention some of the more important interpretations of the *Nightingale*.

Bridges<sup>4</sup>, Colvin<sup>5</sup> and Selincourt agree that the principal theme is to celebrate the song of the bird as a 'symbol of the beauty from which there is no death nor change'.<sup>6</sup> The experience of beauty is momentary but the ideal embodiment

of that moment in song or in marble is an imperishable source of joy. 'If that were all,' argues Douglas Bush, 'these Odes should be hymns of triumph, and they are not. It is the very acme of melancholy that the Joy he celebrates is joy in beauty that must die.'<sup>7</sup> Bush does not, however, substantiate his idea by discussing individually the Odes he mentions. He makes a general observation that Keats's important poems are 'related to or grow directly out of...inner conflicts'.<sup>8</sup> R. H. Fogle takes issue with him on this point to say that in the Odes these conflicts are reconciled. Fogle discusses the *Nightingale* at some length and observes:

In the *Nightingale* Keats portrays a state of intense aesthetic and imaginative feelings, too poignant for long duration, which arises with the song of a bird and vanishes when the song is done. The poet records his emotion and its passing without comment.<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps it is not altogether correct to say that 'the poet records his emotion and its passing without comment.'

C. L. Finney and D. G. James more explicitly consider the poem in terms of romantic escape. According to Finney, Keats 'expressed in the *Nightingale* the inadequacy of a romantic escape from painful reality into an ideal world of natural beauty'.<sup>10</sup> D. G. James holds that 'the poem has the note of escape, and of escape through poetic luxury, rather than of courage and resolution; it is elegiac, mournful, self-pitying even'.<sup>11</sup>

Dr. Leavis's analysis of the Ode is valuable in certain respects but we disagree with his reading of the 'main impulsion' of the Ode in terms of 'luxury' or 'indulgence'.<sup>12</sup>

Of the New Critics, Cleanth Brooks defines as the theme of the poem 'the following paradox: the world of the imagination offers a release from the painful world of actuality, yet at the same time it renders the world of actuality more painful by contrast'.<sup>13</sup> In an intelligent if somewhat confident analysis of the Ode, Allen Tate finds in the *Nightingale* 'an emblem of one limit of our experience, the antinomy of the ideal and the real'.<sup>14</sup> It is interesting to note that Tate appears more sure than the poet himself about the 'real'

in the poem. (He comments on the third stanza: 'Here if anywhere in the poem the necessity to dramatise time, or the pressure of actuality, is paramount. Keats has no language of his own for this realm of experience. That is the capital point'.<sup>15</sup>) But Tate does not tell us clearly what in his opinion is the 'ideal' in the poem. The 'real' and the 'ideal' are large terms and unless specifically defined, their use may confuse rather than clarify the meaning. The view we want to submit is that the main theme of the Nightingale is not the 'antinomy of the ideal and the real' nor 'the inadequacy of a romantic escape' but rather the capacity of imagination to transcend (not escape) life's painful realities (by its devotion to the principle of beauty in things, in this case, the song of the Nightingale), and the limitation peculiar to such experience.

Keats had observed:

The excellence of every art is its intensity, capable of making all disagreeables evaporate from their being in close relationship with Beauty and Truth.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps the Nightingale is a good example of how he is able to work the disagreeable into his art-experience. The excellence of his art in the Ode consists in the intensity and fulness with which he records the rise, the progress and the setting of his moments of ecstasy. The first three stanzas describe the birth of the vision, iv and v its growth, vi and vii its consummation, and viii its end.

The opening is one of the finest in Keats, and 'gives us', to quote what Keats said of the beginnings of great works, 'a direct taste and surmise of its inwards'.<sup>17</sup> The first stanza strikes us with a kind of 'black brightness'<sup>18</sup> (to use a Keatsian expression again) in its impressive blend of the light and shade of the Nightingale and the human worlds. The misery, the dullness and the heaviness of the human condition is set against the happiness, the ease and the buoyancy of the Nightingale in a series of suggestive images and expressions: a kind of aching 'drowsy numbness' that follows the drinking of 'hemlock' or some 'dull opiate', and sinking 'lethwards' contrasts with the 'light-winged Dryad' 'in some melodious plot' and singing of summer in 'fullthroated ease'. We also

know that the Nightingale is making possible the poet's accession from the painful to the happy world. The summer-song of the bird revives his spirits and he rallies round from torpor and gloom to 'dance, and provençal song, and sunburnt mirth'. He longs for 'a beaker full of the warm South' so that his transcendence into the Nightingale world may be complete. From the 'hemlock' of the first stanza to the 'Hippocrene' of the second, we notice a transition from one state of mind to the other. (The highly concentrated imagery of fulness and plenitude in stanza 2 evokes an ideal life of joy and gusto and freedom.) But his yearning for 'happiness', of which the Nightingale is the symbol, reminds him of the chief driving force behind it: the misery and the heartbreak of the actual, the 'hemlock' aspect of life. In a rapid series of vignettes, the poet captures 'the weariness, the fever, and the fret' of life and the spectre imagery of privation, disease and decay of stanza 3 is sharply contrasted with the rich and sumptuous imagery of plenitude and health and joy of stanza 2. This movement backward to the actual renews his awareness of the human condition and intensifies his longing to attain the supreme innocence symbolized by the Nightingale ('What thou among the leaves hast never known. The weariness, the fever, and the fret'). Could he achieve that state of detachment? Stanza 4 answers this question.

He begins by rejecting positively the 'Hippocrene' solution:

I will fly to thee,  
Not charioted by Bacchus and his pards,  
But on the viewless wings of poesy.

The artificial intoxicant would perhaps do no more than drug one to unconsciousness of life's dilemmas and 'drown the wakeful anguish of the soul'. He will rely instead on the power of imagination for his ascent to the Nightingale World. It is a measure of his 'negative capability' that he could so quickly rise above his personal self to achieve an intimate communion with the bird in the dark forest scene. The soft and heavy (as well as the light and fresh) imagery in stanzas 4 and 5 is particular and sensuous. There is nothing unreal

or ethereal about it. It is a remarkably vivid, precise and feeling description of the luxuriant summer woods under a moon-lit night. Shelley's ethereal, unfamiliar and somewhat indefinite imagery in the *Skylark* offers itself as a contrast. Odour merges with touch in 'what soft incense hangs upon the boughs'. 'The grass, the thicket, and the fruit tree wild' have tactual and plastic qualities. The 'musk rose, full of dewy wine' has a rich sensation of taste and 'the murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves' is haunting in its music of the scene.

It is this 'melodious plot of beechen green' which has as its sovereign, the Nightingale. The poet gives himself up to the ecstasy of her song, and would willingly sacrifice his life to this great and consummate moment:

Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain,  
While thou art pouring forth thy soul abroad  
In such an ecstasy:

Perhaps the death-wish here is a profound representation of a particular human condition in which life is one long torment, and death, no longer dark, beckons light and release. The poet's own sufferings culminating in his early death give a peculiar poignancy to the death theme in some of his later poems. It would be a profound mistake, however, to conclude that the poet thought of 'death' as a solution to life's problems. We should remember the particular context in which he contemplates 'easeful death'. He desires for it under the impact of beauty: 'Now more than ever seems it rich to die'. If death is inevitable, the poet seems to say that rather than die a dragging spectre-thin death he would wish to cease in the midst of such ecstatic moments and make of death itself a rich experience. This conceiving of the awful fact of death in terms of 'intensity' or as 'life's high mead' is peculiarly Keatsian. (Cf. letter to Fanny Brawne: 'I have two luxuries to brood over in my walks, your loveliness and the hour of my death. O that I could have possession of them both in the same minute.'<sup>19</sup>)

Death under the circumstances appeared an alluring idea

that might somehow perpetuate the bliss he enjoyed at the moment; but perhaps it was no more than an idea. Death may even make him impervious to the exquisite pleasures, and what seemed so romantic, a moment ago, becomes just a heap of dust.

Still wouldst thou sing, and I have ears in vain—  
To thy high requiem become a sod.

- ✓ This consciousness of change and decay makes the poet celebrate the 'immortal' glories of the Nightingale's song. The question about the bird's immortality is perhaps made too much of: 'Thou was't not born for death, immortal bird'. It is the same sort of statement that Keats made in 'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever', where he described as imperishable not the object as such, but the thing that makes it beautiful, in other words, what he called 'the principle of Beauty' in things. The principle of beauty in the Nightingale is her 'voice', as he makes explicit in line 3 of stanza 7, and he commemorates its permanent and universal appeal in a series of significant images, ending with 'faery lands forlorn'. From 'ancient days' the Song has been a source of companionship and comfort to people differently placed: it has ministered to the needs of different minds: in its appeal to both 'emperor and clown'; as a friend to the lonely and homesick 'Ruth'; and by awakening a sense of wonder and beauty and adventure in minds wearied with the dull processes of their everyday lives. Thus stanza 7 marks the climax of the imaginative experience. 'The disagreeables' lose their sting 'in close relationship with the Beauty and Truth' of the Nightingale song: the human sadness of a Ruth is soothed, and thoughts of men under the pressure and tedium of the commonplace and customary, are lifted to contemplate the glory and freshness of Nature's elements. ✓ In celebrating the Nightingale, Keats is also celebrating Imagination as the principle of beauty in man by which he can transcend the limitations of his personal self and find deeper fulfilments in communing with other realms of being. ✓
- ✓ The last stanza records the passing away of the consummate moment and comments upon it. 'The fancy cannot cheat

so well as she is famed to do' is not a repudiation of imagination but an anguished complaint at the brevity of the poetic spell and 'the journey homeward to habitual self'. The withdrawal from the heights is objectified in the gradual fading of the song, 'Past the near meadows, over the still stream,/ Up the hill-side': and the poem concludes with a query:

Was it a vision, or a waking dream?  
Fled is that music:—Do I wake or sleep?

The questions come from one who is prostrated by the impact of a powerful experience and is too much dazed to judge or define it in very positive terms. The conclusion is characteristically Keatsian in trying 'not to dispute or assert, but whisper results'.

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# D. H. LAWRENCE AND E. M. FORSTER: A STUDY IN VALUES

BY CHITRA ROY

THE rehabilitation of D. H. Lawrence as one of the major novelists of the English tradition, has been a signal contribution of F. R. Leavis. One wishes that a similar evaluation had been undertaken by him, or by a critic of his stature, on behalf of E. M. Forster. Though considerable work has been done on Forster in recent years, and much new light has been thrown on him as a novelist, no adequate attempt has been made so far to relate him to the English tradition.

A reference to Lawrence is always expedient in any evaluation of Forster. A comparative study sets Forster in the right position in relation to the major English novelists. We see him as belonging to the best in the humanistic tradition of the English novel along with Lawrence. Forster and Lawrence were contemporaries. But that fact alone does not make it easy to draw out points of agreement between the two. Their genius is of a widely dissimilar nature, Forster stylistically being more in the Jane Austen tradition than in any other, and Lawrence belonging to an altogether different *genre*. The points of affinity concern their general attitude to life, and will form the subject of the present investigation.

A common misconception about Lawrence was that he was a primitivist in every sense of the word. This was an opinion which, as F. R. Leavis has pointed out, had held the English literary world in thrall for years. Critics have gone to the absurd length of viewing him as the forerunner of the dark spirit of Nazism. About Forster, equally confused inferences have been made, that like Lawrence he too is a primitivist (Tyndall). Or else, he is seen as being merely representative of the very limited Edwardian liberal culture (F. R. Leavis, Frederick Crews). Far from being primitivists, the novelists are unequivocally committed to the cause of civilization, and English civilization at that. At the same time, it is true that they can easily be mistaken as primitivists. An enthusiastic Freudian and Frazerian reading will do the

trick. There is a radical dissatisfaction with the society they have lived in. This has engendered a consistent shift away from the home country, and away from the present. Do not the pictures of Sawston suburbia in Forster's novels and of the provincial industrial towns in Lawrence's novels speak of a rejection on the part of both? Do they not turn away from civilized, anaemic men to pagan heroes? [The revitalized hero in Forster's short stories is the Greek Pan, or rather his spirit; and in his novels, provincial and country oafs like Gino and Stephen. Typical of Lawrentian revitalized heroes are the gamekeeper Mellors, the gypsy vendor Smith, the grooms Lewis and Phoenix, drawn from the lower rungs of society and unmistakably primitive in outlook.] Imp.

Such an approach finds favour with critics, as then one can conveniently relate these writers to the bulk of modern 'Wasteland' writers, Eliot, Virginia Woolf, Hemingway, Huxley and the rest. But Lawrence and Forster are very different writers, who never make a creed of their dissatisfaction. With the help of their clear intelligence, they limit their distaste to the diseases exhibited by civilization, and never do they extend it to civilization itself, as the writers mentioned above have done. On the other hand, they show a keen awareness of the dark forces that constantly threaten civilization, and ponder on the ways and means of preserving the achievements of man. In this, they demonstrate their unshakable faith in life, and this places them in the direct humanistic tradition of the English novel of the previous century. Imp.

Aldous Huxley in his introduction to the letters of D. H. Lawrence analyzes the motives that had sent the novelist travelling round the world. 'It was, I think, the sense of being cut off, that sent Lawrence on restless wanderings round the earth. His travels were, at once a flight and a search: a search for some society with which he could establish contact, for a world where the times were not personal and conscious knowing had not yet perverted living; a search and at the same time a flight from the miseries and evils of a society into which he was born, and for which in spite of his artist's detachment, he could not help feeling profoundly responsible.' Lawrence's early novels are set in England. *The Rainbow* shows the spiritual

heritage of England in relation to the general development of civilization, and *Women in Love* is a comprehensive presentation of contemporary England (F. R. Leavis). After his marriage, and with the outbreak of the First World War, began a particularly unhappy phase in the novelist's life. All through the war, he had remained a suspect, and virtually an internee, by reason of having a wife of German birth and because of sarcastic references he had made to the war in his books. *The Rainbow* was banned, and no publisher could be found for *Women in Love*. Lawrence was in a hopelessly unsettled condition, and the flights Huxley mentions began at this period. In disgust he turned away from England in search of other congenial worlds. Huxley concludes that Lawrence's search was fruitless as his flight was ineffective and he knew 'the inevitability of disillusionment and failure'. How Huxley, with his intimate knowledge of Lawrence's development, could arrive at such an impossible conclusion, amazes us. Even a first consistent reading will show that the travels were not in vain. They were in the nature of explorations, explorations of wider and larger regions of consciousness. They were a way of knowing where his true self lay. The search did yield result, and Lawrence after an initial period of despair returns to a vigorous affirmation of life, a faith he had demonstrated in his earlier novels *The Rainbow* and *Women in Love*. The novels which record this development in succeeding order are *The Lost Girl*, *Kangaroo*, *The Plumed Serpent*, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *The Man Who Died*.

[Lawrence's first projection outside his native world and culture was into Italy. *The Lost Girl* and *Aaron's Rod* study the effects of a foreign country and culture upon insular ideas and personalities. Similar quests in Italy had been undertaken by Forster as well, and the characters in the novels of both the writers remind us of Henry James's exiles in Europe. Alvina Houghton (*The Lost Girl*) has succeeded in shaking off the deadening shackles of a suburban English background like Lilia Herriton (*Where Angels Fear to Tread*). What has she gained instead? Morally she has lost nothing, but she has gained nothing either. The novel ends on the brink of tragedy, for Alvina has rejected England for Italy, without caring to understand the real nature of her problem.

It is only when her marriage to the Italian Cicio, a real Italian, is an accomplished fact, when she has finally and irrevocably cut off all ties with her native land and culture, that the problem and consequent tragedy confront her relentlessly. In this sense Alvina is a lost girl. She is uprooted from her native soil, but is offered no warmth and shelter in the cold mountains of Northern Italy, the home of her husband. 'At Pescocalascio it was the mysterious influence of the mountains and valleys themselves which seemed always to be annihilating the English-woman; nay, not only her, but the very natives themselves. Cicio and his uncle clung to her.... It seems *there are places which resist us*, which have the power to overthrow our psychic being. It seems as if *every country has its potent negative centres, localities which savagely and triumphantly refuse our living culture*. And Alvina had struck one of these, here on the edge of the Abruzzi.... How unspeakably lovely it was,...the grand, pagan, twilight of the valleys, savage, cold with a sense of the ancient gods who knew the right for human sacrifice...the terror, the agony, the nostalgia of the heathen past was a constant torture to her mediumistic soul.' If this was how Alvina reacted to the outer landscape, her experience of the inside of any dwelling in that region was unhappier still. A dwelling grows out of the place, and it is more alien and hostile than the outside as Alvina's unhappy visit to the interior of a church confirmed. External nature has certain impersonal, elemental or cosmic forces, common everywhere; but the interior is fashioned out of a distinct, personal or rather native, and therefore necessarily alien culture. Alvina comes up against this, and in her helplessness turns to the cold mountains and hard rocks which offer little hope to her.

The cases of Lilia Herriton and Caroline Abbott invite comparison. Lilia, uprooting herself and settling down in Italy, is like Alvina. She suffers a similar, if not worse fate. Of a much inferior cast of mind, she miserably succumbs to her fate, while Alvina, intelligent, sensitive and perceptive, is determined to fight tragedy. Caroline, wiser than either, has fallen in love with Italy and not Italians. She remains a spectator and escapes tragedy. The Marchesa in *Aaron's Rod* is another case in point. A cosmopolitan, leading a

migratory existence, she has lost her bearings in life and Aaron fails to establish satisfactory relationship with such a person.

Lawrence's next excursion was into the newest continent of the world, Australia. His rejection of Australia was as emphatic as was his dismissal of Italy, nearer home, and follows the same pattern. The examination brings up the same reflections on an alien culture. Lawrence had been well-read in sociology. His novels show how seriously he had studied the evolution of societies and the development of civilization. His study of myths, and of patterns of collective racial behaviour, was on the line set by Jung, and Frazer in his *Golden Bough*. But Lawrence was in no way inclined to primitivism. His study helped him to understand forces antagonistic to civilization, elemental and subterranean forces in nature and man. This led him to value immeasurably the achievements of civilization.]

The annihilating and life-defeating forces in nature, perhaps, he encountered for the first time in Italy. The descriptions in *The Lost Girl*, quoted earlier, are relevant. 'There are places which resist us', 'every country had its potent negative centres, localities which savagely and triumphantly refuse our living culture.' The description of the bush country in Australia is equally suggestive. It seemed to Somers that here in the bushland, the spirit of the place was watching its victim with a terrible, ageless watchfulness. Somers is fascinated by the utter loneliness and indifference of the Australian scene, which is timeless and nowhere. It thwarts all the efforts of Christian and modern civilization to entrench themselves in. The buildings are symptomatic. They are foundationless bungalows and shacks with tin roofs. Somers contrasts these with buildings in Europe, which have strong foundations and are of a definite architecture.

Lawrence's study of the nature of political action and leadership throws an interesting sidelight on the relation between society and politics. A political ideology, be it fascism or communism, is what religions were in ancient days, guiding social action. Political messiahs like Kangaroo, or Ramon or Cipriano (*Plumed Serpent*) worked on the primitive instincts latent even in the individual, and ever potent in the crowd or the herd. These are all-powerful instincts and take man

back to the dawn of history. Jack Callcott revels in bloodshed and violence. It satisfies an urge deep down in his soul. Somers senses it and relates it to the sudden urge that overtakes the aboriginal to kill and shed blood. He remembers also the fear that had gripped him in the midst of the elemental loneliness of the bush country. Kangaroo preaches love; so does Ramon, seeking to evoke an ancient myth. Kate Leslie yields to the power implicit in it. But in an earlier book, Somers clings to reason and intellect, the prerogative of the civilized man and turns his back on Kangaroo and his like. Rational isolation necessary for a Westerner and an Englishman is not to be found here. Somers realizes that English culture has made no inroads into the heart of the newest continent; it has scratched the surface only, in the form of haphazard democratic sprawlings of monstrous cities like Sydney. The real thing is the spirit of the place, inimical to any culture and civilization, as not even a primitive one had ever found the place congenial. It persistently resisted all human efforts, and is perhaps that one large negative centre, described in *The Lost Girl*.

✓ Mexico was Lawrence's last itinerary. Mexican experience Lawrence describes, in his collection of essays in *Phoenix*, as the greatest experience from the outside world, liberating him from the present era of civilization. 'None of the other travels had shattered the essential Christianity on which my character was established... I had no permanent feeling of religion till I came to New Mexico, and penetrated into the old human race experience there... the Red Indian seems to me much older than Greeks, or Hindus... he is a remnant of the most deeply religious race still living... while a tribe retains its religion and keeps up its religious practices... then there is a tribal integrity and a living tradition going back far beyond the birth of Christ, beyond the pyramids, beyond Moses. A vast, old religion which once swayed the earth, lingers in unbroken practice there in New Mexico, older perhaps than anything in the world save the Australian aboriginal taboo and toto, and that is not religion. You feel the old root of human consciousness reaching down to depths we know nothing of.' Primitive dance and song, according to Lawrence, were the attempts of men to establish contact with the great

cosmic source of vitality, the mountains, cloud, thunder, air, earth, sun. This was the oldest and most cosmic religion compared to the newest and humanistic Christianity. The above passage records not only the impressions, the impact on a very sensitive mind; it is also an assertion, and admission of the essential Christianity in him. The Mexican experiences were shattering, subverting his Christian belief; he returns to the Christian fold all the same, but in a devious manner.

Instead of the complete negation Lawrence had found in the land of the Kangaroo, in Mexico he found a living culture and religion which had grown round a reconciliation of the land and the people. This was the cult of the Quetzacoatl, which four centuries of Christianity had failed to kill. So Lawrence, in the role of Don Ramon and Cipriano, sets about reviving the older pantheon of Aztec gods. Yet the one thing which is impressed on the reader, as the editor Richard Aldington points out, is that 'the English Lawrence constantly recoils in dissenting horror from the very things he is supposed to be preaching.' Kate Leslie, no doubt, stays back and marries one of the Mexican heroes, but this is indicative not of her acceptance, but, as in the case of Lawrence, of her fascination for a powerful living myth. The implicit lesson of the book is 'to each man, his own country'.

