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## A MODERN APPROACH TO TENNYSON

BY V. A. SHAHANE

CRITICISM has not yet come to terms with Tennyson in spite of many pious claims. Tennyson the man and poet symbolizes the Victorian age about which Englishmen not merely have a divided mind but also an uneasy conscience. Tennyson is in part a misunderstood and in part an inadequately understood poet and my aim in this paper, besides expounding the modern critical approach to Tennyson, is to reduce the area of misunderstanding or understanding about him. The modern approach to Tennyson, which is obviously different from the traditional and conventional view, is not quite an offshoot of what is regarded as the 'New Criticism', though it is much influenced by many modes and practices of 'new critics'. This modern approach is not quite divorced from a historical view of Tennyson's achievement and my objective in this paper is to strike a balance between these two ways of evaluating Tennyson and thus come to closer terms with his work.

First I propose to present certain broad aspects of the traditional attitude to Tennyson so that it could be distinguished from the modern approach. This conventional view is shown in two stages: stage one which commences from the mid-nineteenth century and extends over about forty years shows the hero-worship of Tennyson as a crowning glory of English poetry. Stage two begins towards the end of the nineteenth century and becomes quite pronounced in 1913 when A. C. Bradley delivered his famous lecture on the 'Reaction against Tennyson'. Recent Tennyson criticism has gone far ahead of the position outlined by Bradley.

The Tennyson legend has to be seen in a historical perspective. Tennyson became the Victorian Sir Oracle and an object of fantastic hero-worship. For example, in a contemporary encyclopaedia containing a chapter on 'Hundred Greatest Men' the list was headed by Horace and ended with Tennyson! The Tennyson legend reached such absurd proportions as outlined by Lord Morley. He declared that Britain could be divided between two classes: one consisting of those who had a

Tennyson at home and the other of those who didn't have one. The age itself was named after him and his achievement was identified with the characteristics of the Victorian age. The Victorian age was too massive and complex in its corpus of thought and feeling to be generalized about, yet certain basic qualities are clearly revealed. Despite the strong advocacy of rationalism, Benthamism and utilitarianism the Victorian age was marked by an odd sense of sentimentality. G. M. Young in his classic portrait of Victorian England gives the following example of Victorian sentimentalism:

Once at Bowood, when Tom Moore was singing, one by one the audience slipped away in sobs; finally the poet himself broke down and bolted. We are in an age when, if brides sometimes swooned at the altar, Ministers sometimes wept at the Table; and one undergraduate has to prepare another undergraduate for the news that a third undergraduate has doubts about the Blessed Trinity! . . .

The Victorian intellectual suffered from a sense of personal perplexity which was part moral and part religious. It also underscores the basic dilemma in Tennyson. Yet Tennyson is conventionally regarded as a typical representative of his age and this is part of the historical view of his achievement. His reputation as a poet passed through painful vicissitudes and strong denunciation followed in the wake of excessive eulogy.

In the second phase of this traditional approach Tennyson was almost written off as a tiresome Victorian who had outlived his utility or value. Leaders of reaction against Tennyson in England and France launched a vehement attack on his insincerity and his alleged lack of intelligence. They criticized what they termed as the feminine feebleness of his polluted Muse, the apparent affectations of his tone, the intellectual insincerity of his moralizings and his utter want of the reality of emotion. They pointed out that in Tennyson expression degenerates into mere decoration, imagination deteriorates into sentiment and religion declines to the level of interested morality. The moral world of Tennyson is darkened by self-regarding impulses, and consequently the eternal struggle between soul and sense, the avowed subject-matter of the *Idylls*, is falsified

by fusing sense with sentimentality. Swinburne, with his characteristic irreverence called 'Morte d'Arthur' 'Morte d' Albert' and thus exposed some of the weaknesses in Tennyson. Whereas T. S. Eliot heroically defended Tennyson by underscoring the qualities of 'abundance, variety and competence', W. H. Auden conceded that Tennyson had 'the finest ear', yet he was 'undoubtedly the stupidest' of poets. The reaction against Tennyson was obviously linked up with the postwar reaction against the Victorian age. A dispassionate reconsideration of the eulogy of as well as the reaction against Tennyson is now in progress. These revaluations have resulted in a change in perspective and also in the slow formulation of what may be termed as the modern approach to Tennyson.

Now the question must be raised: what is exactly this modern approach? What are its salient features? How is it different from the conventional or traditional approach? I now propose to answer these questions.

Cleanth Brooks stated that the language of poetry is the language of paradox. He slightly overstated the case when he wrote that the truth which the poet utters can be approached only in terms of paradox. Nevertheless, one of the principal elements in the modern critical approach to poetry is governed by the concept of paradox. His classical criticism of 'Tears, idle tears', while demonstrating the paradoxical element, also points out the limitations of paradox in Tennyson. Tennyson's poetry, said Brooks, should not be associated with the subtleties of paradox, ambiguity, tension or reconciliation of opposites. Tennyson, of course, builds up the paradoxical structure in 'Tears, idle tears':

Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean,  
Tears from the depth of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart, and gather to the eyes,  
In looking on the happy Autumn-fields,  
And thinking of the days that are no more.

In this stanza the use of the adjective 'idle' is complex since it raises the question whether the tears are indeed idle, inexplicable, unaccountable. The poet knows not what they mean, and yet we realize that they are neither idle nor are they meaning-

less. Although there is no immediacy of cause, yet they arise from a divine despair. They are also caused by remembrance of the past. In this poem Tennyson creates and builds up paradox in the language and structure.

But, Brooks' contention that Tennyson only blundered into the language of paradox and the implication that this is extremely rare is rather disproved by a close reading of the text of many other poems of Tennyson. The critical view that Tennyson firmly set his face against enriching his poems and their structure through the use of irony and tension is an overstatement of the case.

Let me now present rather an elaborate explication and interpretation of 'Ulysses', a well