Salvation and happiness lie right in the heart of the home country. At this point, it would not be inapposite to refer to circumstances of Lawrence's life, once again; that is, Lawrence's and Frieda's married life, childless, and migratory in nature, and which placed them in a peculiar position—against a vacant background, with no place in the community. Whether consciously aware or not, this factor shaped Lawrence's outlook on life, and caused his return to the fold. His next novel, *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, brings him back to the problem of industrialized civilization in England, and Mellors, the gamekeeper, sums up his total attitude to culture. Mellors has intellectual refinement, is physically healthy, and above all he is a workman, sprung from the soil. People like him or Stephen Wonham, build up a living civilization, while the presence of Sir Clifford Chatterley indicates the beginning of a moribund culture. Mellors represents the vitality of English culture, taking nourishment from the soil,

entrenched in tradition and resisting the sterility of Sir Clifford. That Sir Clifford is physically a cripple, is suggestive. ✓

In Mexico, in 1927, Lawrence had been very close to death, but had recovered after a hard and prolonged struggle. It was as if 'he had actually experienced a death and a resurrection in this life' (Aldington). This condition helped Lawrence to realize the truth implicit in the myth of Christ resurrected. Lawrence's critical encounter with primitive cultures had led him to reject them. The cult of the Kangaroo (a neofascist cult with primitive tonings), or the cult of Quetzacoatl, were cults of violence and blood and were associated with death. These were repugnant to a rational Englishman. Consequently, in his last posthumous story, The Man Who Died, Lawrence returns to Christianity, the religion that had nurtured him. The article, The Risen Lord, contributed to the Everyman (3 October, 1929) provides a probable explanation of this story, and throws light on Lawrence's attitude to Christianity. While returning to it he would have nothing to do with the official interpretation of religion. 'The great religious images are only images... of our own state of mind and soul.' This view, Aldington remarks, 'is closer to the Golden Bough than the Summa of Aquinas. This is religion, not as ordinary men or salaried men understand it, but a mixture of poetry and science, tolerant and sceptical.' So when Lawrence returns to the old religion, he revitalizes it with the pagan health of the body. The Christ myth is combined with an earlier myth, that of Osiris and Isis, which flourished in the very region which gave birth to Christianity, and at a period of history earlier than either Greek or Roman, the Egyptian era. Christ resurrected has parallels to the return of the lost Osiris to Isis. The marriage of the resurrected Christ with the pagan priestess of Isis indicates the recreation of a myth. A new life is infused into the myth by balancing the spiritual and the physical. Thus Lawrence travels back in time to the very centre of a universal experience, in the life of long generations of people, relates the myth with great insight to the seasonal experience of the people of that locality, and invests it with psychological truth. '...in the warm south great joy flooded the hearts of the people on Easter Sunday. The Lord is risen. The Lord

is on the rising wheat and the plum blossoms are warm and kind upon earth again, after having been done to death by the evil and the jealous ones. Christ rises, from the dead in the flesh, not merely in the spirit. The virgin birth, the baptism, the temptation, the teaching, Gethsemane, the betrayal, the crucifixion, the burial, the resurrection, those are all true according to our inward experience.... If Jesus rose as a full man, in full flesh and soul, then he rose to take a woman to Himself and to know the tenderness and the blossoming of the twoness with her....' At the very end of his life, Lawrence thus seems to have arrived at a satisfactory and a complete scheme of life. Its expression is the story mentioned above. It was an assertion of his faith in life, his belief in humanism, and in the English and Christian way of life.

E. M. Forster's humanistic affirmation takes on a slightly different turn. For one thing, he gives up writing novels altogether, after having felt that the novel can no longer carry the burden of too heavy an affirmation, such as he brings to bear on it. So he has to his credit only five slender volumes, and on this his entire reputation depends. But to come back to the kinship between Forster and Lawrence, Forster like his compatriot, quite early in his career, had experienced the compulsion of change and movement, had in fact experienced them immediately after his undergraduate days at Cambridge. Cambridge had inculcated in him a taste for Greece, and out of his Greek experience were fashioned his early short stories or fantasies, as he terms them. Still an impressionable young man, with the bitter memories of a repressed, late Victorian adolescence fresh in his mind, the pagan spirit of Greek mythology symbolized for him the rebellion and liberation of youth. The Greek experience was more congenial than the later Eastern one. But for all that, the young man did not remain an exile in Greece, as Henry James had remained in another friendly world. How can one settle down in the country of one's choice, when that country existed only in history and in the imagination? It was not modern Greece, and Forster, never given to hasty, impracticable solutions, returns to the home country to grapple with life.

As in the case of Lawrence, Forster's travels in different countries were a way of knowing gradually where the roots of his true self lay. He had not travelled in as many lands as Lawrence had, but his explorations were not less intensive. Perhaps his motivation was not as strong as Lawrence's, who was something of a forced exile. But then the credit is all the more Forster's, since the task of getting to know the world and himself was self-imposed.

The first novel *Where Angels Fear To Tread* records the writer's flight from late Victorian and Sawstonian moral values. Philip Herriton, Forster's counterpart in the novel, is no longer the callow, cramped adolescent of the short-story period, but is a mature young man, called upon to take the full responsibilities of life on himself. The Italian background against which he is called to task, is a combination of the Renaissance past and the living present. Here in Italy, one traces the roots of present living to the magnificent Renaissance tradition. Italy shows up the inefficacy of Philip, for which Sawston and Cambridge training are held responsible. But, however drawn they feel to Italy, neither Philip nor Caroline feel any urge to settle down in the land they had so much admired and respected. They return to Sawston, as their mission lies there, after having received a spiritual blood transfusion. For them Lilia's fate is a pointer; her experiments with Italy had been the worst sort of blunder.

Forster's other Italian novel, *A Room With A View*, once again deals with English middle-class visitors in Florence, a city rich with the sense of the past. In a way, this book is a sequel to the earlier novel, as the second half shows the effect of Italy on characters when they return to England. It is a development which had been only hinted at in the first novel. The English characters are in Italy mainly as spectators, and do not get entangled with any Italian as Philip and Caroline had been in the other novel. They do get involved with each other, but not until they have gone back to the old country, do they take part in the greater drama of life, that is marriage, procreation and the continuity of the race. The role is not given to ineffectual spectators like Philip and Cecil Vyse, who are self-portraits of Forster himself, but to young men like George Emmerson, endowed with radiant

health, whose Italian parallel had been Gino (*Where Angels Fear To Tread*). So Italy once again is a lesson in wise living. The two books are also a record of the fine tribute Forster has paid to the best in civilization, in any country. A civilization is living and vital when it is deeply entrenched in the past, in history. The Italy we see in the two novels, is a perpetuation of the Renaissance tradition. Forster seeks the same kind of profitable living for an Englishman in his own country that he had found in Italy. That is why his heroes return to England, to complete their mission in life. An exile is no solution, and Italy, at best, can provide an instance only. ✓

Travel, in fact, comes in for implicit censure in *Howards End*. The Schlegel sisters have travelled extensively, both within and outside the country. This and their Bloomsbury-Cambridge sophistication incapacitate them for any serious endeavour. The weakest in the family, Tibby, is another Philip Herriton. Or rather, Tibby is what Philip would have degenerated into, had it not been for Caroline and Italy. Constant drifting does not encourage one to take root anywhere and build up a stable culture. In both *The Longest Journey* and *Howards End*, Forster finds a remedy in the English countryside which is old and traditional. Regeneration will come through such healthy specimens as Stephen or Helen's and Leonard's child, sprung as they have from the soil, and as a result of the best stock in the nation. English civilization can thrive only if this race continues. ✓

Curiously enough, it is not Forster's last novel which asserts his faith in life and humanity. It is *Howards End* which completely sums up Forster's humanistic affirmation, and in this respect, is parallel to Lawrence's last story, *The Man Who Died*. *A Passage To India* is rather a problematical novel. Since we have started with noting points of agreement between Forster and Lawrence, we should mark that Forster is following his previous theme in this novel also, which had been Lawrence's theme as well. Difficulties are encountered by an alien from England, trying to understand a strange land and its culture. Forster shows that the hurdles are insurmountable. Forster approaches India via three routes, Moslem, Hindu and prehistoric. The Moslem way of life is the most agreeable to a Westerner, since it distinguishes and

discriminates. (Forster in *The Hill Of Devi* had confessed that he had found Islam more compatible than Hinduism.) Brought up on the rational philosophy of the West, life has no meaning for Adela, or Fielding, unless it is systematized. The mind which systematizes and harmonizes, is the rational intelligent mind, and this has been responsible for the major achievements of humanity. On this common ground, then, do the Moslem Aziz and the Englishman Fielding try to meet and build a bridge of understanding. But they have not foreseen the extrarational forces in life, symbolized by the prehistoric caves in India. The goblins evoked by Beethoven's fifth symphony in *Howards End* reappear menacingly in this novel, and this time they are not to be banished that easily. The 'Ou-boum' sound reverberating through the ancient caves shattered the very basis of a rational existence for English people, destroyed the meeting ground of the English and the Moslems. Panic, chaos and emptiness which momentarily had seized Helen, now proceed from the caves and fill the whole universe, not to be dispelled ever. *A Passage to India* reflects, then, a frustrating, pessimistic view of life. The novelist's pat solution to problems, superb humanism displayed in the previous books and *Howards End* particularly, are blocked off by the shadows of a dark, cosmic universe. Forster cannot shake off the gloom which settles on his soul. The stress of his theme—a cosmic theme, not a humanistic one, is too great for the novel; of course, it has made this one novel what it is, a masterpiece.

Forster, by placing the symbol of the temple third in the book, and after the cave section, seems to point out how Hinduism, coming even before the Muslims and the Englishmen, had contended with the primeval, elemental forces. This was by not drawing sharp, clear-cut distinctions between contrary objects and emotions, between good and evil, a wasp and the universe. Distinctions and divisions are made by man. The Hindu view of life embraces all, the wasp and the universe, and is a cosmic view. But it is not acceptable to Aziz and Fielding.]

The novels of both Lawrence and Forster were written around the first World War period. The destructive forces unleashed by the war, consequently, feature prominently in

their novels. These are, in fact, identified as the life-defeating cults, antagonistic to civilization. The political ideologies advocated by Kangaroo, Jack Callcott, Don Ramon and Cipriano are neofascist, semi-religious cults. They reject the grace and love of humanism. Even as early as 1924, in *A Letter From Germany* (*New Statesman And Nation*, Oct. 13, 1934), Lawrence shows remarkable sensitiveness to trends in Germany, at a time when Nazism, as we know it, hardly existed. Lawrence senses Germany's swing 'away from the polarity of civilized Christian Europe', and feels 'the ancient spirit of prehistoric Germany coming back, at the end of history.' How ridiculous seem the charges levelled against him (that he was a precursor of Fascism in Europe) when we consider this document. Further, we see how successfully Lawrence contended with primitive cults in other continents, and countered them with rejuvenated traditional religion. His last book, thus, is a fine assertion of all that is best in life and a record of his personal triumph as a serious writer.

As we have already mentioned, among Forster's novels, the one which exactly corresponds with *The Man Who Died*, in being a humanistic affirmation, is *Howards End*. Written in 1910, not long before the first World War, the book reflects the fear lurking in the corner of the writer's mind; but the goblins are banished and the book ends on a note of bright optimism. Fourteen years intervened between the publication of *Howards End* and that of the last novel, and much water had flown under the bridge. Forster and Lawrence were alike in sensing the dangers emanating from a resurgent Germany. Can we not relate these fears to the cold feelings of panic and emptiness in the cave? (*A Passage to India*). However, Forster has had a cosmic vision (or nightmare?) of life in the cave, and refuses to proceed further. He had almost been swallowed up in the darkness. The novel shows the stress of a heavy gloom. Under such circumstances, Forster, to save a humanistic cause, feels a more propagandist manner of writing is needed. So *A Passage to India* remains his last novel, his last humanistic affirmation in the novel form.

# A READING OF *MRS DALLOWAY*

BY M. L. RAINA

IN the early novels of Virginia Woolf there is no significant experiment in technique. From *Jacob's Room* onwards her attitude to fiction shifts. She sees characters not in relation to one another but to an existential reality. In a significant statement in *A Room of One's Own* she says, 'we go alone and that our relation is to the world of reality and not only to the world of men and women.'<sup>1</sup> This statement is relevant in our attempts to study her later themes and methods. Her later method is characterized by her total refusal to explicate in discursive terms and by the increasing use of symbolism as an integral structural device. She called this method 'crepuscular' in her Diary entry for 26 January, 1920.<sup>2</sup> The idea was to suppress all clues to the meaning of her symbols and let the words and metaphors themselves create a texture of meanings. The success of *Mrs Dalloway* as a work of art is largely due to its elaborate symbolic structure and a wide suggestibility of metaphoric design. Not only is the main development of the novel contingent upon a dichotomy between two existential concerns of life and death, but most of the scenes themselves revolve round this dichotomy. My purpose in this paper is to attempt an analysis of the way in which the novel successfully dramatizes a basic paradox between one's desire for life and the frustration of this desire by actual reality.

## II

Neither the early manuscripts of the novel nor the sketch *Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street* shows any tangible involvement in existential concerns. Nor is there evidence of any pre-conceived pattern into which Mrs Dalloway's reveries are cast.<sup>3</sup> The Ms. drafts of the novel in the British Museum throw light on the working methods of Virginia Woolf, particularly regarding the subordination of the thematic elements to the metaphoric pattern of words. In the first

of the three manuscript Notebooks at the B. M. we see the novel being written in the form of independent scenes apparently unrelated to any structural device. In the subsequent revisions the actual linking up of scenes takes place. Beginning in a matter-of-fact manner in the first version, the scenes are polished and refined until their significance is made dependent on symbolic links. Often Virginia Woolf revises in the process of writing itself.<sup>4</sup> The first drafts are descriptive, flat and clear. The revisions are tighter and far more spatially organised, the particular scenes telescoped into one another through a subtle and sophisticated interplay on the metaphors of life and death. The first draft is more specifically laden with value judgement. The revised version is generalised and impersonal and value judgements are embedded in a variety of shifting contexts provided by the paradoxical juxtaposition of the life-and-death theme.

The sketch, *Mrs Dalloway in Bond Street*, too begins in a straight-forward way—'Mrs Dalloway said she would buy the gloves herself'—and records Clarissa's impressions of one summer morning. There is not much of that 'tunnelling process' that gives the novel its peculiar distinctiveness. The sketch is an investigation into what Virginia Woolf was later to call the 'party consciousness', 'the frock consciousness'.<sup>5</sup> By this she meant 'an envelope which connects (people) and protects them from others.' Clarissa appears as a typical society hostess and her parties are an oblique comment on her shallowness and superficiality. Virginia Woolf, in spite of being herself a vivacious party-giver, expressed her dislike of the 'party consciousness' in a Diary entry for 4 June, 1923.<sup>6</sup> Here she records her reaction to a party by Lady Ottoline Morrell. What disgusts her is the hostess's attempt to project 'her own picture of herself'. Later in the novel this will form a basic element in Clarissa's social personality. Eager to please, lacking centrality, egoistic—such is Clarissa on the surface. Perhaps it is her social aspect that has led a recent critic of the novel to the conclusion that a 'comedy of social illusions' is the novel's primary merit.<sup>7</sup> He regards the novel as a failure because it attempts to 'resolve the social comedy into something of a tragedy of the soul'. James Haffley is nearer the point when he says that the novel is 'about life

and reality or time; both character and circumstance are means to the end of expressing a unified vision of experience.<sup>8</sup> Although he recognises the existential nature of the theme, he does not develop its precise implications. He sees the book rather as a Proustian work in its conception of unity. Here it is instructive to examine the Diary entries of this period for a clue to the novel's intentions. 'I adumbrate here a study of insanity and suicide; the world seen by the sane and the insane side by side.' 'I want to give life and death, sanity and insanity...criticise the social system, and show it at work, at its most intense.'<sup>9</sup> These entries suggest that Virginia Woolf was not interested in presenting a 'typical' society woman, but in investigating certain fundamental truths about the confrontation of the individual with the existential realities of time, death and personality. True, there is enough in the novel by way of social criticism. Hugh Whitbread, Lady Burton, Miss Kilman and the Bradshaws are a representative cross-section of the middle-class society so scathingly criticised and caricatured. All of them are given over to sham and superficiality. But they are relevant only as a comprehensive image of Clarissa's 'life'. Against this is presented another reality—death—whose existence as a vital factor is perceived by Clarissa only after Septimus's actual death. The tension is between these two symbolic opposites and is worked out through various complicated situations. For instance, Clarissa's life is a form of death. 'She could see what she lacked. It was not beauty; it was not mind. It was something central which permeated' (*Mrs D.*, p. 36). Similarly, Septimus's death is a symbolic assertion of life. Clarissa's party is a gesture of self-preservation against death, a ritual act, a creative gesture like art. All these meanings are implicit in the book and emerge as the transition is made from one centre of consciousness to another. Virginia Woolf does not see the opposition of life and death as a simple process. The symbolic opposites have been given a wider resonance within the novel as will be clear from the present discussion. Yet the basic design is simple enough to make this novel a mature work of art. Far from there being a discrepancy between the analytical and the lyrical modes, as alleged by some critics, there is a correct balance between

them, a balance later to be disturbed by the insistent demands of 'vision' over 'life itself'. The fact that *To The Lighthouse* and *The Waves* appear somewhat debilitated by the absence of solid life can be explained by the author's subordination of everything to symbolic determination. In *Mrs Dalloway*, on the other hand, Virginia Woolf does not abandon realism altogether and that is the principal strength of the novel. There is no overt attempt to create a purely aesthetic structure but to apprehend it through varying the contexts of the life-and-death themes. The novel is saved from abstraction by the lived experience of death and suffering in the principal characters. Besides, the constant seethe and flow of the London traffic as well as the minor idiosyncrasies of its various characters give to *Mrs Dalloway* a solidity lacking in *To the Lighthouse*.<sup>10</sup> Judging from the novel's themes Virginia Woolf's position appears nearer to that of Albert Camus and others of his way of thinking. Like Camus Virginia Woolf is a sceptic and, like his, her novels deal with modern sensibility, which thrives not on moral but 'on metaphysical problems'.<sup>11</sup> Clarissa Dalloway in the course of her reflections hits upon some crucial thematic points:

What she loved was this, here, now, in front of her; the fat lady in the cab. Did it matter then, she asked herself, walking towards Bond Street, did it matter that she must inevitably cease completely; all this must go on without her; did she resent it; or did it not become consoling to believe that death ended absolutely? (p. 11)

All the same, that one day should follow another; Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, Saturday; that one should wake up in the morning; see the sky; walk in the park;...After that, how unbelievable death was!—that it must end; and no one in the whole world would know how she had loved it all; how, every instant... (p. 135)

In the course of these reflections we watch Clarissa's transition from a sensuous apprehension of life to the realisation of death as an absolute certainty. Her development is the

development of her consciousness and leads to her freedom from a too insistent self. Camus characterizes such consciousness in these words:

Rising, tram, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, . . . according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. . . . Weariness comes at the end of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. . . . At the end of the awakening comes, in time, the consequence: suicide or recovery.<sup>12</sup>

Clarissa's outward life is nothing but a repetition of dull routine. Her progress is towards the truth which she faces in opposition to desire, sensuousness and pleasure. By accepting death at the end of the book Clarissa has a true insight into the reality of her self. The dichotomy between her intense concern for the sensuous life and the recognition of death is not only a part of her consciousness but extends to her actual relationship with her 'double', Septimus Warren Smith. The latter is the concrete embodiment of the death theme. This relationship is of crucial importance at this point in our discussion. In the novel it is stressed indirectly. The symbolism of the window and the stair brings them together. On the level of the narrative both are related to the theme of tyranny, as represented by Holmes and Bradshaw. The one belongs to the class of the tyrants and the other is a victim. Both face death as an existential reality, the one as a recognition and the other as a release. Neither Clarissa nor Septimus is a character in the usual sense. They are character parts or 'ideas' as Virginia Woolf would call them. Which means that Septimus-Clarissa is one composite personality. With this association of Septimus and Clarissa established, one can explain the symbolism of life and death more clearly. The Clarissa-Septimus theme may be regarded as illustrative of what Raymond Williams, echoing Camus, calls the incompatibility 'between the intensity of physical life and the certainty of death'.<sup>13</sup> Camus himself stresses the divorce between 'the mind that desires

and the world that disappoints'.<sup>14</sup> Since Clarissa regards Septimus's suicide as her own disgrace (p. 203), one can assume that the Septimus theme is the culmination of Clarissa's intense preoccupation with life as she understood it. Her attempts to fix the present moment are what Camus would regard as the typical 'absurdist' position. 'The present and the succession of presents before a constantly conscious soul is the ideal of the absurd man.... Having started from the anguished awareness of the inhuman, the meditation on the absurd returns at the end of its itinerary to the very heart of the passionate flames of human revolt'.<sup>15</sup> There are several visionary moments or 'epiphanies' which reveal the 'absurdity' of Clarissa's position. But between these moments she lives intensely, fully:

And then, opening her eyes, how fresh, like frilled linen clean from a laundry laid in wicker trays, the roses looked; and dark and prim the red carnations, holding their heads up...and girls in muslin frocks came out to pick sweet peas and roses after the superb summer's day, with its almost blue-black sky, its delphiniums, its carnations, its arum lilies, was over; and it was the moment between six and seven when every flower glows...and how she loved the grey white moths spinning in and out, over the cherry pie, over the evening prim-roses! (pp. 15-16).

It was her life, and, bending her head over the hall table, she bowed beneath the influence, felt blessed and purified, saying to herself, as she took the pad with the telephone message on it, how moments like this are buds on the tree of life, flowers of darkness they are, she thought (as if some lovely rose had blossomed for her life only); (p. 33).

Passages like these express Clarissa's zest for living and often the flower imagery with its connotation of freshness and youth is made suggestive of this. In this way the imagery functions not as mere decoration but as an embodiment of the character's thought and feeling.

The metaphoric basis of Clarissa's vivacity is laid in the beginning of the book. Her absorption in life is seen in the nature of a 'plunge'. Her immersion in the London traffic is characterised as 'What a lark! What a plunge' (p. 5). As Reuben Brower has vividly shown, through this metaphor Clarissa's experience is formulated and presented.<sup>16</sup> This metaphor reveals the true character of Clarissa's experience as of a carefree abandon in the pleasures of the moment. Thus she is shown 'slicing' through everything (p. 10). Her attempts to seize the receding life has the abruptness of an adventure (pp. 41-42). Even in the party scene she has the consciousness of herself as an adventurer: 'Why seek pinnacles and stand drenched in fire?... Better anything, better brandish one's torch and *hurl* it to earth than taper and dwindle away like some Ellie Henderson' (p. 184. My italics). To her Septimus's death is also a fling into the unknown. 'But he had flung it away', she thinks, and 'They went on living' (p. 202). In this admission is a sense of regret at the chances of true life wasted away. This is a crucial statement for it qualifies the metaphor of life and shows it to be a form of 'death'.

The other variations on the metaphor of 'life' can be seen in the minor characters of the novel. Peter Walsh illustrates one aspect. He enjoys life but not with as much intensity as Clarissa. There is nothing of Clarissa's keen sensibility in his attitude to life. He lacks her consciousness of time as a vital factor. The London scene just sweeps him by. 'He had escaped! was utterly free—as happens in the downfall of habit when the mind, like an unguarded flame, bows and bends and seems about to blow from its holding. I haven't felt so young for years! thought Peter, escaping (only of course for an hour or so) from being precisely what he was.' (pp. 58-59). Peter's hold on life does not go to the extent of recognising death as an existential reality. He remains undeveloped in the sense that there is no progression in his consciousness as there is in Clarissa's. Clarissa's developing consciousness has tragic implications as is revealed in the party scene when she discovers in the form of her life an inner lack, a hollowness (p. 192). Peter's life is a form of 'non-being' because it is not aware of itself.

The lesser characters other than Peter Walsh also provide

variation on the 'life' metaphor. Hugh Whitbread, Lady Burton, Elizabeth Dalloway ('a hyacinth sheathed in glossy green, with buds just tinted', p. 135), Doris Kilman ('a wheel without a tyre...jolted by every pebble', pp. 143-44)—all these are 'living' in one sense or another. Whitbread lives for empty pomp, Kilman for her causes. Yet all of them are incomplete. They lack the awareness of their being. Apart from these, there is a vast unknown mass of people seething and surging in the streets of London who live unnoticed. The nurse in the park and the people looking at the aeroplane constitute that ceaseless movement which is also a form of life. In thus varying the shades and contexts on the abstract term 'life' Virginia Woolf creates different possibilities for the symbolic rendering of her theme. Not only does she present various forms and intensities of living, she also sees the other aspect—death—in the form of a composite metaphor. Clarissa's life is described by Peter Walsh as the death of the soul. Her true life begins only when she 'dies' to her former self after her ritual identification with Septimus. Her conception of her party as an 'offering' is relevant here. Ritualistically, an offering is associated with sacrifice. Clarissa is sacrificing her camouflage in order to realise herself fully.

It is Septimus, however, who embodies the death theme in all its symbolic significance. There are two aspects to him. He is dead in the sense that he has been deprived of all those faculties that make for meaningful living. In this sense the death theme extends to Holmes and Bradshaw who are for him the actual instruments of death. Against their death-dealing function Septimus's suicide is a gesture of defiance. Then there is his actual death which also has a symbolic significance. Septimus is the obverse of the picture symbolised by Clarissa. His suicide is a philosophical problem as Camus understands it. It is the inevitable outcome of the dichotomy between man's desire for life's intensities and the irrational negation of this desire by reality. Camus writes:

A world that can be explained even with bad reason is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger.<sup>17</sup>

Virginia Woolf herself experienced moments of depression in which she seemed to lose hold of things. She records several of these in her diary:

...I...am...very little persuaded of the truth of anything—what I say, what people say—always to follow, blindly, instinctively with a sense of leaping over a precipice....

Why is there not a discovery in life? Something one can lay hands on and say 'This is it'?<sup>18</sup>

Clarissa in her moments of intense enjoyment of the sensuous is haunted by a feeling of something awful that would interrupt (p. 5). The Shakespearean refrain 'fear no more' acts as an oblique comment on Clarissa's state of mind and speaks of fear as an inevitable concomitant to the life of pleasurable intensity. The presence of Peter Walsh brings mixed feelings of joy and horror. She, like Bernard in *The Waves*, is desperately catching the 'falling drop' of life. Time itself becomes an element in the general process of dissolution. The presence of clocks is a constant reminder of the main dichotomy in the theme:

It was her heart, he remembered; and the sudden loudness of the final stroke tolled for death that surprised in the midst of life, Clarissa falling where she stood, in her drawing-room. No! No! he cried. She is not dead! I am not old, he cried.... (p. 56)

Before this time's indifference to individual desire is brought out by the ominous strokes of Big Ben (pp. 53-54). Septimus, too, has successive periods of joy and 'sudden thunderclaps of fear' (p. 96). He is dead in all but name. His ravings lack the order and clarity of rational apprehension. His life is 'awful' in the sense of being fear-ridden and oppressed. The war crippled him irrevocably and now Holmes and Bradshaw are draining the last ounce of whatever is left in him of an animate being. Yet he is alive in the sense in which neurotics are alive. We shall see this aspect more clearly

when we attempt further elucidations of the symbolic gesture of Clarissa's party and Septimus's suicide.

Clarissa regards her party as a creative act, an act of communication (pp. 134-5). We know that she is desperately trying to reach out to the world around her. The symbolic implications of the party as a creative gesture bear upon the processes of creative art. That is to say that Virginia Woolf is making a comment on the psychology of the artistic act. But this particular gesture is empty because she fails to comply with the basic fact of artistic creation: the effacement of personality in the act of art. All that it enables her to achieve is a realisation of her inner vacuity. 'These semblances, these triumphs... had a hollowness; at arm's length they were, not in the heart' (p. 192). Far from communicating anything valuable, this party is Clarissa's dodge against reality. [As Camus says, quoting Nietzsche, 'We have art in order not to die of the truth.'<sup>19</sup> This is appropriate comment on Clarissa's ritual offering, her gesture of art. The party scene itself is a caricature. The upper classes are shown up with a scathing irony that remind one of *The Voyage Out*. There is no attempt to conceal the fact that the party, far from being creative in any meaningful sense, is actually a pose (witness Clarissa's impatient wait for the Prime Minister). The party as a creative gesture does not convince. No new analogies are created, no new harmonies glimpsed. What makes Mrs Ramsay's famous dinner in *To The Lighthouse* a creative gesture is the peculiar harmony and stability she realises through it. The question raised by Clarissa's party as a creative gesture is: to what extent is art an evasion of reality? This book does not provide an answer to this question, but *To The Lighthouse* does. In the creative turmoil of Lily Briscoe's painting the relation of art to life acquires a new edge and meaning. Septimus's suicide is also symbolic of a creative act,<sup>20</sup> but in a different sense. The neurotic ravings of this shell-shocked man may be regarded as the crude material out of which the artist moulds his art-symbol. In this sense Septimus's role is that of an artist and his death is the culmination of his symbolic explorations of reality. If art is an attempt to communicate, then Septimus's death succeeds in communicating meaning to Clarissa:

Death was an attempt to communicate, people feeling the impossibility of reaching the centre which, mystically, evaded them; closeness drew apart; rapture faded; one was alone. There was an embrace in death. (p. 202)

It is this knowledge that Clarissa has acquired when she faces Peter and Sally at the end of the book (it is worth noting that the words 'There she was' come as an evident surprise, for they see a new Clarissa now). Septimus's ravings may be regarded as those elements that enter the act of creation and determine its character. His suicide, on this analogy, is an artistic expression from which the personality of the artist has escaped. There is a suggestion that the work of art is ultimately an escape from personality, a familiar enough point of view today. This suggestion is derived from another angle too, i.e. from Clarissa's fear of losing her personality. She visualises herself as being a prisoner (p. 211) and her sense of loneliness is the result of an insistent concern for her personality. We are better able now to see why her party fails as a creative act. Simply because she sought herself too much in it. Septimus throws his life away, reflects Clarissa, and all she had done was to throw a shilling into the Serpentine. Septimus is free and she a prisoner of her self. The conclusion to which we are led is that art is a release from one's neurotic self, again a familiar enough point of view today. Both Septimus and Rhoda in *The Waves* create their dream worlds away from everyday reality. This accounts for their total identification with the world around them, an identification which is in the nature of a 'negative capability'. Hence they are artists while Clarissa remains immured in her own cocoon. ✓ In *Mrs Dalloway* the problem of artistic creation is touched upon in relation to the fundamental concern of the novel with the existential realities of life and death. The variation in their contexts creates a fusion of the concrete with the generalised concept. The two polarities are presented metaphorically and associated with a rich cluster of imagery from nature. Because of the existential nature of the theme the characters acquire significance far beyond their possibilities as fictional characters in a realistic novel. There is a vague, suggestive aura of imprecision about them. Yet this

does not lead the author to didacticism or abstraction of any kind. We are made receptive to their roles as symbolic carriers of a multi-levelled meaning as we see them face to face with the existential concerns. Although Clarissa's gesture is a manifestation of her zest for living, its deeper connotations show a deadliness about it. Similarly, Septimus's gesture is motivated by a fear of living and yet is an assertion of life. It is the metaphoric design of the novel that holds this paradox in a vital and flexible state of tension.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Pp. 171-72. Quotations from Virginia Woolf's works are taken from the Hogarth Edition.
2. *Diary*, p. 23.
3. The Ms. drafts (British Museum Add. Manuscript Nos. 51044-51046) are in the form of three Notebooks. The first includes early versions of independent scenes that were later to be incorporated in the finished text. The second and the third Notebooks are mainly revisions of the scenes already sketched and also include extra material which went into the book. For reasons of copyright no extensive quotation from the drafts will be included here.
4. In the Ms. No. 51044 (Folio pp. 10-13) two versions of Peter Walsh's reflections on Clarissa following his first meeting with her that morning follow one another in quick succession. It is instructive to see these revisions in the light of her diary entries of this period (June, 1923) where she outlines her new techniques.
5. *Diary*, p. 75.
6. *Ibid.* pp. 55-56. John Lehmann records Virginia Woolf's vivacity at her own house parties. See *The Whispering Gallery, Autobiography, I*, London, 1955, p. 184. In a private letter to me Paul Farr of Chicago University suggests that Clarissa is partly modelled on Lady Ottoline Morrell.
7. A. D. Moody, *Virginia Woolf*, London, 1963, pp. 18-28.
8. *The Glass Roof*, University of California Press, 1954, pp. 61-62. For other recent interpretations see Jean Guiget, *Virginia Woolf and Her Works*, London, 1965, pp. 227-47; N. C. Thakur, *The Symbolism of Virginia Woolf*, London, 1965; Blanche H. Gelfant, 'Love and Conversion in Mrs Dalloway', *Criticism*, Vol. VIII (1966), pp. 229-45.
9. *Diary*, pp. 52, 57.
10. For a statement of Virginia Woolf's aesthetic of the novel, see the essay on Montaigne (*The Common Reader*, First Series, pp. 84-97); 'Life and the Novelist' (*Granite and Rainbow*, London, 1958, pp. 41-47); and 'Philosophy in Fiction' (*Contemporary Writers*, London, 1965, pp. 67-70).

11. Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, tr. Justin O'Brien, London, 1955, p. 85.
12. Ibid. p. 18.
13. Raymond Williams, 'Tragic Despair and Revolt', *The Critical Quarterly*, Vol. 5 (1963), p. 104.
14. Camus, op. cit. p. 44.
15. Ibid. p. 55.
16. See his essay on the novel 'Something Central Which Permeated', *The Fields of Light*, New York, 1951, pp. 123-37. Although there are quite a few similarities in our approach to the novel, my interpretation is derived from different assumptions altogether, as will be clear from the present discussion.
17. Camus, op. cit. p. 13.
18. *Diary*, pp. 137, 86. Leonard Woolf has described his wife's neurotic states in a way that suggests some resemblance between her and Septimus. See his *Beginning Again*, London, 1964.
19. Camus, op. cit. p. 77.
20. In an early version of this scene the writer makes explicit comment on the symbolic value of Septimus's death. Words such as 'offering', 'altar' are made part of Septimus's meditations before his actual plunge into death. This links up the creative gesture of Septimus with that of Clarissa. The version referred to is on Folio Pages 21-2 of the manuscript, No. 51046.

## EPIPHANIES IN A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN

BY I. N. AGRAWAL

ACCORDING to Aquinas, three things are needed for beauty: wholeness, harmony and radiance. These correspond to the necessary phases of artistic apprehension. Stephen in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* defines the last phase in the following words:

The radiance of which he speaks is the scholastic *quidditas*, the *whatness* of a thing. This supreme quality is felt by the artist when the esthetic image is first conceived in his imagination. The mind in that mysterious instant Shelley likened beautifully to a fading coal. The instant wherein that supreme quality of beauty, the clear radiance of the esthetic image, is apprehended luminously by the mind which has been arrested by its wholeness and fascinated by its harmony is the luminous stasis of esthetic pleasure, a spiritual state very like to that cardiac condition which the Italian physiologist Luigi Galvani, using a phrase almost as beautiful as Shelley's, called the enchantment of the heart.<sup>1</sup>

In an earlier draft of *A Portrait* called *Stephen Hero*, Joyce had used the term epiphany for radiance.

Joyce's concept of epiphany is embodied in his novel *A Portrait* and it throws light on its theme and structure. The type of the novel and its structure have both been determined by the theme which has been selected by the author.

About the theme, Harry Levin says, 'The theme of the novel is the formation of character; its habitual pattern is that of apprenticeship or education; and it falls into that category which has been distinguished, by German criticism at least as the *Bildungsroman*. The novel of development, when it confines itself to the professional sphere of the novelist, becomes a novel of the artist, a *Künstlerroman*. Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, Stendhal's *Vie d'Henri Brulard*, and Butler's *Way of*

*All Flesh* amply suggest the potentialities of the form.<sup>2</sup> William York Tindall is more succinct while presenting the problem of theme: 'In *A Portrait* there are ideas, both moral and social, and there is narrative movement, but what seems central here is character. Since *A Portrait* is portrait indeed, character takes the place of idea or movement, conducting, as visitor, the concert of elements. Before looking at structure, parallel, image, and other subsidiaries, we must look at character again—at character as theme.<sup>3</sup> The theme of *A Portrait*, therefore, is the character of Stephen Dedalus who is a sensitive youth shaped by his surroundings, feeling their pressure, and rebellng against them to become himself. The action is centred upon developing him. The structure is therefore determined by the making of the exile. Stephen, who is shaped by home, religion and country, rebels against them and escapes from them and exiles himself. Each chapter of *A Portrait*, therefore, reveals a stage of structural development. Hence the theme and structure are interrelated. Actually structure is the unfolding of the theme which here is character.

The theory of epiphany furnished Joyce with a technique of characterization which evolved generally in the 'lyrical, epical-dramatic' progression which Stephen described: from the first person to the third, from the personal to the impersonal, from the kinetic to the static. It is a technique in which integritas and consonantia are always necessary to claritas, and claritas itself comes more and more to reside in quidditas, the soul, the essential identifying quality of the thing, than in the mystic, emotional exhilaration on the part of someone who looks on. Claritas is quidditas is the key the theory itself gives us. Thematically, the evolution of the artistic soul is represented as a three-way struggle toward fulfilment of sexual, religious, and aesthetic desires. The sexual and religious desires initially form a nexus and later separate from each other. This progression may be sketched roughly as the initiation of Stephen as the knight of these female figures: Eileen Vance, the Blessed Virgin Mary, Emma Clery, Mercedes, the prostitute, and the girl on the beach. The first of these movements reaches the crest at the end of Chapter 2 in the arms of the prostitute; the second part reaches its crest at the end of Chapter 4 with the static joy at the sight

of the girl on the beach. Ultimately Stephen sees both the sexual and the religious desires as kinetic, those things toward which appetite tends to seek fulfilment outside itself. The beautiful, toward which his aesthetic sense yearns, is that the perception of which pleases. The satisfaction of the aesthetic appetite is static; it is something that satisfies or pleases in itself; it does not move the individual to the acquisition of something or someone outside the self, be it a prostitute's body or eternal salvation. Stephen moves to the aesthetic stage, however, only after he has passed through, sometimes alternately and sometimes simultaneously, the other two stages, and the wave structure of the book, trough and crest, defeat and triumph, gives a pattern to this struggle. The kinesis of physical and spiritual entanglement in the first four chapters is transmuted to the stasis of the perception of the 'spirit of mortal beauty' in the fifth chapter.

In Stephen's discussion of *quidditas*, the necessary condition to radiance is a perfection of formal organization, or *consonantia* itself; 'You apprehend it as complex, multiple, divisible, separable, made up of its parts, the result of its parts and their sum, harmonious. That is *consonantia*.' (*A Portrait*, 212). Applied to characterization, it means the division of a whole character into its separate parts, analogous to the 'analysis of apprehension'. And when a character is broken down into its parts and resynthesized, the new integrating agent which assists the synthesis of immediate perception and serves both *consonantia* and *claritas* is language itself. One is most familiar with the plays on etymology and multiple accretions of meaning in his later work, but at first he achieved his effects through all the poet's or orator's devices of cadence and balanced period, metaphor and apostrophe, verbal connotation and subtle variation of sound. This is apparent in two examples of *quidditas* where we are given auditory impressions rather than adequate visual description: 'frail fresh innocent voices' (*A Portrait*, 163) and 'a first noiseless sundering of their lives' (*A Portrait*, 165). Epiphany is, in fact, one purpose of Joyce's amazing virtuosity of language which grows as much between *Stephen Hero* and the *Portrait* as between the *Portrait* and *Ulysses* or *Ulysses* and *Finnegan's Wake*. It is an attempt to create a literary substitute for the revela-

tions of religion; it is the vehicle of the radiant aesthetic experience itself, and at the same time it is intimately related to the plan of Joyce's work as a whole.

v-9. The epiphany is an image, sensuously apprehended and emotionally vibrant, which communicates instantaneously the meaning of experience. Minor epiphanies or what Irene Hendry Chayes calls 'individual quidditas'<sup>4</sup> mark all the stages of Stephen's understanding, as when the feel of Eileen's hand shows him what Tower of Ivory means: 'Eileen had long thin cool white hands too because she was a girl. They were like ivory; only soft. That was the meaning of Tower of Ivory but Protestants could not understand it and made fun of it. One day he stood beside her looking into the hotel grounds. A waiter was running up a trail of bunting on the flagstaff and a fox terrier was scampering to and fro on the sunny lawn. She had put her hand into his pocket where his hand was and he had felt how cool and thin and soft her hand was. She had said that pockets were funny things to have: and then all of a sudden she had broken away and had run laughing down the sloping curve of the path. Her fair hair had streamed out behind her like gold in the sun. Tower of Ivory. House of Gold. By thinking of things you could understand them'. (*A Portrait*, 42-43). Another minor epiphany arises when Stephen sees the word 'Foetus' carved on a school desk. It suddenly focuses for him in brute clarity his own monstrous way of life: 'It shocked him to find in the outer world a trace of what he had deemed till then a brutish and individual malady of his own mind. His recent monstrous reveries came thronging into his memory. They too had sprung up before him, suddenly and furiously, out of mere words'. (*A Portrait*, 90) ✓✓

The minor epiphanies reveal the character of other persons in the novel. The aesthetic image here may contain a revelation of a person's character, brief and fleeting, occurring by virtue of some physical trait in a person, as the way big Corrigan looked in the bath. In this kind of use, as revelation through one or two physical traits of the whole mass—formation of a personality, the epiphany is almost precisely duplicable in Dickens, as in the spectacle of Miss Havisham leaning on her crutch beside the rotten bridecake, or of Jagger's flourishing

of his white handkerchief and biting his great forefinger. The minor figures in *A Portrait* are reduced to something very like a Dickensian 'signature'—as Heron with his bird-beaked face and bird-name, Davin with his pleasant turns of speech and Lynch whose long slender flattened skull beneath the long pointed cap brought before Stephen's mind the image of a hooded reptile. There is yet another person, Mr Casey who is described as a person always smiling and tapping the gland of his neck.

Clothes are also important in creating individual quidditas for they are the true repositories of soul. When he comes upon his schoolmates swimming, Stephen thinks pityingly of their nakedness. Shuley without his deep unbuttoned collar and Ennis without his Norfolk coat with the flapless side-pockets appear to be very characterless to Stephen. This technique he uses elsewhere too. In *Stephen Hero*, he is first impressed by the prostitute's black straw hat, the outward and visible sign of her essence, and the clothes of the characters in Joyce's play *Exiles* are so important that they are not only described in the stage directions but are mentioned by the characters themselves, with a green velvet jacket playing a significant part in the action. Finally, in the nightgown episode of *Ulysses*, changes of costume are as frequent as in the charades in which Stephen takes part in Mr Daniel's house in *Stephen Hero* and the hallucinatory images of Bloom at successive stages of his past are dressed for their roles.

Epiphany may be a kind of 'still life' with which are associated deep and complex layers of experience and emotions. In the following passage, for instance, the sordidness of Stephen's home, the apprehensive and guilty image of the bath at Clongowes, and bestiality he associates with the bogholes of Ireland, are illuminated simultaneously by a jar of drippings on the table: 'He drained his third cup of watery tea to the dregs and set to chewing the crusts of fried bread that were scattered near him, staring into the dark pool of the jar. The yellow dripping had been scooped out like a boghole, and the pool under it brought back to his memory the dark turfcolored water of the bath at Clongowes' (*A Portrait*, 174).

Joyce uses still another technique in which *claritas*, a tiny,

perfunctory flash, is all but absorbed by quidditas. Through this we can trace out a virtual iconography of characters, like the systematic recurrence of emblems and attitudes among the figures in sacred art. This was probably intentional on the part of Joyce, who was curiously influenced by the medieval concepts and methods, probably more so than any other writer of our time, and whose preoccupation with symmetry and correspondence and the-microcosm-within-the-microcosm would have been worthy of Dante. There are indications in this novel of his attraction to religious iconography, which itself had a literary origin in the Middle Ages. During the period of sin, the adolescent Stephen still delights in the traditional symbols of Mary, and Saints and their emblems—St. Ignatius Loyola with his book, St. Francis Xavier indicating his chest, Lorenzo Ricca and his berretta—are noted with particular interest by Stephen the boy in the paintings at Clongowes. The emblematic quidditas is a technique of characterization that is present not only in *A Portrait* but is also to be found in all of Joyce's work.

✓ The major epiphanies in the book occur as the symbolic climaxes of the larger dialectical movements constituting each of the five chapters. Each of the chapters begins with a multitude of warring impressions, and each develops toward an emotionally apprehended unity; each succeeding chapter liquidates the previous synthesis and subjects its elements to more adult scrutiny in a constantly enlarging field of perception, and develops toward its own synthesis and affirmation.

✓ These moments when a synthesis and an affirmation is reached is the epiphanic moment. Two examples of this symbolic climax may be given here below. The first occurs at the end of the second chapter when Stephen loses himself in the warm embrace of a prostitute: 'With a sudden movement she bowed his head and joined her lips to his and he read the meaning of her movements in her frank uplifted eyes. It was too much for him. He closed his eyes, surrendering himself to her, body and mind, conscious of nothing in the world but the dark pressure of her softly parting lips. They pressed upon his brain as upon his lips as though they were the vehicle of a vague speech; and between them he felt an unknown and timid pressure, darker than the swoon of sin,

softer than sound or colour.' (*A Portrait*, 101). The last lines of the fifth chapter also constitute epiphany: 'Welcome, O Life! I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.' (*A Portrait*, 252-53).

*A Portrait* is the portrayal of a man alone. Alienated and isolated from his home, religion and country, Stephen enjoys epiphanies of one kind or the other but he never sees himself completely: his trouble is failure to realize himself. He fails because he suffers from excessive self-love. The concept of epiphany enabled Joyce to present the portrait of a man who searched for lasting values, rebelled in order to realize them and yet failed to see himself or others through a defect in his sense of values.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (New York, 1964), p. 213.
2. *Joyce's Portrait: Criticisms and Critiques*, ed. Thomas E. Connolly (New York, 1962), p. 9.
3. William York Tindall, *A Reader's Guide to James Joyce* (New York, 1964), p. 55.
4. *James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism*, ed. Sean Givens (New York, 1963), p. 41.

## THEMATIC STRUCTURE IN *A FAREWELL TO ARMS*

BY M. K. NAIK

THAT the two themes of *A Farewell to Arms* are love and war is a commonplace of criticism. The mutual relation of the two themes in the novel does not however seem to have been understood and interpreted in terms of the structure given to the novel by Hemingway. This has naturally vitiated the current interpretation.

The standard interpretation of the thematic structure of *A Farewell to Arms* is that of Professor Philip Young.<sup>1</sup> According to him, in the novel the courses of the two themes 'run straight and exactly, though subtly, parallel... In his affair with the war Henry goes from desultory participation to serious action and a wound, and then through his recuperation in Milan to a retreat which leads to his desertion. His relationship with Catherine Barkley undergoes six precisely corresponding stages from a trifling sexual affair to actual love and her conception, and then through her confinement in the Alps to a trip to the hospital which leads to her death. By the end of Hemingway's novel... the two stories are as one, in the point... that life, both social and personal, is a struggle in which the Loser Takes Nothing, either.'<sup>2</sup>

Professor Young's interpretation, with its six stages in the development of the theme of war paralleled by six corresponding stages in the theme of love is extremely neat and well-ordered, besides having the arithmetically satisfying finality of the completed 'round dozen'. Doubts however begin to arise, when one turns from the critical study to the novel proper. Why, for instance, if Professor Young is right, should the author have divided his novel into five books? When one considers the fact that *A Farewell to Arms* is not an epic novel like *War and Peace* where a division into books is inevitable, but a comparatively shorter piece of fiction occupying less than 250 pages, its division into five books is seen to be of special thematic significance.

Each of the five books of the novel can be regarded as a

stage in the development of the two themes of love and war, each stage being set against the background of a reason which is seen to be symbolic of the particular stage in the progress of the theme and the action.

A critical analysis on these lines immediately shows Professor Young's contention that the structure of the novel is based upon a parallelism between love and war to be unacceptable and makes it clear that the basis of the structure is actually a sharp contrast between the two themes.

Thus, in *Book I* war is the more dominant of the two themes. By the end of the Book, the hero, Frederick Henry, is wounded in action, but significantly enough, not yet wounded in the heart. He has suffered the worst in war, but has not enjoyed the best in love, in this book. War as a serious engagement is contrasted here with love as a light-hearted flirtation.

The tables are turned in *Book II*. The significance of the war for the hero is now reduced to the terms of a successful knee-operation and an equally successful convalescence. In contrast with this, he is now seriously in love with Catherine. The convalescent soldier staging a quick recovery is also the doomed lover whose case is beyond all hope of betterment. By the end of the Book, the hero, now completely recovered, is going to the war again for which now he has no love lost; and this means that he is going away from Catherine, whom he now loves deeply, Love and War are thus again pitted against each other.

The setting for both these Books is summer, the season of Love and—also alas—of War.

In *Book III* the hero is thoroughly disillusioned with war, which now shows all its worst to him, and brings him to the brink of an ignoble death—death as a deserter. In this disillusionment, it is in his love for Catherine that he finds a haven of joy and peace.

In *Book IV* the exigencies of the war have turned Henry into a fugitive from justice, fleeing to safety. It is at this very time that love brings into his life a delightful idyll of companionship and contentment.

The setting for *Books III* and *IV* is that of the fall, Keats's season of 'mellow fruitfulness'—and quite aptly, for in terms of love, Henry has achieved this fruitfulness which is in

ironic contrast with his earlier fruitless participation in the war. ✓

The conflict between love and war is resolved only in the concluding Book, where, by a powerful stroke of tragic irony, Catherine dies in child-birth and Henry now bids farewell both to love and to war. ✓✓

The setting for this Book is, very appropriately, that of Winter, the season of many farewells.

It will be seen from the foregoing analysis, that in every Book of the novel, except the last, the two themes of love and war are sharply contrasted, until at the end, the contrast is ironically resolved into a savage marriage between them.

The source of both the plots—the war plot and the love plot is, as noted by Professor Young, the brief sketch called *A Very Short Story*, from *In Our Time*. This sketch outlines the love affair between a wounded American soldier and a nurse; but as Professor Young himself admits, 'Where the book ends powerfully with the death in child-birth of the woman, the story dribbled off in irony.'<sup>3</sup> For, here the girl jilts the soldier (and is jilted in turn by her new lover), and later on, he contracts gonorrhoea 'from a sales girl in a loop department store while riding in a taxicab through Lincoln Park.'<sup>4</sup> As for the war-theme, the sketch also records, in the prefatory passage at the beginning, Nick's disillusionment with the War and his declaration that he has 'made a separate peace.'<sup>5</sup>

This difference between the original story and the novel is highly significant. In the story, the hero is disillusioned with both love and war and the two themes run parallel there. But the result is that the total effect of the story is, as will generally be conceded, one of a disquieting cynicism. In the novel, however, the love-theme, in spite of its tragic ending, counterbalances the frustrating war-experience, and it is this that accounts for the rich human warmth and the powerful appeal of the book, which Hemingway justly described as his *Romeo and Juliet*.<sup>6</sup>

A comparison with *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, a novel on the same twin themes, supports this analysis, by presenting a similar thematic structure. In this novel also, love and war are contrasted with each other. Thus, Maria, shattered by the war is rendered whole through love. ✓ To Robert Jordan,

love brings ecstatic bliss in the midst of the cares and disappointments of his military task; and what is more, it gives him courage to face death calmly, while doing his duty. The idea of love as an antidote to war is central to the structure of both *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. The thematic structure of *A Farewell to Arms* must thus be interpreted in terms of a sharp contrast between love and war, not in those of a parallelism between them.

Lastly, this interpretation is also supported by the title of the novel, with its strong note of irony.<sup>7</sup> If the *Farewell to Arms* is a farewell to both love and war, in the first farewell, the hero has nothing to gain, and in the second, nothing to lose.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Professor Carlos Baker's interpretation of the theme in terms of 'the opposed concepts of Home and Not-Home' seems to me to be rather far-fetched; nor is it worked out in terms of a detailed analysis of the structure of the novel (Baker: *Hemingway, the Writer as Artist*, 1956, p. 101).
2. *Ernest Hemingway*, 1952, pp. 64-65.
3. Op. cit. p. 61.
4. *The First Forty-nine Stories*, p. 135.
5. Ibid. p. 133.
6. Quoted by Baker, *Hemingway*, p. 98.
7. This has been noted by Philip Young who points out that the allusion in the title to George Peele's poem 'is—as in the case of many of Hemingway's titles—slightly ironic, for Peele mourned the fact that he could not longer fight'. (p. 234).

## INTELLIGENCE OF HEART: WOMEN IN YEATS'S POETRY

BY DEVINDRA KOHLI

YEATS is undoubtedly 'the greatest poet of our time' and perhaps the greatest since Wordsworth in the English language. And thus he has been considered in many perspectives: as the last Romantic, as a symbolist, a visionary, a myth-maker, an escapist, a realist, an Irish revivalist committed to 'the idea of an aristocratic order', a Neo-Platonist and so on. No wonder, then, one of the latest additions (B. Rajan, *Yeats*, London, 1965) to 'the highly capitalised industry' of Yeats studies, though it begins encouragingly by viewing Yeats as 'essentially the poet of the human condition', should get entangled in the most irresistible temptation to focus the poet's growing personality as revealed in the kaleidoscopic framework of his poetry. But one wonders what Yeats, if he were alive, would have thought of the punctilious and analytical sophistication of his critics. It is one of the amusing ironies of scholarship, it seems to me, that a poet of Yeats's stature has been considered in almost all perspectives except the one which was after his own heart, viz. a poet with deep human attachments, one who combined public indignation with a warmly personal humility before a man, not men, a humility which worked in emotional alliance with his capacity to admire people who could 'mix courtesy and passion into one'.<sup>1</sup> A little time before he died, Yeats left a warning for his critics which appears to have received little recognition:

You that would judge me, do not judge alone  
This book or that, come to this hallowed place  
Where my friends' portraits hang and look thereon;  
Ireland's history, in their lineaments trace;  
Think where man's glory most begins and ends,  
And say my glory was I had such friends.

In one important sense, Yeats's poetry is an act of defining and re-defining himself in relation to his friends; and those

who stand out distinctively happen to be women: Maud Gonne, Lady Augusta Gregory, Iseult Gonne, Olivia Shakespeare and Dorothy Wellesley reminding us that perhaps there is nothing more enriching than a friendly association with a woman and that such an association need not always be physical. Yeats is, I think, a singular case of a poet whose personal life, despite his intense and recurrent apotheosis of passion in the physical and spiritual sense, remained paradoxically chaste. And it so happens that frustration, despair and tragedy are with Yeats the most vital constituents of passion—constituents which while outraging us still give our life the structure and significance of a grand drama. It is Yeats's full recognition of woman's vital role—vital even when it is destructive—in this drama that made him raise his 'song of thanks and praise':

May God be praised for woman  
That gives up all her mind,  
A man may find in no man  
A friendship of her kind.<sup>2</sup>

and dramatize his readiness in the event of a re-incarnation  
'to live it all again/And yet again...'

To find what once I had  
And know what once I have known,  
Until I am driven mad,  
Sleep driven from my bed,  
By tenderness and care,  
Pity, an aching head,  
Gnashing of teeth, despair;  
And all because of some one  
Perverse creature of chance,  
And live like Solomon  
That Sheba led a dance.<sup>3</sup>

Keats (who, of course, did not share Yeats's luck) and the Irish poet have more in common than has generally been recognized. They not only share some of the irresoluble human conflicts and concerns but also humility before the mystery

of life and experience—the insistence upon the recognition of the inevitability of ultimate ignorance or 'half-knowledge'—

Wine comes in at the mouth  
And love comes in at the eye;  
That's all we shall know for truth  
Before we grow old and die.<sup>4</sup>

as also before personal friends who had contributed something vital to the *making* of the particular poet's mind. Yeats's unfortunate depreciation of Keats's art

✓ His art is happy, but who knows his mind?  
I see a schoolboy when I think of him,  
With face and nose pressed to a sweet-shop window.<sup>5</sup>

however cannot obscure his implicit sharing of the latter's sentiment that 'I could not live without the love of my friends'.<sup>6</sup> True to his life-long abhorrence for abstractions and his humanistic preference for the *embodied* truth, Yeats has little to propound by way of any concept of friendship. In many of the poems which radiate the 'glory that I had such friends' he is invariably concerned with a person, a friend, an admirable personality. It is this concern with friends than any abstract notion of friendship that seems to affirm what in his possible ignorance Keats had already said: 'I would be subdued before my friends, and thank them for subduing me—but among Multitudes of Men—I have no feel of stooping, I hate the idea of humility to them' and what he himself implies when he says 'One doesn't mind the misunderstandings of the indifferent world but one is hurt by the misunderstandings of friends',<sup>7</sup> and 'One writes and works for one's friends, and those who read, or at any rate those who listen, are people about whom one cares nothing—.' (*Letters*, p. 768.) Such a notion of humility was of course consonant with Yeats's reasons for the exaltation of the aristocratic mode of life, the living and the most exemplary symbol of which he had found in his friend Augusta Gregory. After all, the virtues—'natural' or 'glad' kindness, 'the heart-revealing intimacy' and homely beauty—which he anxiously desires his daughter

in 'A Prayer for my Daughter' to embody—were more or less revealed virtues to him, revealed during his contact with and stay at Coole Park. Thus it is possible to argue that Yeats's apotheosis of the heroic as embodied in the aristocratic mode of living, shaped as it was by his directly personal involvement, is at least an oblique celebration of his friendship with Augusta. Yeats who anticipated in a way the classic orientation of the English poetic idiom alleged to have been officially brought about by Pound and Eliot remained an incorrigible romanticist in many ways till the end. And perhaps an outstanding case of his romanticism is to be discovered in his attitude to his friends, and in the mythical perspective in which he was placing them and himself again and again—a mythical perspective of both attitude and style. [And if Augusta represented one facet of this mythical stance, the sustained synthesis of courtesy and passion, of 'high laughter, loveliness and ease', Maud Gonne embodied the other transcendental but destructively heroic facet.] Here then is one instance of the mode of the operation of Yeats's romanticism: the friends and friendships are given the treatment and significance which they deserved in terms of what they gave to Yeats as man: Augusta—tranquillity and affectionate comfort and hence a sense of stability and creativity;<sup>8</sup> Maud Gonne—restlessness, defeat, tragedy and hence an awareness of heroic challenge. And if Maud Gonne is celebrated in terms of soaring and iridescent analogies—indeed the impressions of character and beauty<sup>9</sup> which Yeats had gathered of Maud Gonne during his early meetings with her were neither lost nor falsified:

Tall and noble but with face and bosom  
Delicate in colour as apple blossom.<sup>10</sup>

For she had fiery blood...  
And trod so sweetly proud  
As 'twere upon a cloud,  
A Woman Homer sung,  
That life and letters seem  
But an heroic dream.<sup>11</sup>

or her 'nobleness made simple as a fire' and 'beauty like a

tightened bow'—something which belongs to an heroic age and 'is not natural in an age like this'; 'a thing . . . that seemed a burning cloud'; 'my phoenix'; 'that proud look as though she had gazed into the burning sun'; 'a Ledaean body'; 'the fire that stirs about her, when she stirs/Burns but more clearly'; 'beauty that is cast out of a mould/In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears'—Augusta is celebrated in terms of homely and less dazzling ones which point to a high affectionate regard and understanding rather than a wild admiration of one who is 'deep and dumb and blind with love'. Her 'selfsame excellence' cannot be brought again, her pride and humility are almost domestic virtues capable of energizing, sustaining and transforming instead of dazzling into prostrate helplessness anyone who came into contact with her because it was 'pride established in humility'. Her Coole Park was a haven where 'Thoughts long knitted into a single thought,/A dance-like glory that those walls begot.' Thus if analogies used for Maud Gonne are scintillating and suggest a contact with the fire, the wild summer, the sun or the cloud in order to focus its transcendental quality, those used for Augusta—'that laurelled head'—are not only plainly solid and unadorned but suggestive of a vital 'contact with the soil'. Besides the literary dimensions of this 'contact with the soil' so clearly stated in 'The Municipal Gallery Revisited':

John Synge, I and Augusta Gregory, thought  
All that we did, all that we said or sang  
Must come from contact with the soil, from that  
Contact everything Antaeus-like grew strong,  
We three alone in modern times had brought  
Everything down to that sole test again,  
Dream of the noble and the beggar-man.

there is another dimension implied here which is more relevant to the present discussion. In Yeats's warm exhortation to anyone who passed by Coole Park to 'dedicate . . . a moment's memory' to Lady Gregory:

Here, traveller, scholar, poet, take your stand  
When all those rooms and passages are gone,

When nettles wave upon a shapeless mound  
 And saplings root among the broken stone,  
 And dedicate—*eyes bent upon the ground,*  
*Back turned upon the brightness of the sun*  
*And all the sensuality of the shade—*  
 A moment's memory to that *laurelled head*.<sup>12</sup> (italics mine)

one notices his unconscious or subconscious effort to place Augusta in a perspective which is distinctively different from the one evoked for Maud Gonne: the difference in perspectives is the difference in imagery. The suggested gestures of bending one's eyes upon the ground and of turning the back upon the burning sun and the organic analogy of the laurelled head are images which strikingly eliminate even a remote sense of the transcendental; they illuminate not only the emotional dimension of 'contact with the soil' (in so far as it contrasts with Maud Gonne's symbolic contact with the clouds—burning clouds to be precise) but, in terms of it, the notion of 'pride established in humility', of that synthesis of courtesy and passion, of that sense of the heroic which is uncorrupted by 'intellectual hatred' or made arrogant by the loss of the Horn of Plenty.

[No critic would deny the significant part played by Maud Gonne and Lady Gregory in the shaping of his poetic career. It was as if Augusta was an antidote to Maud Gonne:<sup>13</sup> indeed when one generated a shock in his emotional life, the other promptly acted as the shock-absorber; when his imagination tossed on the emotional sea-waves, Lady Gregory offered restorative moorings to salvage his poetic talent from the aftermath of combating the exhausting upheaval all alone.] Yeats readers, in fact, owe gratitude to these two women for directing him towards greatness and the attitude of heroic defiance, the notion of 'the exultant heart', or of rejoicing in the midst of tragedy. Despite his overwhelming passion for Maud Gonne, despite the possibility that had she married him 'I might have thrown poor words away / And been content to live', Yeats was clear-headed enough to be critically aware of Maud Gonne's shortcomings. 'What could she have done, being what she is?' may appear to be a harmlessly defensive gesture of the resigned Yeats, and, indeed, 'No

Second Troy' is at first sight a powerful defence of his indifferent beloved. But beneath the sweep of the defensive rhetoric throbs a controlled but pungently chiselled sense of judgment for 'being what she is' which is not merely suggestive of her helplessness against her temperament but also, and more than that, of the poet's justified sense of denunciation. If at moments she could cut a 'sweetly proud' figure, at others and more public and rhetorical ones, she could have 'taught ignorant men most violent ways / Or hurled the little streets upon the great'. Her nobility was as destructive as it was simple, and her beauty was such as Yeats had learnt to dread, though not without admiration, beauty which would 'make a stranger's eye distraught / Or hers before a looking glass, for such, / Being made overmuch, / Consider beauty a sufficient end, / Lose natural kindness and may be / The heart-revealing intimacy / That chooses right, and never find a friend'.<sup>14</sup> The greatest shortcoming of Maud Gonne which was perhaps responsible for all the ills (from Yeats's point of view of course), was her lack of 'radical innocence' of soul, her failure to learn that 'it was self-delighting, / Self-appeasing, self-affrighting,' and her obsession with 'arrogance and hatred' which are 'wares / Paddled in the thoroughfares'. Maud Gonne had, moreover, an 'opinionated mind'; she had, unlike Lady Gregory, bartered because of it the horn of plenty 'and every good / By quiet natures understood / For an old bellows full of angry wind'. Yeats's passion for Maud Gonne was, if one were to sum it up in one phrase, fatal—perhaps *vitally fatal* for who knows whether short of it, he would have been roused from his Celtic slumber into the prophetic grimness and tragic splendour of 'The Second Coming', 'Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen', 'Meditations in time of Civil War', 'Easter 1916', 'The Tower' etc. But as we read poem after poem addressed to Maud Gonne, we increasingly and painfully become aware, notwithstanding its sweeping intensity, of the essential superficiality of Yeats's passion because if there is anything which justifies it and the potency of his surrender, it was Maud Gonne's undeniable physical beauty which merited heroic analogies with Pallas Athene, Helen, Leda and one might add Cleopatra. There was nothing in her temperament, as Yeats was later to realize:

... that most fecund ditch of all,  
 The folly, that man does  
 Or must suffer, if he woos  
A proud woman not kindred of his soul.<sup>15</sup>

(italics mine)

that could have brought harmony and peace to his life; and one cannot help recognizing the spark of wisdom in Maud Gonne's categorical refusal: 'The whole world should thank me for not marrying you' though a more graceful and less self-consciously haughty but un-Maud Gonnish statement would have been 'The whole world should thank us for not marrying each other'. And it is doubtful if Yeats would have approved of the bracketing of Maud Gonne with such friends as Synge and Augusta. Her pride was not of the kind to be found in them who 'weighed so lightly what they gave'; it was, so far as Yeats's interpretation is concerned, rhetorical and doctrinaire with little attempt at its integration with a larger national programme. At least, she 'weighed so heavily what she gave; she was not of 'the passionate serving kind' but of the propagandist kind. And three important persons, he said, know nothing of propaganda: a man modelling a statue, a man playing the flute, a man in a woman's arms:

The pride of people that were  
 Bound neither to Cause nor to State,  
 Neither to slaves that were spat on,  
 Nor to the tyrants that spat,  
 The people of Burke and of Grattan  
 That gave though free to refuse—  
 Pride, like that of the morn,  
 When the headlong light is loose,  
 Or that of the fabulous horn,  
 Or that of the shower  
 When all the streams are dry,<sup>16</sup>

It is a pride shared by Yeats, Augusta, Synge, Hugh Lane, Robert Gregory and is different from the one signified by 'that proud look as though she had gazed into the burning sun', 'that straight back and arrogant head'. Indeed she was so frequently in 'a joyous and self-forgetting condition of political hate'<sup>17</sup>

that it was impossible even for Yeats not to have been alarmed by the contrast despite the possibility that 'It was, it seems, O'Leary who first inspired her with Nationalist enthusiasm'.<sup>18</sup>

I thought my dear must her own soul destroy,  
So did fanaticism and hate enslave it,<sup>19</sup>

In fact, he had come to realize that it was Maud Gonne's political passion which had destroyed the possibility of an intimate and harmonious relationship with her; on September 13, 1928 he wrote to Olivia Shakespear:

When Lady Gregory goes, and she is now frail, I too shall have but one old friend left. (M(aud) G(onne) has been estranged by politics all this while.)<sup>20</sup>

'Friends' is a poem which celebrates Mrs Shakespear, Augusta Gregory and Maud Gonne—'three women that have wrought / What joy is in my days', the first for a highly courteous and untroubled relationship which began as a minor, timid love-affair but survived as an intellectual friendship. Her human warmth was a perfect foil to Maud Gonne's haughty self-consciousness. On hearing the 'tragic news' of her death, Yeats hastened to write to Dorothy Wellesley, his last great friend:

For more than forty years she has been the centre of my life in London and during that time we have never had a quarrel, sadness sometimes but never a difference. When I first met her she was in her late twenties but in looks a lovely young girl. When she died she was a lovely old woman . . . She was Lionel Johnson's cousin and felt and thought as he did . . . I will find her memory everywhere.<sup>21</sup>

Yeats had always acted as a thoughtful commentator on Olivia Shakespear's work and his comments, more often than not, revealed his own mind:

If you could make your men salient, marked, dominant,

you would at once treble the solidity of your work. As yet your heroes are not only a little shadowy in characterization, but too passive, too much driven hither and thither by destiny...<sup>22</sup>

The second, gifted with magical sympathy as she was, for remaking him, for so transforming him that 'I live / Labouring in ecstasy', for giving him a sense of creative direction when his poetic talent might have been wasted in haphazard and strained living. [If Maud Gonne gave Yeats inspiration and if Olivia Shakespear gave instigation, Lady Gregory in giving him what he called 'my home for nearly forty years' from 1897 onwards gave him repose and sustenance.] Yeats's recognition of this regenerative influence is unequivocal:

She taught me that straight line that sets a man  
Above the crooked journey of the sun.<sup>23</sup>

And the third took 'All till my youth was gone / With scarce a pitying look'. [The distinction between Augusta and Maud Gonne is the difference between giving and taking, creating and destroying, kindness and pitilessness.] And yet Lady Gregory can only get gratitude, of course warmly genuine and almost devotional:

They [the great Irishmen] came like swallows and like  
swallows went

And yet a woman's powerful character  
Could keep a swallow to its first intent;  
And half a dozen in formation there,  
That seemed to whirl upon a compass-point,  
Found certainty upon the dreaming air,  
The intellectual sweetness of those lines  
That cut through time or cross it withershins.<sup>24</sup>

Whereas Maud Gonne,—even when a part of his consciousness protests and whispers 'How could praise that one?'—can always elicit a helpless admiration from him for

When day begins to break

I count my good and bad,  
Being wakeful for her sake,  
Remembering what she had,  
What eagle look still shows,  
While up from my heart's root  
So great a sweetness flows  
I shake from head to foot.<sup>25</sup>

v. y. And he later confessed to Mrs Shakespear: '...no matter how I begin, it becomes love poetry before I am finished with it.'<sup>26</sup> This is not only because of Yeats's feeling that 'She has unconsciously given him more than the other gave consciously'<sup>27</sup> but because of his helpless admiration of the sheer physical beauty of Maud Gonne (or for that matter of any woman), for whenever it comes to her personality, he is unsparing of criticism; indeed, in poems like 'A Prayer for my Daughter' and 'No Second Troy' the criticism is so damaging that one wonders how Yeats could have also loved the same woman for so many years to the point of being obsessed with her, and whether the criticism emanates from objective perception or from sheer subjective anguish and frustration.✓

At any rate, Maud Gonne's marriage in February 1903 despite its potent imminence did shock Yeats out of his wits.✓ For once with 'the ears being deafened, the sight of the eyes blind / With lightning', the vision did get blurred before a final shattering of the Celtic veil, a rejuvenescent withering into 'the truth' because more than the sense of being 'officially renounced, what shocked Yeats was the man she had chosen to marry. And the tone and the language in which he 'numbers' him as one of the heroes in 'Easter 1916':

This other man I had dreamed  
A drunken, vainglorious lout.  
He had done most bitter wrong  
To some who are near my heart,<sup>28</sup>

are uncomplimentary and perhaps even uncharitable. But as an implied emotional judgment, they are equally uncomplimentary to Maud Gonne, a judgment reinforced and clinched by Maud Gonne's separation from her husband

within two years. And as the old fascination still smouldered, Yeats could not help trying again and failed to appreciate in her adamant refusal the underlying touch of discretion. The chapter might have closed here but for the comic epilogue when in the summer of 1917 he, the fifty-two-year-old bachelor, proposed to Maud Gonne's daughter Iseult who was still in her teens. The daughter did not reverse the role played by her mother; only that she was a bit kinder in disposing of the matter by September of the same year though not without involving moments of anxious suspense for Yeats:

Iseult and I are on our old intimate terms but I don't think she will accept. She 'has not the impulse'. However  
 ✓ I will think the matter undecided till we part.<sup>29</sup>

Part they did in this sense but not before Iseult had found a place in Yeats's poetry. The six poems she figures in are united in theme and tone. While the theme is the recurrent one of the agonized gap between youth and old age, innocence and experience, its treatment still lacks the dramatic edge and tragic dignity we find in his later poems like 'Sailing to Byzantium', 'The Tower' etc. which deal with the same conflict. And the lyrical perceptions are all the more heightened by the underlying nostalgia couched in a half-regretful and half-patronizing tone:

Being young you have not known  
 The fool's triumph, nor yet  
 Love lost as soon as won,  
 Nor the best labourer dead  
 And all the sheaves to bind.  
 What need have you to dread  
 The monstrous crying of wind?<sup>30</sup>

or that of rationalization:

Iseult has always been something like a daughter to me and so I am less upset than I might have been—I am chiefly unhappy about her general prospects. Just at the moment she is in one of her alarming moods—deep

melancholy and apathy, the result of having left the country . . . Only in the country is she amused and free of this mood for long.<sup>31</sup>

Iseult did share Yeats's own love of the country and solitude and the hatred of the city and the very first poem about her 'To a Child Dancing in the Wind' puts her emphatically in the company of the shore, the wind and 'water's roar' and reminds us of what Yeats wrote elsewhere:

My imagination goes some years backward, and I remember a beautiful young girl singing at the edge of the sea in Normandy words and music of her own composition.<sup>32</sup>

But she did not share the exhausting experiences of Yeats's prolonged frustration in love and in 'this blind bitter land'. And these experiences had, he realized, only qualified him to speak in 'a barbarous tongue' incomprehensible to Iseult, incomprehensible in fact to any living or young beauty except the sculptured one, 'that is cast out of a mould / In bronze, or that in dazzling marble appears'. The cry is poignantly nostalgic because of the focused wildness of regret:

. . . O heart, we are old;  
The living beauty is for younger men:  
We cannot pay its tribute of wild tears.<sup>33</sup>

✓ Indeed, when one is in love and is sure that it is as good as lost, the only comfort is the possibility of acceptance—desperate or heroic. And even when Yeats rationalizes it is not without the flash of objectivity: 'How could she mate with fifty years that was so wildly bred?' or

'Speak all your mind,' my Heart sang out, 'speak all  
your mind; who cares,  
Now that your tongue cannot persuade the child till she  
mistake  
Her childish gratitude for love and match your fifty years?  
O let her choose a young man now and all for his wild  
sake.'<sup>34</sup>

Though he married a month after the final refusal of Iseult, he still pledged that 'I will still be a friend and guardian to Iseult'<sup>35</sup>—a gesture which illumines an important aspect of Yeats's attitude towards his friends, viz. that he never willingly quarrelled with them. And if the Gregorys quarrelled with him they did so precisely because Yeats would not quarrel with Gosse to please them. And on hearing about Maud Gonne's arrest he wrote to Olivia Shakespear:

I cannot write any more as I have just learned that Maud Gonne has been arrested and I must write to Iseult and offer to help with the authorities in the matter of warm blankets.

The day before her arrest she wrote to say that if I did not denounce the Government she renounced my society for ever. I am afraid my help in the matter of blankets, instead of her release (where I could do nothing), will not make her less resentful. She had to choose (perhaps all women must) between broomstick and distaff and she had chosen the broomstick—I mean the witches' hats.<sup>36</sup>

Before we turn to the woman who helped him sustain his creative talent during his last years, it would be profitable to notice by way of contrast two poems in which he celebrates men instead of women. Here are people who are celebrated not because they gave Yeats anything or took away anything from him but as those who mattered to him as friends and who represented certain attitudes which were convictions with Yeats. Thus what is lost in gratitude or wild admiration or regret is gained in affectionate warmth and fond reminiscence. 'In Memory of Major Robert Gregory' is perhaps the most thoughtful celebration of a friend. The very opening gesture is one of wistful longing for the lost 'heart-revealing' intimacies:

Now that we're almost settled in our house  
I'll name the friends that cannot sup with us  
Beside a fire of turf in th' ancient tower,  
And having talked to some late hour

Climb up the narrow winding stair to bed:  
Discoverers of forgotten truth  
Or mere companions of my youth,  
All, all are in my thoughts to-night being dead.<sup>37</sup>

Although in apotheosizing Robert Gregory he is, in one sense, apotheosizing his ideal of the Unity of Being:

Soldier, scholar, horseman, he,  
And all he did perfectly  
As though he had but that one trade alone.<sup>38</sup>

—a unity of thought and instinct, of contemplation and action, of detachment from and involvement in life, yet what gives the poem its 'unity of being' is not so much this doctrinal relevance as the essential human warmth, the fond, elegiac mellowness with which the memory is cherished, and the fact that more than the idea, it is the once living embodiment of that idea that is the centre of poetic concern. Lionel Johnson's intense delight in abstract thought and learning, Synge's immersion in 'the living world', his unfailing 'contact with the soil', George Pollexfen's 'muscular youth' and legendary horsemanship: 'These were my close companions many a year, / A portion of my mind and life as it were'—were all beautifully epitomized in Robert Gregory—'my dear friend's dear son', 'our Sidney and our perfect man' the thought of whose 'death took', like the death itself which has made all his 'close companions' breathless, 'all my heart for speech'.

'The Grey Rock' is the other poem in which Yeats summons Lionel Johnson (this time with Ernest Dowson) from the memory to be applauded for certain qualities which Yeats himself cherished:

You had to face your ends when young—  
'Twas wine or women, or some curse—  
But never made a poorer song  
That you might have a heavier purse,  
Nor gave loud service to a Cause  
That you might have a troop of friends,<sup>39</sup>

And this foremost quality is the courage, in the face of the threatening indifference of the external world, to remain loyal to the inner world of imagination, to 'the Muses' sterner laws' and therefore earn the right 'to troop with the world's forgot, / And copy their proud steady gaze'. It is only Yeats who could have made the last phrase doubly significant, to have charged it simultaneously with the terrible and the triumphant, death and life. In one sense, if we stress the line 'And unrepenting faced your ends' 'proud steady gaze', like the 'laughter-lit eyes' of the dying lady in 'Upon A Dying Lady', would seem to belong to the dead in the grave and therefore indifferent to the living:

Cast a cold eye  
On life, on death,  
Horseman, pass by!<sup>40</sup>

And if we stress 'You might have kept the Muses' sterner laws' then the 'proud steady gaze' would be the triumphant gesture of the artist, of his commitment to the 'lonely impulse of delight', of his tragic but proud affirmation of the intensity of the life of imagination at the cost of loneliness and isolation, of the intense moment when life and death are magically at one:

Nor law, nor duty bade me fight,  
Nor public men, nor cheering crowds,  
A lonely impulse of delight  
Drove to this tumult in the clouds;  
I balanced all, brought all to mind,  
The years to come seemed waste of breath,  
A waste of breath the years behind  
In balance with this life, this death.<sup>41</sup>

that secret, proud exultation which he suggests to Lady Gregory in 'To a Friend whose work has come to Nothing' to adopt as the defensive weapon against the external world.

The romantic temper is always peculiarly prone to cherish in others what resides at its deepest core, to look more for similarities and likenesses than for differences. Any relationship

must needs involve a sort of 'going out of our own nature', an identification with the best in other's mind and heart, but with a romantic mind this 'thirst after its own likeness' is sometimes so intense that the best of the other mind is the projection of the imagined or actualized best in oneself. Yeats's saving grace, a complex romanticist as he was, lay in his ability to temper his longings with a fidelity to the objective fact. The last friendship with Dorothy Wellesley which is celebrated only in one poem and which dominated the last years of his life is more objectively treasured in their letters. She filled the vacuum in his life created by the death of Lady Gregory in May 1932. Indeed, 'this short and beautiful friendship' was a repetition in a finer, though in respect of duration minor, tone of his friendship with Augusta. At Penns in the Rocks, he re-discovered a 'perfect country house, lettered peace'

Where passion and precision have been one...  
And the sweet laughing eagle thoughts that grow  
Where wings have memory of wings, and all  
That comes of the best knit to the best...<sup>42</sup>

and in Dorothy herself not only an imaginative kinship as a poet but, 'greatly wishing to please and be pleased' as she was, also gradually and increasingly a dependable source of inspiration, criticism and affection. Replying to Yeats's recurrent desire to stay and work for a few days at Penns in the Rocks:

I long for quiet, long ago I used to find it at Coole.  
It was part of the genius of that house. Lady Gregory  
never rebelled like other Irish women<sup>43</sup> I have known  
who consumed themselves and their friends; in spite of  
Scripture she put the new wine into the old bottles.<sup>44</sup>

she wrote '... This house is yours to work in, at peace, at any time all yours...' <sup>45</sup> Kathleen Raine could not have been more accurate than when she said: '...in a more refined age it might have been called love perhaps, for the relationship went beyond mere exchange of ideas and civilities and possessed the magical quality which belongs to a deeper level of

imagination... We should not forget however that Dorothy came in his life when Yeats was about to complete his last phase<sup>46</sup> and through her 'aggressive' correspondence and conversation' she acted as more than a catalyst in activating this phase. In fact, what had promptly brought him in touch with Dorothy and cemented the initial fascination was his discovery of something in her poetry which he had not only cherished but had consciously tried to incorporate in his poetry. This is what he says in his fourth letter to her:

✓ If I had your descriptive genius I would have written just such poems<sup>47</sup> of the woods at Coole and of woods known in Sligo when a child...<sup>48</sup>

Yet it is of your own poetry I want to talk—that mysterious rhythm which is as though I myself were talking in a dream...<sup>49</sup>

It should be obvious that Yeats was thinking of this mysterious rhythm, an attribute of the poetic tradition he was committed to when he said: 'I wanted the strongest passions, passions that had nothing to do with observation, and metrical forms that seemed old enough to have been sung by men half-asleep or riding upon a journey'.<sup>50</sup> In another letter after talking about her poetry, Yeats adds a revealing postscript: '...A ferment has come upon my imagination. If I write more poetry it will be unlike anything I have done'<sup>51</sup> and in the one dated 8th July, 1935, 'I am tired of my little personal poetry, your "Matrix" has given me a glimpse of what I want'; it was

the most moving precisely because its wisdom bulked animal below the waist. In its abrupt lines, passion burst into thought without renouncing its dark quality.<sup>52</sup>

What makes your work so good is the masculine element allied to much feminine charm—your lines have the magnificent swing of your boyish body.<sup>53</sup>

✓ Such remarks tally what Yeats had begun to feel about poetry

in general in so far as he demanded 'gusty energy' from it, about his own:

My work has got far more masculine. It has more of salt in it.<sup>54</sup>

as also of the only poem he *addressed* to Dorothy Wellesley: 'Stretch towards the Moonless Midnight of the Trees':

All depends on the completeness of the holding down, on the stirring of the beast underneath. Even my poem 'To D. W.' should give this impression. The moon, the moonless night, the dark velvet, the sensual silence, the silent room and the violet bright Furies. Without this conflict we have no passion only sentiment and thought. . . . About this conflict in 'To D. W.', I did not plan it deliberately. That conflict is deep in my subconsciousness, perhaps in everybody's.<sup>55</sup>

Kathleen Raine is not wrong when she says '...the rich harvest of poetry Yeats reaped from his friendship with her vindicates Dorothy herself'.<sup>56</sup> But more than that I think it is the warmth of feeling and sincerity of tone—essentially human attributes so difficult to come across—which should vindicate her if vindication is at all needed. And both of them are fully conscious of the fruits of this relationship. 'You have brought a new pleasure and interest into my life and I thank you',<sup>57</sup> wrote Yeats and then added in a softer tone 'I thank you for those cheerful days and because I learned something as I always do in your house'.<sup>58</sup> This is the kind of humility which Yeats who could denounce those who hated 'The Playboy of the Western World' as aesthetic eunuchs, was capable of in his more personal moments. But Dorothy was no less unequivocal in reciprocating: 'I get tired. But this sudden and beautiful friendship between you and me gives me strength. "The Spirit keepeth alive."<sup>59</sup> Although she had 'a love for the poetry which perhaps you don't care for: Gray's "Elegy", "the Prelude",<sup>60</sup> yet she shared his love of "a proud style" born of "a sense of something steellike and cold within the will, something passionate and cold", and of

writing "like common people" with "the animation of spoken words and spoken syntax". Undoubtedly, 'To D. W.' depicts a conflict which is, in Yeats's vocabulary synonymous with 'passion' (as distinguished from mere 'sentiment' or 'thought'), conflict of the opposites, of 'the moonless midnight of the trees' (the darkness of passion) and the 'chamber of books' (the intellect). But equally relevant to this ramming full of the mental chamber with 'that most sensuous silence of the night' is the culminating idea of isolation and loneliness which is at once the privilege and the curse of the artist:

No books upon the knee, and on no one there  
But a Great Dane<sup>61</sup> that cannot bay the moon  
And now lies sunk in sleep.

and the related identification of Dorothy with the proud Muse in her supreme loneliness or lonely in her supremacy:

What climbs the stair?  
Nothing that common women ponder on  
If you are worth my hope! Neither Content  
Nor satisfied Conscience, but that great family  
Some ancient famous authors misrepresent,  
The Proud Furies each with her torch on high.

It was this deep but subconscious likeness which made Yeats, who was never tired of remaking himself, delight in remaking another:

Ah my dear how it added to my excitement when I re-made that poem of yours to know it was your poem. I re-made you and myself into a single being. We triumphed over each other and I thought of *The Turtle and the Phoenix*.<sup>62</sup>

And re-reading all his letters in December 1937, Dorothy was filled with irrepressible gratitude and love:

They (the letters) bring us back vividly your first visit to Penns ... in May 1935. I re-lived again my fear of

your arrival, my joy that you should come, the relief of finding I was not to be afraid of you at all, that we understood each other. I cannot think of Ottoline without gratitude that she showed such intelligence of heart, came to me bringing you...<sup>63</sup>

Is it not from statements like these that we learn that 'the soil from which great poetry grows is remote from these aridities which occupy the pens of critics; the beauty of a woman, the charms of her house, and her companionship, friendship, dreams and kindness, these nourish immortal poetry'?

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. 'The People', *Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats*, London, 1961, p. 169.
2. *Ibid.* p. 164.
3. *Ibid.* pp. 165-6.
4. *Ibid.* p. 104.
5. *The Letters of John Keats*, ed. M. B. Forman, London, 1947, p. 131.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *The Letters of W. B. Yeats*, ed. Allan Wade, London, 1954, p. 427.
8. After a year's acquaintance, Yeats wrote to Lady Gregory: 'The days at Coole passed like a dream, a dream of peace.' (*Letters*, p. 288)
9. Here is Yeats's description of Maud Gonne unmistakably immersed in the language, tone and feeling of a crashing fascination and admiration: 'I had never thought to see in a living woman so great beauty. It belonged to famous pictures, to poetry, to some legendary past. A complexion like the bloom of apples and yet the face and body had the beauty of lineaments which Blake calls the highest beauty because it changes least from youth to age, and stature so great that she seemed of a divine race.'  
Like Shakespeare's Cleopatra's, her beauty too could neither wither with age nor stale with custom: 'Time can but make her beauty again: Because of that great nobleness of hers/The fire that stirs about her, when she stirs...'
10. *Collected Poems*, p. 85.
11. *Ibid.* p. 100.
12. 'Coole Park, 1929', *ibid.* pp. 274-5.
13. Yeats confides this in Lady Gregory unhesitatingly: 'I don't know whether things are well or ill with me, in some ways ill, for she has been almost cold with me, though she had made it easy for me to see her. If you knew all . . . you would understand why this love has been so bitter a thing to me, and why things I have known lately have made it, in a certain sense, the bitterer, and the harder . . . I would not so much lament, but I am sure that if things remain as they are she will never leave this life of hatred which a vision I

made her see years ago told her was her deepest hell, and contrasted with the life of labour from the divine love, which was her highest heaven . . . whenever things are going ill I find myself thinking of my peaceful months at Coole . . .' (*Letters*, pp. 311-2.)

14. Yeats's first meeting with Maud Gonne took place on January 30, 1889 and he wrote on February 3 of the same year: 'Did I tell you how much I admire Miss Gonne? She will make many converts to her political belief. If she said the world was flat or the moon an old caubeen (an Irish hat) tossed up into the sky I would be proud to be of her party.' (*Letters*, p. 110).
15. *Collected Poems*, p. 267.
16. *Ibid.* pp. 222-3.
17. *Letters*, p. 631. Also cf. 'I sympathise with her love of the national idea rather than any secondary land movement, but care not much for the kind of Red Indian feathers in which she has trapped out that idea.' (*Ibid.* p. 117.)
18. Allan Wade's footnote in *Letters*, p. 106.
19. *Collected Poems*, p. 392.
20. *Letters*, p. 769.
21. *Ibid.* p. 916.
22. *Ibid.* pp. 240-1.
23. *Ibid.* p. 769. Also cf. 'She has been to me mother, friend, sister and brother. She brought to my wavering thoughts steadfast ability.' (Quoted by Joseph Hone, *W. B. Yeats 1865-1939*, London, 1965, paperback, p. 144.)
24. *Collected Poems*, p. 274.
25. *Ibid.* p. 139.
26. *Letters*, pp. 714-5.
27. Richard Ellmann, *The Identity of Yeats*, London, Faber and Faber, paperback, 1964, p. XXII.
28. *Collected Poems*, p. 203.
29. *Letters*, p. 628.
30. *Collected Poems*, p. 137.
31. *Letters*, p. 631.
32. *A Vision* (B), p. 220.
33. *Collected Poems*, p. 156.
34. *Ibid.* p. 249.
35. *Letters*, p. 633.
36. *Ibid.* p. 697.
37. *Collected Poems*, p. 148.
38. *Ibid.* p. 151.
39. *Ibid.* pp. 116-7.
40. *Ibid.* p. 401.
41. *Ibid.* p. 152.
42. *Ibid.* p. 106.
43. The reference is unmistakably to Maud Gonne.
44. *Letters*, p. 855.
45. *Letters on Poetry from W. B. Yeats to Dorothy Wellesley*, London, 1964, Oxford, paperback, p. 6.
46. Dorothy records with fond regret the occasion when talking about the per-

fection of the Greek drama he suddenly said to her: 'I feel I am only beginning to understand how to write'. And she knew this to be a sign that the struggle, both physical and poetic, had reached its finale because 'I believe that complete achievement, complete mastery, is the end of creation.' (Ibid p. 194.)

47. 'The Lost Forest'.
48. *Letters to Dorothy Wellesley*, p. 4.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid.
51. *Letters to Dorothy Wellesley*, p. 6.
52. Ibid. p. 25.
53. Ibid. p. 113.
54. *Letters*, ed. Allan Wade, p. 397.
55. *Letters to Dorothy Wellesley*, p. 86.
56. Ibid. Introduction, p. xi.
57. Ibid. p. 39.
58. Ibid. p. 190.
59. Ibid. p. 10.
60. Ibid.
61. Dorothy Wellesley's dog.
62. *Letters to Dorothy Wellesley*, p. 82.
63. Ibid. p. 152.

# CHRISTOPHER FRY AND THE THEATRE OF THE ABSURD

BY A. JHA

AT first sight, it might appear odd, if not arbitrary, to bracket Christopher Fry with such dramatists as Ionesco, Samuel Beckett and Harold Pinter, who represent the Theatre of the Absurd. Between Fry on the one hand and the absurdist dramatists on the other there is said to exist an antithetical opposition. It has even been argued that Fry's eminence in the late forties and early fifties was an accidental phenomenon, that his poetry was devoid of poetic-dramatic core, and that the tight-lipped prose plays of Harold Pinter are more genuinely poetic.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, we have developed in our mind, thanks to the widespread prejudice against poetry in the theatre since Ibsen, a curiously imaginary picture of Christopher Fry. It is the picture of a word-drunk Bacchus, or of a Shakespeare who could not grow beyond *Love's Labour's Lost* or *Richard II*, or, again, of a Bernard Shaw, sans his socio-economic philosophy, having strayed into the world of verse drama. This, of course, is the Fry-image in the minds which have been irresistibly drawn to his work, and are, therefore, sympathetic to him.

In the minds fed indiscriminately on Eliot, however, it is a different Fry-image, though equally misleading. He is not only an ineffectual phrase-maker with little dramatic power; he is lamentably ignorant of the tensions and pressures of our time. In these minds, he is placed with the ineffectual Georgian poets and dramatists such as Stephen Phillips and Gordon Bottomley. In his work, poetry is said to be too loud and wordy; it invites all the attention to itself and impedes whatever action is there. It is evident that these minds have formed their opinions on the basis of Eliot's insistence, both in his precept and practice, upon ruthlessly subduing poetry in the poetic drama to the point where it would be indistinguishable from naturalistic prose dialogue. Overawed by the authority of Eliot's voice, these people ignored the fact that Eliot was making the way clear for his own kind of

sensibility in the poetic theatre; and therefore, the relevance of his precept was limited to his own practice. They failed to realize that there could be a variety of poetic styles in the theatre, as a result of which they were led to commit the error of applying Eliotian rules to an assessment of Fry's entirely different kind of plays.

[This paper is not concerned with Fry as one of the leading revivers of the poetic drama in the English theatre after the Second World War. In this respect, Eliot as a poetic dramatist naturally overshadows him. Besides, any consideration of Fry's poetry is bound to, as it always has in the past, lead us to neglect his theme and vision of life. Here, an attempt has been made to indicate the nature of his experience which found expression in his post-Second War plays and its kinship with that of the absurdist dramatists.

→ The term, the Theatre of the Absurd, owes its origin and validity as a critical counter to Martin Esslin's book<sup>2</sup> dealing principally with the plays of Ionesco, Beckett and Pinter. He makes a distinction between the conventional representational theatre and the Absurdist theatre. He argues that the point of distinction does not lie so much in what the dramatists have to say as in their technique of saying it. In substance and theme, according to Martin Esslin, Giraudoux, Anouilh, Salacrou, Sartre, and Camus are undoubtedly absurdist:

Yet these writers differ from the dramatists of the Absurd in an important respect: they present their sense of the irrationality of the human condition in the form of highly lucid and logically constructed reasoning, while the Theatre of the Absurd strives to express its sense of the senselessness of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the open abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought.<sup>3</sup>

In terms of substance and theme, other dramatists too than those listed by Esslin could be said to belong, though, in some cases only partly, to the Absurdist school. [The 'sense of the senselessness of the human condition' informs not only the works of Pirandello, Strindberg and Chekov; it is there in the great tragedies of Sophocles, Shakespeare and Racine: Oedipus,

Hamlet, Phedre—all are ultimately confronted with the meaninglessness of the human condition. The tragic situation, in each case, emerges from a realization that all conventional values are mere husks and that man must confront his fate and know himself all alone. Life loses its configuration imposed by the code of accepted beliefs and is laid bare in a meaningless stretch of 'To-morrow and to-morrow...' But certainly the term, the Absurdist, is not to be applied to the above dramatists, because meaninglessness of life is not the only or the whole theme of their plays. In them, certain values such as the dignity of the struggling man, the need of order and humility emerge out of the tragic catharsis and are accepted as pure and positive.

The Theatre of the Absurd, therefore, specifically characterizes those dramatists of the post-Second-World-War world who have given up any pretence to representational method and devised an amalgam of expressionistic-symbolist-allegoric stage-techniques and highly stylized and ruthlessly clipped language. Analysing the emergence of the absurdist vision and its nature, Martin Esslin says elsewhere:

Basically, the Theatre of the Absurd expresses the loss of feeling that the world makes sense, and can be reduced into an integrated system of values—which is due to the decline of religion—that had been apparent since the end of the First World War, and the decline in the belief in the substitute religions of nationalism, faith in progress and socialism, in the cynical disillusionment of the period after the Second World War.<sup>4</sup>

The First War gave a violent jolt to the illusory conventional moral values many of which fell apart and decayed. Eliot dramatized this situation on an epic scale in *The Waste Land*. But a longing for the rains remained, and the longing gave rise to hopes of salvation through a mirage of sentimental ideals such as nationalism, 'socialism', 'communist dictatorship', 'democracy', 'free world' and a recourse to religion. The Second War blew up these sentiments into shell-smoke, and laid bare the complete meaninglessness of all values, conventional and imaginary, ancient or modern: it killed

the very longing and the hope. The human condition was aptly summed up by Camus as the myth of Sisyphus: life suddenly appeared to be a mere drag and an utter boredom.

In France, naturally, the artists felt this experience most intensely. The French are among the most sensitively alive and intellectually alert people and, moreover, some of the worst battles were fought on their soil. Anouilh, Sartre, Cocteau and Camus, who had lived through the stunning experience of the war emerged to give powerful expression to them in the theatre. It was in this climate that the philosophy of existentialism had an immediate impact on their minds and found an artistic expression in their works. The existential absurdity seemed to characterize the whole human situation, particularly in Europe.

In England the impact of the Second War on the sensibility of the artists and authors was comparatively mild. There were reasons for this. First, save and except some parts of London, England did not suffer any large-scale physical calamity. Secondly, it still had a big empire with which to console itself. Thirdly, the rules of moral conduct and convention, though shaken, were still there to hold to, even though largely superficially. In the theatre, particularly, the Second War had even less perceptible impact. As Richard Findlater has pointed out, the post-Second War London theatre was the continuance of the theatre between the Wars. The same dramatists as wrote before the War were still writing, and almost with the same themes and conventions. Of course, there was J. B. Priestley and his preoccupation with the concept of time; and there were Emelyn Williams and Terence Rattigan presenting sometimes soldier characters and mentioning war. The only new post-war dramatist, who gave a significant expression to the contemporary experience in the theatre, was Christopher Fry. Of course, his medium was verse; but essentially, his sensibility was akin to Anouilh's, and anticipated Ionesco's and Pinter's.

The subject of a kinship between Fry and Anouilh has often attracted the attention of dramatic critics. Harold Hobson in his excellent book on the post-Second War theatre<sup>5</sup> in Britain has devoted a whole chapter to it. But what needs to be shown is that the kinship is not limited to their styles

of language; it extends to their attitudes to life and the world. Loneliness is the underlying but perennial theme of both the dramatists. Messerschmann in *Ring Round the Moon* and the Duke in *Venus Observed* are victims of the same kind of affliction. In a world devoid of any code of conduct or set of values in which even two persons could commonly believe, an individual is thrown back entirely upon himself. Never before had he faced such a confrontation with his own self; and now, he is losing his sense of identity. Both Messerschmann and the Duke make desperate attempts to realize their own existence through artificial means such as love of money or love of the flesh, and thereby cover up their painful sense of being lonely. This is a characteristic of not merely these two middle-aged figures. Most characters in Anouilh are forsaken figures: St. Joan, Beckett, Henry II. And, similarly, most characters in Fry too begin with the rejection of the world and showing an incapacity to enter into any relationship with it: Dynamene, Tegeus, Thomas, the Duke, Perpetua, and the prisoners in the Church. The death-wish, manifest or latent, provides most often the main dramatic motive to the action in the plays of the two dramatists. They desire death in order to realize in the dying moments the sensation of having lived. Joan and Beckett are both in love with death; so are Dynamene, Tegeus, and Thomas. Again, both dramatists deal with these themes with an innate sense of humour, sardonic in the case of Anouilh and ironical in the case of Fry. Humour is not a matter of mere style with them: it is cognate with the reality of the human situation that they have perceived. The reality of the human situation is not tragic: it is tragic and farcical at the same time. The situation does not evoke pity and fear, for even these emotions have lost their relevance and force; the whole situation provokes laughter at the fun of being a human creature. Fry's apprehension of this nature of human reality is thus as deep as, if not deeper than, Anouilh's and closer to that of Ionesco and Pinter.

[At this point, I wish to reiterate that my concern is not to place Christopher Fry among the absurdist dramatists. For Fry is distinguished by his deep religious faith. He began as a writer of religious pageants and in all his plays there is to be found an implicit or explicit Christian allegory.] His first

published religious pageant, *The Boy with a Cart*, states his religious faith simply and directly. The centre of it is the discernment of partnership between God and man. Nature, the God-created world, fulfils itself in this partnership. Fertility and growth are the miracles of this partnership; and these miracles are there to subdue the evil in human beings. This is the simplest statement of what Charles Williams calls the in-Godding of man. This faith is not opposed to the life of the world; on the contrary, it realizes itself in the fullness of living the life of the body, the only condition being that the life must be lived in full awareness of the divine miracles manifest in the creative-fertility phenomena of the universe.

It is evident that Fry begins with the idea that man is fundamentally good, and that though he is afflicted with original sin, in the miracle of Jesus Christ, he has found a way to salvation, Christ being the supreme miracle of in-Godding of the flesh. But the traumatic experience of the war, for a time, shattered Fry's belief in man's fundamental good, as a result of which he moved close to the existentialist dilemma. The problem of evil in its myriad forms confronted him for the first time in the shape of the War. Ominous doubts and questionings about good and evil, about innocence and guilt, began to pester him terrifyingly. One has only to read Fry's *The Firstborn* carefully to know the painful intensity of these questionings in his soul. Ramsey's death is a big and baffling question-mark seriously doubting the existence of any design of God-man partnership. If God sends the plague to kill the evildoers, why must the innocent first-born be killed? Does evil sometimes parade in the guise of good? The whole episode gathers a close relevance to the Second War. The spiritual death which Moses suffers for a moment at the end of the play suggests Fry's own spiritual death, the cracking of the mirror of his childlike faith.

Of course, the comedies which follow *The Firstborn* reveal complete recovery of his faith, maturer and deeper than before. But the experiences of the war continued to affect his dramatic plot, characterization and themes. It is by no means an accident that war is present, directly or indirectly, in most, if not all, of Fry's plays, and that most of his protagonists are renegades from the battle-field. The more deeply affected,

war  
a  
profound  
cut out  
his view

however, are his themes, and in the manner of treating them he anticipates the absurdist dramatists.]

v-9 Of this period of Fry's state of mind there is a document which has received little attention so far. It consists of a series of four letters written in 1944 to a Shakespearean actor, John Byron, and is entitled *Letters to an Actor playing Hamlet*.<sup>6</sup> It should be clear to anybody who reads these letters attentively that Hamlet in them is just an excuse for Fry to talk about his own, or, for that matter, any contemporary man's Hamletian plight. Take, for example, his remarks on the death-in-life situation of Hamlet. He quotes the line from Hamlet's soliloquy after hearing the ghost, 'But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue!' and then goes on to comment:

It is the acceptance of his utter separation from all other life in the world: he is outlawed by his own nerves: there is no real way of expression for him, except for his heart to break and destroy him: the only possible expression of what he feels, is his death . . . But there are two ways of death—physical death, which doesn't come until five acts further on: and personal death, the death of the inner person. . . . Once personal death has been suffered, the appearance of life is maintained by an over-consciousness of what it is to be alive—everything may seem to remain: ambition, laughter, personal relationships; but now they are made of the bone instead of the blood. It is no longer as though the body lives, but as though the skeleton dreams. . . .

v-7 ✓ Hamlet's inner death was the result of his confrontation with the naked evil parading as good in the garb of his mother, and Fry's spiritual death was due to his confrontation with the evil of the War perpetrated, as always, in the name of good. ✓ The consequence of this is the separation of Hamlet or Fry from 'all other life in the world.' In isolation, in utter loneliness, he becomes acutely conscious of his own self, which is, in fact, a dead self. 'Ambition, laughter, personal relationships' may be there, but for him they have lost all their meaning and relevance. Life begins to appear as unreal. 'From here on,' Fry says in his second letter, 'his actions and his conversations

are a simulacrum of real life. This action of writing down the one thing he can never hope to forget is the action of a dream-world, a remembered action from an altogether different mode of Being: and much that follows can be understood by this: nightmare, but with this difference: that conscious and unconscious reign in his mind together. . . . He is living on two planes at one time: the planes of death-in-life and of resurrection-in-death. . . .'

The lines have all the ingredients of an absurdist experience of confusion between reality and illusion, and sense and senselessness. Fry, however, approaches the level of the absurdist experience more closely. In his third letter, he clearly suggests the sense of loss of religion which Esslin considers to be central to the absurdist vision of the world. Taking up the thread of his argument, he goes on to analyze what he considers to be the second important factor: 'First, his inner-death; then his attitude to good and evil. Perhaps it is curious, but I believe it to be true, that to a man innerly-dead the problem of good and evil comes particularly poignantly. To the man who has no very discernible hint to death in him, good and evil are dealt with straightly and according to his lights: for him they're no problem, any more than, to St. George, the dragon was a problem. But let a man's being withdraw from life, never so little, and begin to be walled up in this ubiquitous riddle. Once the ordinary actions of life are performed not as themselves but as actions-remembered, only two ambitions can remain to choose from . . . either the inner-death must become the complete, the physical death or the riddle must be answered.'

Fry did ultimately discover an answer to this 'ubiquitous riddle', but for five years—1940-44—he himself was 'walled up' in it. His experience of the period is almost akin to Albert Camus who has given a philosophical precision to the arguments favouring suicide. Fry came face to face to a concrete situation wherein he saw human beings prefer death to life. And in this situation he discerned a Parable for the contemporary man. The scene was the hospital where Fry himself was convalescing. He describes it thus in one of his Letters:

The hospital was mainly for severe cases of shell-shock,

but also a good many men were there who had attempted suicide. They could see no particular reason for any life they might lead in the future, or no outcome for mankind generally, unless some clear outlines could be put to the inextricably wrestling muscles of good and evil. That's what I meant by our all being Hamlet, in part, to-day, to-day being out of joint. . . .

From this insight into the deep split in the contemporary man derives Fry's idea of reality being fantastic. Providing a variation, as it were, on the Pirandelloian concept of illusion being reality and reality being illusion, Fry states:

Reality is incredible, reality is a whirlwind. What we call reality is a false god, the dull eye of custom.<sup>7</sup>

His business as a dramatist has been to explore this reality in which man confronts himself in his naked state unaided by custom or convention or any man-made law. In Fry's own words:

The inescapable dramatic situation for us all is that we have no idea what our situation is. We may be mortal. What then? We may be immortal. What then? We are plunged into an existence fantastic to the point of nightmare, and however we rationalise, or however firm our religious faith, however closely we dog the heels of science or wheel among the stars of mysticism, we cannot really make head or tail of it.<sup>8</sup>

The bewilderment in the face of naked existence which Fry attempted to dramatize in his plays anticipated the themes of the absurdist dramatists. In fact, the thematic area of exploration is strikingly similar in both the cases. Consider, for example, what Ionesco says about Beckett, which is also relevant to his own plays:

The reason why I love the theatre of Samuel Beckett is because it presents man in his nudity, stripped in front of his existence, his death, before the fundamental problem

which is this and no other: Why do I exist? Why was I born if I must die?<sup>9</sup>

✓ At this level of experience, separate identities of different objects or different notions about reality and unreality, truth and falsehood, begin to disappear. Most trite and commonplace things, for a moment, become imbued with certain vague intimations, and noble and great things appear as monuments of boredom and monotony. Values of one kind or the other having wholly evaporated perceptions get blurred and thoughts nightmarish. In the words of Harold Pinter:

There are no hard distinctions between what is real and what is unreal, nor between what is true and what is false. The thing is not necessarily true or false; it can both be true and false.<sup>10</sup>

[To delineate in their plays this theme of what has been aptly called 'the double awareness',<sup>11</sup> of the real as unreal, of the meaningful as meaningless, of the sublime as ridiculous, and of the logical as absurd, is the common concern of Fry and the Absurdist. The methods, however, apparently differ. In Fry's plays, the theme more often finds expression in the comments provided by the characters on the situation in which they find themselves. The situation in each of the comedies is in itself a baffling riddle. Dynamene in A Phoenix Too Frequent fasts on the grave of her husband to follow him to the underworld and she must make the journey along with her maid. In The Lady's Not for Burning, Thomas Mendip insists upon his own capital punishment. In Venus Observed a middle-aged Duke asks his youthful son to choose from among his early flames a mother for himself. In The Dark Is Light Enough, a divine Duchess throws all her weight to protect the life of an incorrigible sinner.] It is clear that as Fry developed he tried to select less riddling dramatic situations and leaned more heavily, for the delineation of his theme, on the pattern of comments. In the early comedies of the late forties, however, the baffling dramatic situations and the comments upon them together reinforce the impression of an absurd universe. All

the speeches, in fact, in his first two comedies, are keyed up to a pitch which brings out explicitly or implicitly the meaningless nature of the world and the creation. Dynamene provides such a comment early in *A Phoenix Too Frequent*:

... What a mad blacksmith creation is  
 Who blows his furnaces until the stars fly upward  
 And iron Time is hot and politicians glow  
 And bulbs and roots sizzle into hyacinth  
 And orchis, and the sand puts out the lion,  
 Roaring yellow, and oceans bud with porpoises,  
 Blenny, tunny and the almost unexisting  
 Blindfish; throats are cut, the masterpiece  
Looms out of labour; nations and rebellions  
 Are spat out to hang on the wind...<sup>12</sup>

This is a picture of the nightmarish universe where perversities, cruelties, advancements, natural resources, artistic excellences are all devoid of any sense. One thing is just the same as its opposite. But, while this picture approaches close the view of the universe as being meaningless, it is to be noticed that in Fry the dilemma is not exactly the one which the absurdists present: that of the man reduced to the state of a beast in a universe devoid of all values and sense. What Fry perceives is a riddle, a mystery, in the cosmic process and in the relationship of man and his cosmos, which constitute the perennial theme of Thomas's speeches in *The Lady's Not for Burning*. Take the following lines, for example:

... what a waste of effort it has been  
 To give you Creation's vast and exquisite  
 Dilemma: where altercation thrums  
 In every granule of the Milky Way,  
 Persisting still in the dead-sleep of the moon,  
 And heckling itself hoarse in that hot-head  
 The sun...<sup>13</sup>

✓ But when Thomas considers man divorced from this cosmic relationship he views man reduced to the state of a mass of flesh, even less than flesh. Take this self-portrait by Thomas:

Just see me  
As I am, me like a perambulating  
Vegetable, patched with inconsequential  
Hair, looking out of two small jellies for the means  
Of life, balanced on folding bones, my sex  
No beauty but a blemish to be hidden  
Behind judicious rags, driven and scorched  
By boomerang rages and lunacies...<sup>14</sup>

which is a highly exaggerated picture of a man for whom not only God is dead but all conceivable human values are dead and to whom, therefore, the once hallowed human body appears no different from a cabbage. Thomas, in his speeches, evinces an attitude to the world which makes him the precursor of such absurdist characters as Berenger and Stanley. He betrays the same aversion to life divested of any sense whatsoever as his successors. As he says:

Half this grotesque life I spend in a state  
Of slow decomposition, using  
The name of unconsidered God as a pedestal  
On which I stand and bray that I'm best  
Of beasts, until under some patient  
Moon or other I fall to pieces, like  
A cake of dung.<sup>15</sup>

In the plays of Ionesco, Beckett and Pinter, however, the absurdist themes are more integral to the plots. The characters dramatize in their actions more fully and more effectively the nature of the meaningless world. In Fry, the method is one of providing a pattern of comments while in Pinter or Beckett it is one of episodes, but both the patterns are concerned with vivifying the vision of the absurd at the core of the plays. Consequently, characterization in the manner of the representational drama is weak both in Fry and Pinter. When accused of this, Pinter replied:

The assumption that to verify what has happened and what is happening presents few problems, I take to be inaccurate. A character on the stage who can present no

convincing argument or information as to his past experiences, his present behaviour or his aspirations, nor give a comprehensive analysis of his motives is as legitimate and as worthy of attention as one who, alarmingly, can do all these things. The more acute the experience the less articulate its expression.<sup>16</sup> ✓✓

The same could be said also in defence of Fry's method of characterization, particularly in his comedies.

Fry comes closer still to the absurdists of our times in his attitude to the comic laughter and the manner of his provoking it in his plays. Anyone acquainted with Fry's essay on *Comedy* knows that to him the comic is not concerned with individual follies related to the accepted social norms; it is concerned with the spiritual being of the characters. In his plays such as *A Phoenix Too Frequent* and *The Lady's Not for Burning*, as also in the plays like *Waiting for Godot*, *Amedee*, *The Killer* and *The Caretaker*, the comic laughter issues from the farcical situation which is concomitant with the tragic. In these plays, to quote William I. Oliver, 'The subject of farce is the same as that of tragedy: the terrible or comic discovery of man's absurdity, ignorance and incompetence.'<sup>17</sup> Thus, suffering and misery and death, the ingredients of tragedy, in Fry, as also in the dramatists of the Absurd, have become a source of laughter. The point of departure in their plays is the limit beyond which pity and terror cease to be tragic and become indistinguishable from the farcical. Once or twice Shakespeare, too, crosses this limit in *King Lear*. With him, however, it is the other way round. He transmutes triviality into the tragic; while the absurdists including Fry trivialize the tragic into the laughable, which is consonant with their perception of the world. And the laughter has a more vital role to play in the absurdist plays than what it has in the conventional comedy. Here it is neither 'corrective' and 'thoughtful'<sup>18</sup> nor helpful to the progress of the élan vital.<sup>19</sup> It reveals the absurdity of our contemporary spiritual existence, and our mere recognition of it makes us will to live. Our capacity for laughter is an assertion of life in the midst of utter despair. As H. A. Smith says with reference to *Waiting for Godot*:

One way of not being defeated by the cosmic irony is to laugh at it. It is this ability to laugh—to enjoy the absurdity of the spectacle while still feeling its full pressure—that most distinguishes the attitude I have been dealing with from the older kind of romantic aspiration which looked before and after and pined for what is not. At the end of *Waiting for Godot* Estragon takes the cord from around his waist in order to hang himself, and his trousers fall down. Vladimir tells him to pull them up; the implication seems to be that there is a loss of spiritual dignity in giving up the struggle. It is tragic that spiritual dignity should have to be sustained with such a poverty of resources, but it is ridiculous too...<sup>20</sup>

Of this genre of the comic laughter, which characterizes the absurdist plays Fry's post-war plays, particularly *A Phoenix Too Frequent* and *The Lady's Not for Burning*, are among the most hilarious expressions. The hyperbole in Dynamene's speeches is not mere fanciful exaggeration: it is an irony which functions on a multiple level. When she says about Virilius:

... Where is the punctual eye  
And where is the cautious voice which made  
Balance-sheets sound like Homer and Homer sound  
Like balance-sheets?<sup>21</sup>

the exaggerated fancy in the first place implies Dynamene's unconscious disapproval of the cold conventional love-relationship Virilius offered her; secondly, it suggests a stirring in her of a desire for a fuller, more vital, life; and, thirdly, it helps keep up the surface playful atmosphere of the play. Each joke in the play is intimately related to the spiritual state of the characters and thus to the central theme of the resurrection of life out of the grave. Laughter in Fry is not an escape from or evasion of the tragic situation but an acceptance of it and going beyond. By a mere turn of the intuitive perception a tragic situation, a tragic character, appears absurdly ridiculous. It is this angle of perception which turns Fry's first two comedies, which are potentially tragedies, into plays of roaring laughter. The corpse, the graveyard, despair, experi-

ence of damnation, suicide, murder—all these become the source of laughter in the plays of Fry, as also in the plays of Beckett, Ionesco and Pinter.<sup>22</sup> And each guffaw of laughter illuminates an otherwise dark spiritual area, and thus helps us attain a fresh vision of ourselves. In his first two comedies, at least, Fry has achieved the kind of laughter which Ionesco regards as important.

‘I believe,’ says Ionesco, ‘Laughter is a very important thing and that serious people tend to be superficial . . . from time to time one should burst out laughing, and so burst the crust, the screen which gets between ourself and the virgin vision of things and the world. . .’<sup>23</sup>

It is in this sense that Thomas at one place in *The Lady's Not for Burning* while talking about human beings as ‘caddis-flies’ and ‘worm cases’ suddenly asks Jennet: ‘For God’s sake, shall we laugh?’ And when, she, in her dismay, wants to know the reason, he replies:

For the reason of laughter, since laughter is surely  
The surest touch of genius in creation. . .

and goes on to conclude:

That same laughter, madam, is an irrelevancy  
Which almost amounts to revelation.<sup>24</sup>

It is true that Christopher Fry, due both to personal and impersonal factors, changed his absurdist method after *The Lady's Not for Burning*. But this play remains the precursor in England of the characteristics associated with the plays of Beckett and Pinter and Simpson. The tramp is an archetypal myth in the absurdist drama, and of this myth Fry’s Thomas Mendip is the first manifestation. He might have been taken seriously in 1948-49, as much as his counterparts in the absurdist plays of the late fifties but for the fact that he spoke scintillating poetry. In times of tight-lipped conventions, the splendour of Fry was easily mistaken for an evidence of lack of substance, and the amazing agility of his mercurial imagination for a sign of frivolity. But, as it has now become clear to some of the critics of our time, Fry in the late forties

was trying to grapple with the same kind of baffling task as the absurdist dramatists in the late fifties: namely, to forge a language which could vitally communicate the vision of the absurd reality. The language that he finally evolved for his dramatic use in his comedies was the language of exaggeration and expansion. In devising this kind of language, which suited his poetic talent most happily, his aim was the same as that of the absurdists: to reorientate and revitalize the conventional speech which had become sterile and worthless. Only Fry's means to the end was different. What appears to be a mere jugglery of words in *A Phoenix too Frequent* and *The Lady's Not for Burning* is, in fact, an attempt to place them in a pattern of highly unusual relationship which jerks the audience out of its complacency into a fresh response by way of laughter. At times, the volubility even implies a silence or an incapacity for normal communication on the part of the speakers, though on the surface, it continues to be the method of exaggeration and expansion, as in most speeches of Thomas. When he says:

Why should these omnipotent bombinations  
 Go on with the deadly human anecdote, which  
 From the first was never more than remotely funny?  
 No; the time has come for tombs to tip  
 Their refuse; for the involving ivy, the briar,  
 The convolutions of convoluvus,  
 To disentangle and make way  
 For the last great ascendancy of dust,  
 Sucked into judgement by a cosmic yawn  
 Of boredom. . . .<sup>25</sup>

the torrent of words, apart from functioning on different levels of irony, suggests a vacancy in the experience just as pauses and chopped sentences do in the characters of the absurdist plays. This is a kind of outburst 'into a great babel of noises' which suggests a howling emptiness of experience in what Ihab Hassan has termed as 'The Literature of Silence'.<sup>26</sup> Like the characters of Henry Miller and Samuel Beckett, Thomas Mendip of Fry 'sound(s) all the notes of the new hollow speech . . . .'<sup>27</sup> R. D. Smith, in an essay on the con-

temporary theatre, recognizes this relationship in the use of language between Fry and the absurdist dramatists. Discussing how Beckett and Ionesco have been driven to extreme linguistic shifts in order to invest the conventional language with new emotion, he points out:

Fry tried this first, let it not be forgotten, by the conventional poetic method of heightened speech. . . . His successors, feeling that Fry's experiment wasn't working, and also having different things to express, tried a different method. They decided (again) to wring the neck of rhetoric. Where he blew up the language into rainbow bubbles, they fired it into hard-cutting jewels. He extended, they compressed.<sup>28</sup>

I hope I have not given the impression that I wish Fry to be placed among the absurdist dramatists. His faith is rooted in the Christianity of the humanist tradition which asserts itself distinctly at the end of each of his plays. What distinguishes Fry's plays is that they offer a way out of the dilemma and riddle of existence while those of Ionesco, Beckett and Pinter deliberately refrain from doing anything of that kind. But what is remarkable is that the resolution in Fry is never arbitrarily imposed: it grows through and beyond the experiences of the absurd existence in a Godless universe. It is a resolution reached in another experience of mystery and riddle: the experience of true human love. But Fry proceeds to the resolution through confronting the same experience and vision which characterize the absurdist. In the post-Second War English theatre Fry remains the first significant expression of the consciousness of the Absurd and is in many ways the precursor of Pinter.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Among those who hold this view, mention may be made of Denis Donoghue and Kenneth Tynan. See Donoghue's chapter on Fry in his book *The Third Voice* (1958) and Tynan's on 'Prose and the Playwright' in *Curtains*. See also John Russell Taylor, *Anger and After* (Pelican 1963), p. 315.

2. See Martin Esslin, *The Theatre of the Absurd*, New York, 1961. ✓
3. Quoted by W. I. Oliver in his essay 'Between Absurdity and the Playwright' in *Modern Drama*, New York, 1965, p. 16.
4. *The Twentieth Century*, February 1961. ✓
5. *Theatre Now*, London, 1952.
6. These *Letters* are published in *Shakespeare Survey*, 1952.
7. Christopher Fry, 'The Contemporary Theatre,' a B.B.C. Talk published in *The Listener*, Feb. 23, 1950.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Plays and Players*, April 1965.
10. Quoted by J. R. Taylor, *Anger and After*, p. 300.
11. *Contemporary Theatre*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 4, 1963, p. 140.
12. Christopher Fry, *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, O.U.P., 1949, p. 6.
13. Christopher Fry, *The Lady's Not for Burning*, O.U.P., 1949, p. 54.
14. *Ibid.* p. 58.
15. *Ibid.* pp. 58-59.
16. Quoted by J. R. Taylor, *Anger and After*, pp. 330-1.
17. Bogard and Oliver (Ed.), *Modern Drama*, p. 5. ✓
18. See George Meredith, *An Essay on Comedy*, Constable, London, 1913.
19. See Henri Bergson, *Laughter*, Macmillan, London, 1921. ✓
20. *Contemporary Theatre*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 4, pp. 162-3. ✓
21. *A Phoenix Too Frequent*, p. 5.
22. In a separate essay entitled 'Notes on the Nature of the Comic Laughter' I have discussed elaborately the function of laughter in Fry and the absurdist dramatists. ✓
23. *Plays and Players*, April 1965.
24. *The Lady's Not for Burning*, p. 50.
25. *Ibid.* p. 33.
26. Ihab Hassan, 'The Literature of Silence', *Encounter*, January 1967. ✓
27. *Ibid.*
28. *Contemporary Theatre*, Stratford-upon-Avon Studies, 4, pp. 127-8. ✓

## BOOK REVIEWS

*The Lyrical Novel: Studies in Hermann Hesse, Andre Gide, and Virginia Woolf* by Ralph Freedman, Princeton University Press, Princeton, paperbacks, 1966, pp. 294.

PROFESSOR Freedman has written a work of extensive learning in taking up the subject of the Lyrical Novel with examples from German, French and English. To evaluate such a work properly, we would have to establish a norm for the right proportion between 'learning' and literary criticism. We use the word 'learning' deliberately, instead of the word scholarship, for there is a stage in the study of a new field, when the subject is not sufficiently broken in and supplied to give the feel of scholarship rather than of learning. Every one of us interested in comparative criticism and in criticism of the novel will read this book with profit. The plan of the work is a rapid and somewhat disconnected treatment of many points. Perhaps this is a necessity in order to cover the wide field and we should not ask the book to do something different from its objective. But we cannot help feeling that if the mind did not jump so methodically from point to point after an all-too-brief halt, the picture of the lyrical novel would have been seen more steadily. As it is, in this treatment, the lyrical novel and many connected objects of discussion are abstractly conceptualised. That, too, perhaps is a result of learned method. The concrete meaning, the actual application to the works of art—which are after all the heart of the matter—must consequently be thinned out.

Perhaps critical distinctions, the discriminations between related kinds of art or significance that are not the same, also, suffer as a result. For instance, for part of the time, it may appear that the lyrical novel is the same as the poetic novel. At other times, the lyrical novel may appear to be described as the subjective kind of writing in the novel. In the opening chapter, the lyrical novel is referred to as both a form and a quality of the novel, and it is obvious that these descriptions apply to different works. We do not feel certain that we are talking of the same subject all the time.

However pertinent the subjective fantasies of the Symbolists are to the lyrical novel, we can only consider the explanation of the prose-poems of Baudelaire a digression. In line with the spirit of these references to Baudelaire is a passage of comment on D. H. Lawrence. Professor Freedman writes, 'In contemporary fiction, a poetic form has often been associated with D. H. Lawrence. Compelled to encompass all external life, Lawrence infused characters and scenes with lyrical intensity and often abbreviated his figures into types which his vision illuminated. Lawrence described life from a perspective in which Man fuses with the External world therein to find his soul.' Has poetic form been often associated with D. H. Lawrence? Was he compelled (and by what?) to encompass all or even most external life? Is not there in *Women in Love* and *The Rainbow*, and perhaps even more largely in the later novels, a tense conflict with the external world rather than a fusion with it? But one must leave these questions here, as part of the intellectual stimulus, indeed challenge, to the re-examination of the ground the author covers.

The discussion of the novels of Hermann Hesse does not appear to be concerned so much with their lyrical quality as with their symbolical philosophical meaning. These are subjected to Jung's Analytical psychology, as no doubt symbols and visions whether in poems, philosophy, confessions or dreams may be subjected. The central problem of Demian is the problem of the sensual self—and the harmonious or symbolic self. If this is only the journey towards the integration of the self, Hesse is a symbolic novelist with a psychological content. The lyrical separates itself from this by a predominance of a feeling traceable to the personality, either of the author or the protagonist, binding the whole work together. Hesse's theme is of a kind of knowledge, not a feeling and this kind of knowledge is universal and symbolic and not personal or lyrical. In Professor Freedman's own description, there is a very good case for considering Hesse a philosophical novelist.

Is the lyrical quality to be identified (simply) with intensity about symbols? Hesse is a romantic novelist because his visions and dreams are not Mrs Brown's, as Virginia Woolf would say. But the lyrical novel is a type that cuts across the romantic world and the real, as well as the romantic and the classical

as the author himself shows in his fine examination of the work of Gide. In the section on Gide, the outlines of the lyrical novel emerge more in the centre of the picture, and more clearly. Confession and objectivity are seen as the two poles of the work of Gide. Confession, the urge of the vigorous scruples of conscience, is a personal need—and it is the moving power, the sincerity which can be felt so vividly as the expression on the face of Gide the novelist. This active conscience is an aspect of the Protestant ethic and as an attitude towards the real world it links up with the novelistic part of the lyrical novel. Gide's aesthetic effort was to impose a Racine-like precision and lucidity on the intensely personal awareness of the conscience. Gide himself describes the classical aspect of his work, as the author says, as the necessity for perceived reality set against the symbolic nature of the objects. If the lyrical novel has a natural form of which it is an æsthetic refinement and culmination, it is the diary or the journal as Gide uses it in person as well as the novelist inside the novel. This journal practises an analytical detachment—the lyrical novel is moving towards the pure novel in its technique away from the man's poetic feeling with which it may in its beginning be involved. This journal is not the sole truth—in fact there is an intersection of different sincere expressions, making each of these personal visions a component of that complex structure which is typical of the lyrical *novel*. Gide's emphasis is on the purity of the novel, on the novel most precisely as a novel and not as a poem. The question of the lyrical novel and the central tradition of the novel turns round the achievement of this objective stated by Gide. Perhaps because the discussion of the text is in the original in the case of Virginia Woolf, this part comes out the most strongly. A second advantage of which the author makes full use is the critical writing of Virginia Woolf on the novel. The relation between the outer and the inner is more concretely and pragmatically dealt with by Virginia Woolf both as a critic and a novelist than by either Hesse or Gide. To reach the kind of novel she wrote, she felt she must be further back from life, not at the point where it would look like life looks like to Mrs Brown. The lyrical novelist takes the world back into a retreat where it becomes a 'soliloquy in solitude'. An undisturbed individual

soliloquy has that quality of unifying tone in its aesthetic impression which E. M. Foster described as melody in *Aspects of the Novel*. The relation between reality in the other novels and reality in the lyrical novel is in giving the moment its whole effect—in saturating it with the effects of all its elements. Perhaps fullness of sensuous response to the natural world and the human world is more relevant an element in the lyrical novel than has been emphasized in this work. The pleasure in precision, in the simplest factual detail which has become valuable as a symbol appears very beautifully in a passage from *The Waves* the author quotes: ‘I see the beetle’, said Susan. ‘It is black, I see; it is green, I see; I am tied down with single words. But you wander off; you slip away; you rise up higher with words and words in phrases.’

The last chapter on Retrospect and Prognosis is critically the most speculative part of the work. Apart from the reference to Sterne and Joyce who do have in them a powerful lyrical current, substantial gain for the lyrical novel is represented by the realization that a lyrical passion may harden into the dramatic or what is on the surface a novel of action or even reportage, Malraux’s *La Condition Humaine*, the example chosen is a good one. In unity of feeling and compact movement, *Temps de Mepris* would be an even better one. In any case, the union of a certain objectivity or events in the public world with a dominant passion is a distinct advance for the lyrical novel in its quality as pure novel.

The personal framework and the unity of current of sensuous evocations in Camus are what anybody who recognizes a lyrical novel would like to examine in detail.

Whether William Golding and a less well known novelist Hugh Sykes Davies in his *Papers of Andrew Melmoth* are or are not lyrical novelists are interesting questions started off by the range and intellectual enquiry in Professor Freedman’s work.

DAMODAR THAKUR

✓ *Shakespeare and Spenser* by W. B. C. Watkins, Princeton University Press, 1966, \$ 2.95, pp. 339.

*Shakespeare and Spenser* first came out seventeen years ago. It is currently being reissued in a new garb which not only would make the wide reading and critical penetration of the author available to a larger number of readers but also would focus attention upon a writer regarded in his life-time as the prince of poets but now several centuries after abandoned to dull lectures in classrooms.

I, for one, would go miles to greet this addition to the Princeton Paperbacks, for *Shakespeare and Spenser* is a learned book, happily free from the musty odour that often lingers around scholarly tomes. His manner of writing—forceful, forthright, fluent—fits neatly the deep scholarship and the subtle acumen that the writer has brought to bear upon the subject of his study.

In this book, Mr. Watkins, who is lecturer in English at Louisiana State University, explores the themes and techniques which Shakespeare, a master of dramatic poetry, had in common with Spenser, a master of narrative poetry. His contention is that as creative writers Spenser and Shakespeare complement as well as supplement each other and with this end in view he uses the work of either writer to illustrate the work of the other. ✓

This engrossing quest for thematic unity has given to the book which comprises eight 'autonomous' essays a refreshing touch of compactness. In the first essay *Shakespeare's Banquet of Sense*, taking *Venus and Adonis* as his cue, Mr. Watkins traces its relation to the other Elizabethan Ovidian poems. Furthermore, he discusses also the interdependence of physical and spiritual in Spenser and Shakespeare. This motif recurs in the second, the fifth and sixth essays and serves to knit up the sprawling skein that makes up the book. Another quest of the author is analyzing the idea of melancholy, due to the transience of time and the instability of human life, which is a significant leit-motif in both Shakespeare and Spenser.

The most interesting and probably the most satisfying essay in the book is the one entitled Marriage Song: A coda. This sensitive and careful appreciation of Spenser's marriage odes

is followed by another well-written essay, *Spenser's Palace of Art* where one finds a brilliant analysis of the pictorial wealth of the poetry of Spenser who was profoundly influenced by the dictum *ut pictura poesis*.

The book is thought-inspiring, informative, is marked by catholicity of taste and shows wide reading. But to a careful reader the misprints are probably likely to cause as much annoyance as the pips in an orange.

DILIP KUMAR SEN

*A World Elsewhere: The Place of Style in American Literature*, by Richard Poirier, New York, Oxford University Press, 1966.

*Southern Renaissance: The Literature of the Modern South*, Edited by Louis D. Rubin, Jr. and Robert D. Jacobs, Baltimore, The John Hopkins Press, 1966.

RICHARD POIRIER'S *A World Elsewhere* is an astonishingly illuminating book in the sense that the writer has thrown a new light on a very interesting subject—the place of style in American literature. The 252 pages of the book bear the stamp of that consummate scholarship, clear analysis and critical assessment that one has come to expect of Mr. Poirier, especially after the publication of his *The Comic Sense of Henry James*, a critical study of the early novels of Henry James.

'American literature,' Mr. Poirier points out in his preface, 'is a struggle with already existing literary, social and historical organization for power over environment and over language itself, and it is possible to describe this struggle only by giving critically evaluative attention to a writer's performance.' Mr. Poirier has chosen for illustrating his thesis quite familiar passages from the works of well-known writers. And very lucidly he has shown that 'even where familiarity has made readers most at home with American literature there exists unrecognized, within the language, very discomfoting agitations of style.'

Writing, Mr. Poirier contends, is an act of power, an act

by which reality is seized and dominated. In the works of Faulkner, James and Thoreau, style is the final authority to which the reader may appeal for 'verification of reality.' He discusses the styles of Dreiser, Edith Wharton and other well-known twentieth century writers and points out the increasing tendency of American literature 'to forego the Emersonian effort to build therefore your own world.' The new American style, according to Mr. Poirier, was meant 'to restore the hitherto unexpressed dimensions of the self into space where it would encounter none of the antagonistic social systems which might stifle it.' Stylistic revolution is not the exclusive product of any particular historical situation, or the exclusive property of any national literature. In fact, the persistent tendency in American literature is to assert against conventional styles another kind of style that may be defined as 'a consistent and definite expansion of pronounced personality.' The emphasis is on the creation through language of an environment in which the 'inner consciousness of the "hero-poet" can express itself, an environment in which he can sound publicly what he privately is.' American literature, Mr. Poirier asserts, must be read as a struggle to achieve 'even a verbal consciousness of freedom.'

Mr. Poirier's critical insight and sensitivity, his fine eye for resemblance and contrast, his humour and good sense have enabled him to write a first-rate book. If I have any reservation, it is that Mr. Poirier, in describing Hawthorne's power of observation, may have made a too-hasty comment. Hawthorne's power of observation, according to Mr. Poirier, 'actually depends on that shadowy style of portraiture.' But does it not depend on something more deep? Hawthorne's creative process has very sincerely been described by his wife Sophia Hawthorne in a letter to her mother: 'He does not meddle with the clear true picture that is painted on his mind. He lifts the curtain, and we see a microcosm of nature, so cunningly portrayed that truth itself seems to have been the agent of its appearance.' (Rose Hawthorne Lathrop: *Memories of Hawthorne*, pp. 70-71).

The flowering of the Southern literature is one of the most

significant literary events in this century. Louis D. Rubin and Robert D. Jacobs, the joint editors of *Southern Renaissance*, who were also the joint editors of *The Hopkins Review*, planned for their journal a series of essays written by persons of varying outlook and interests in which the more obvious characteristics of the host of Southern writers might be touched upon. The response was overwhelming and the present volume is the result.

The essays presented in the volume may broadly be divided into two categories: those which attempt to delineate common themes and those which present a detailed analysis of individual authors. The volume, in four parts, *The Mind of the South*, *The Themes of Southern Literature*, *The Novelists of the South*, and *The Poetry of the South*, makes a penetrating analysis of the literature of the modern South. The arrangement is so skilful that materials gathered from different writers, have been welded into a sustained coherent discourse.

The volume opens with an interesting essay, 'The Southern Temper,' by Robert B. Heilman. 'The Southern temper,' the writer points out, 'is marked by coincidence of the sense of the concrete, a sense of the elemental, a sense of the ornamental, a sense of the representative and a sense of the totality.' This sense of the concrete, the lesson that fiction and poetry must be grounded in the sensory world is apparent in the writings of the well-known writers like Faulkner, Robert Penn Warren, Thomas Wolfe and others. It is also interesting to be told that a look at the roster of Southerners who have won distinctions in the history of the nation reveal that virtually all of them, with the single exception of the soldiers, have been workers in the realm of words. And, as another contributor points out, that it is no accident that the two great rhetoricians to occupy the White House, Abraham Lincoln and Woodrow Wilson, were men of Southern nurture. But one feels somewhat reluctant to accept his assertion that the South is 'history' and not 'real'. It might be the other way round. It is history based on reality.

Part III of the volume starts with a very interesting chapter: *Literature in the South: an exchange of views*. The question posed is: How can one account for the appearance in Mississippi, of all places, of William Faulkner? The cultural back-

ground, in fact, during Faulkner's formative period was extremely forbidding in the South. But, as one essayist points out, this very hostile environment helped Faulkner in his literary venture. He responded more intensely to the forces of growth and decay and stored up everything he had seen and heard and felt for a later evocation.

The last two parts of the volume: *The Novelists of the South* and *The Poetry of the South*, deal with an array of literary figures of the modern South and quite a successful attempt has been made to evaluate their works with the yardstick of critical insight.

My only quarrel with the book is that at least two outstanding Southern writers who happen to be black—Richard Wright and Ralph Ellison—seem to have been segregated, they find no place in the book. The editors of the present volume in their introduction to another book, *South—Modern Southern Literature in its Cultural Setting*, (Doubleday & Co., N. Y.), very rightly comment: 'To speak of the South today is to speak of the Negro . . . . It was with the publication of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in 1951 that a Southern Negro novelist became a novelist who was a Southerner and a Negro.' Quite true, but why oust him then? In fact, the inclusion of some of the well-known Negro-American writers would have enhanced the purpose and value of the book.

BARUN MITRA

*The Cave and the Mountain* by Wilfrid Stone, London, O.U.P., 1966.

MR. WILFRID STONE'S recent survey of E. M. Forster is the latest addition to the rapidly multiplying *Fosteriana*. One of the ablest studies had been by Lionel Trilling more than two decades back. It had set the tone for a fair yet critical reassessment of the novelist. Trilling had done for Forster what F. R. Leavis had in recent times attempted successfully, and on a much larger scale, for D. H. Lawrence; that is, he had extrica-

ted the artist from the bog of adverse and unfair criticism and had rehabilitated him in the world of major writers. Mr. Stone's book is an able successor to Mr. Trilling's and other equally qualified studies that have followed.

A deliberately cultivated toned down style and an ambiguity of manner had long discouraged Forster's critics. As he flaunted no obviously experimental technique, he was rated much below Eliot, Joyce and Virginia Woolf. Flustered and weary critics too readily dismissed him as a minor novelist. That was in the twenties and thirties, when leaving out a few endowed with a finer perception, like Virginia Woolf, critics in general had little patience for him. Few could see beyond his Edwardian liberal background. The war years which had shaped his later development, were not properly accounted for. There was no question of doubting the merit of A Passage To India, but the most even a discerning critic as F. R. Leavis would allow it, was the commendation 'a minor classic.'

The publication of Forster's Aspects Of The Novel (1927), and Peter Burra's introduction to A Passage (Everyman's Library, 1934), were partly responsible for a new development in Forsterian criticism. Forster was found to have adopted as novel and as revolutionary a technique as any of the modern writers. Rhythmic patterns he had advocated in his discussion of the novel, were recognised in his own novels. Various and sometimes confusing interpretations of symbols employed in his novels, were offered. As regards assessment of themes and values, Forster came under fire from several quarters. There were the two extreme factions whom he had annoyed, the neo-Catholic supporters of T. S. Eliot such as Montgomery Belgion 'The Diabolism of Mr. E. M. Forster', The Criterion, XIV, Oct. 1934, 54-73) and the Marxist school whose representative Mr. D. S. Savage voices disapproval in 'The Withered Branch'. E. M. Forster had been too independent for their liking, and the insidious attacks on their values, naturally, had not been overlooked.

Whether it was an evaluation of theme or of style, criticism of the novelist suffered from two drawbacks. One, the lack of a proper perspective which distance of time alone could remedy. Current criticism including Mr. Stone's, by looking at Forster from across a vista of forty years, does correct our

vision. The second drawback consists of arbitrary assumptions, too general studies entailed by a deplorable lack of material about circumstances of Forster's personal life. His shyness and reticence had discouraged probing eyes. Further, critics themselves had never bothered to collect relevant data, and had depended entirely on existing and published researches, chiefly about the Bloomsbury circle and the Georgian Literary world. This pertained to the general background only, and little was known about Forster's childhood and adolescence. Mr. Stone sets right a long felt want in this direction by carrying on first a thorough exploration of the novelist's earlier years. He claims to have spent a considerable time investigating sources and collecting unpublished and unknown material. The best advantage Prof. Stone has had over other critics, is Mr. Forster's direct help in the form of conversations, books, mementos, pictures and clippings. The book has amply profited by it.

American researches are exhaustive to the point of fitting all available material into convenient categories. Where the right thing is to let facts throw up a pattern of development, Mr. Stone imposes on us a thesis at the very beginning of his otherwise admirable book: 'Every Englishman of the present day is by implication either a Benthamite or a Coleridgean.' He admits this is an oversimplification but none the less is hard pressed to prove that Forster was a Coleridgean. And this, when he has already asserted that no novelist could ever be a Benthamite. But Forster is in fact reconciled to Benthamism. Had he not expressed qualified appreciation of his Clapham ancestors, who were nothing if not utilitarian?

A more profitable alternative for Mr. Stone would have been to view Forster in the context of the solid tradition of the English novel. Incidentally, few critics so far have cared to study the novelist from this angle, and so his actual contribution to the development of English prose fiction has never been properly assessed.

With Forster the individual artist, Mr. Stone is on surer ground. New ways of looking at the artist are suggested. The writer's roots are explored because 'the dialectics of his art began in the conflicts of his inheritance.' The conflicts were numerous and the basic aim of both the man and the artist

was to resolve or 'connect' these. There is first the tension between what Mr. Stone describes as the Benthamite and Coleridgean traditions Forster had inherited; then that between the Thornton ancestors and his mother's family, his home and the outside world, prophecy and comedy, poetry and passion, the conscious and the unconscious selves; so many to be traced in rhythmic patterns through the entire length of his work. Mr. Stone invites us to see Forster's writings from the fantasies to *A Passage* as gradual efforts to seek his identity. In his earlier work the search is incomplete for the tensions remain unresolved. The writer is never entirely free from personal involvement, and so all the novels but the last, end up as thematic and therefore artistic failures. In *Howards End* for instance, Forster advocates continuance in a sterile quarantine, since all the male characters have been removed from the scene. For the sake of a beautiful musical pattern, the Schlegel sisters and Forster indirectly have sacrificed deeper human interests.

The search for an identity, Prof. Stone believes, was accompanied by a gradual weaning from home environment. Cambridge, Greece and Italy, the middle East and India, are successive stages in the transition from personal fable to universal symbolism. Forster's main characters, which are barely concealed self-portraits, reveal according to Mr. Stone a deep-seated emasculation which probably was generated by a close association with the mother and aunts in his early childhood. Forster was acutely conscious of this and tries to face this and other problems squarely in his novels. Cambridge helped to focus this tension, but not till he had enlarged his mental horizon and cultivated what Mr. Stone terms as a 'historical' imagination through engagements with history in Europe, Alexandria and India, is he able to throw into objective relief larger tensions, metaphysical in nature.

With regard to Cambridge, it is hoped Mr. Stone has finally put an end to the tiresome efforts of critics to prove that Forster was really and genuinely influenced by the Bloomsbury circle and G. E. Moore. Mr. Stone proves conclusively that it was an earlier generation of Cambridge Apostles and Forster's tutors, and not the Bloomsbury intellectuals who had distilled the essential Cambridge for the novelist.

Particularly interesting is the closing chapter where Mr. Stone studies Forster's non-fictional work including his literary criticism, which was highly idiosyncratic but sound. His observations on different writers, specially contemporaries like Joyce, Eliot, Yeats, Virginia Woolf and Lawrence are noted. Following F. R. Leavis, useful distinctions are made. Forster is studied anew in relation with them. With D. H. Lawrence he is found to share in common a prophetic vision and he is more sympathetic to Lawrence, Hardy, and Tolstoy than he is to Joyce, Eliot and Virginia Woolf, despite his admiration of the technical achievement of the latter group.

A valuable point which Prof. Stone barely touches upon is the tension he notices between prophecy and comedy in the novels. It would have been worth while to follow this point in greater detail since it would have marked out the particular genre to which Forster's novels belonged. Further it would have formulated clearly his representative significance in the world of fiction. So many questions are left open. A leading one is how far Forster has been successful in reconciling Jane Austenian social comedy with Proustian rhythms and Kafkaesque reduction of the story. To top it all there are the epic and prophetic notes sounded in the manner of Shakespeare and Tolstoy. It is hoped that future critics would take into account these broader questions and not concentrate on ingenious interpretations of symbols in the novels only.

CHITRA ROY

*The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, ed. C. T. Onions, with the assistance of G. W. S. Friedrichsen and R. V. Burchfield, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1966, 70 sh.

THIS last work of the greatest lexicographer of the century, the late Dr Onions, is a source of perennial pleasure for all those who are interested in English words. Philosophically inclined Indian scholars, attached to the concept of *Shabdham Brahman*, may be pleased to find in the infinite intricacies of

English etymology an operation of the Ultimate Reality. Those in this country who are learning the language will find the pointed, brief indications of lexical relationship lending strength and accuracy to their understanding of words. Of such attractive lexical relationship I offer a few examples. Take the two synonymous words, 'rascal' and 'rapscallion' (a frequent word in the comedy of manners): 'rascal' was derived in French from Lat. *rādere* (scrape, scratch, shave); O. F. 'raschier' changed into 'rascaille'; it reached the English language in the fourteenth century, meaning an inferior deer of a herd; in the fifteenth century, it meant a man of low station, in the sixteenth century, it referred to an unprincipled fellow, used in that meaning (as Onions indicates in his *Shakespeare Glossary*) by Shakespeare and Ben Jonson. In the seventeenth century, after the fashion of Middle Dutch 'rappaille' (rabble), a 'p' was added to the word which also acquired the obscure element—*allian*, *-allion* (cf. *tatterdemallion*, meaning ragged fellow)—and thus became rapscallion. In our times, the shorter word has replaced the more mouthful word, thus bearing out Jespersen's observation that the language tends towards morphological shortenings.

✓ In respect of scores of words of Indian origin, an Indian reader will learn much. The information given in entries under *India* mentioning Sindhu (Sanskrit), Hendu (Avesta), Hindu (Old Persian), India (Greek) are well-known to scholars in this country but perhaps not the fact that the word *Indian* in early substantive use was applied specifically to the 'mahout'. I have my doubts about some words of Indian origin: dhoby, Devanagri, badmash, budgerow, Dravidian. The word 'bungalow' puzzles me. This dictionary has the meaning, 'one-storied lightly built house'; it says that in the eighteenth century the word was 'bungale', and the word is derived from Gujarati *bangalo* and Hindi *bangla*. Perhaps the derivation can be traced along a different route. The Sanskrit name of Bengal was *Banga*; it became *Bangāla* in 10th-c. Bengali verse; presently, for invading Turks it became *Banglā*; the Portuguese who came to the country in the 16th c. gave the generic name *Bānglā* to the region and also to the characteristically Bengali pattern of house; from Portuguese the word

passed on to English. Indian readers will be interested in words such as *blighty*, *compound*, *wallah*.

It is interesting to learn that 'explain' and 'esplanade' are derived from the same Latin word 'explānāre', flatten out; that perhaps explains the name of the nerve-centre of Calcutta's traffic, Esplanade. There are words of unknown origin yet challenging the attention of Philologists: *junk* (worthless stuff, rubbish), *bummaree* (middleman in Billingsgate fish trade), *flummery*, *fluke*, *funk*, *humbug*, *hunch*, *kit*, *bob*, *bogus*, *canvass*, *caramel*. Equally challenging are such jingling compounds as: harum-scarum, helter-skelter, higgledy-piggledy, hurly-burly, hitty-missy, hanky-panky, hullabaloo, hugger-mugger, hob-nob, hocus pocus, humdrum, humpty-dumpty, hoity-toity, hokey-pokey, hodge-podge, holus-bolus. Readers interested in name-words will be pleased to read the entries under *Quisling*, *Mackintosh*, *hotchkiss*, *hooligan*, *jockteleg*, *kitcat*, *knickerbocker*, *bloomer*, *bobby*, *boycott*, *bunkum*, *chauvinism*, *damask*.

If I were thrown on an island Crusoe-fashion, I would not mind my isolation if I had this dictionary with me.

A. BOSE

✓ *W. B. Yeats and Japan*, Oshima Shotaro, The Hokuseido Press, Tokyo, 1965.

THIS is one of the most beautifully produced books that I have had the opportunity of seeing in recent years. Encased within elegant, semi-soft-board covers, printed on excellent smooth paper (the like of which we do not see in this country), the typography unfailingly pleasing to the eye, this volume contains a number of photo-plates of letters from W. B. Yeats and Jack Butler Yeats, several photographs of Yeats, his children, Elizabeth Yeats (Lolly), Sato's sword, scenes from Nōh performances, a typical Tanto sword, a splendid Nōh mask and a Kara-ori costume. The 'letter-press' (as the Victorians were fond of calling the reading matter) contains some letters (accompanied by helpful bio-critical footnotes in

Japanese and English) which have not been included in the *Letters of Yeats* by Allan Wade; four autograph poems by W. B. Y.; five essays ('Yeats and Nōh plays', 'Yeats and the Zen philosophy', 'Meru', 'The Elements', 'Buddha's Emptiness'); reports on some interviews; books and periodicals on Yeats in Japan. Prepared on the occasion of the Yeats centenary by Shotaro Oshima, D. Litt., Professor of English literature at Waseda University, this volume is an admirable testimony to Yeats's impact on Japan. No one who wishes to understand Yeats's relations with Nōh and Zen philosophy can afford to ignore Professor Oshima's essays. I find the professor's note on pp. 64-65 on Sato's sword wholly illuminating.

It is a pity that we have nothing in India to show as a parallel to this volume although no Indian scholar misses an opportunity to dissertate on (and in that process, somewhat inflate) W. B. Y.'s response to Indian thought. ✓

A. BOSE

*Arrows of Intellect*, Asloob Ahmad Ansari, Naya Kitabghar, Aligarh, 1965.

EVEN at the risk of perpetrating a lyrical book-review, I would say that this book, however unlovely its physical appearance be, is undoubtedly one of the best among scholarly interpretations of English literature undertaken in India. And when such Blake authorities as Foster Damon, Geoffrey Keynes and Northrop Frye give the book high praise, one who has not dipped much down in the deep fathoms of Blakeana but has rested content with the beauty and power of Blake's poetry perceptible even on its upper layers, may, with a sense of humility, feel impressed. ✓

'Arrows of Intellect', a characteristic phrase of Blake's, symbolizes the heroic view of the power and process of the Imaginative faculty that came naturally to the poet of *Milton, Jerusalem* and the *Four Zoas*. In exploring the background

and the nature of the concept of Imagination, Mr Ansari has gone to the roots of Blake's view of Reality of which the poetic vision was an arc, a significant and inalienable arc. For too long a time, a real understanding of this Reality (an understanding, not necessarily an acceptance of it) eluded the grasp of even ardent admirers of Blake's poetry who allowed themselves to be stirred by the poet's lyrical energy but failed to see the glimmer in the lyrics and the radiance in the later longer poems of the intellectual foundations and ramifications of Blake's unswerving ideas of Life and Reality. It was not realized that one could not praise the lyrics and at the same time ignore the intellectual content—a dichotomy of aesthetic content and form that would have horrified A. C. Bradley. The devoted and undaunted (I say undaunted because the uncompromisingly personal diction and symbolism of Blake may very well discourage most readers except a few brave scholars who are prepared to give a whole life-time of study to Blake), the devoted and undaunted industry of the great Blake scholars of this century has by now illuminated most of Blake's symbols and therefore the thought imaged in the symbols. Now the time has arrived for launching on a synoptic view of Blake's achievement. As far as I can see, Mr Ansari firmly treads the road to such a synoptic view and, in the process, throws new illumination on details here and there.

I think Mr Ansari has entirely succeeded in achieving his initial aim, viz. to prove that Blake did not stand in intellectual isolation in his age, that the poet's sustained animus against Bacon, Locke, Newton was no personalist bigotry but the expression of an energetic rejection of what he considered to be a false, stultifying and inhuman view of life. Mr Ansari has succeeded in his aim because he has constantly and firmly placed at the centre of his study the rather complex nature of Blake's concept of Imagination. In Mr Ansari's study, the centre and the periphery are in accord to a degree of perfection that would have delighted the geometric vision of Blake himself or the greatest Blakean of our times, Yeats. Mr Ansari's examination of the philosophical position of Blake, Locke and Newton is objective, fair and luminous on the background to the poet's concepts. Having established

the background, Mr Ansari examines Wordsworth's and Coleridge's (particularly the latter's) view of Imagination in correlation to Blake's although there is no suggestion (we do not have any factual data for such a suggestion) that either Blake or Wordsworth-Coleridge had any awareness of each other's position in the matter. The argument thus ultimately turns out to be in favour of the tremendous diffusion of the *zeitgeist* of that colossal movement in West European civilization that started two centuries ago and which we lazily label as Romanticism, a term that, as Jaques Barzun has so disconcertingly shown, meant contrary things to different users of it. Mr Ansari, better than most writers on English poetry of the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth century, establishes the romanticist significance of Blake.

✓ I am impressed by Mr Ansari's correlation between Blake and the great Urdu poet, Iqbal, I only wish this correlation were a trifle fuller than it is. I would have welcomed a consideration, in the context of Blake's Imagination, of two questions: ✓

- (1) What light does Blake's concept of Imagination throw on the fact that, as a poet, he moved from the form of the short lyric to that of long heroic-symbolic poems?
- (2) Would this concept of Imagination apply equally well to the poet's paintings and engraving?

This book establishes Mr Ansari's position as a powerful scholar and critic in our country on English poetics and poetry.

A. BOSE

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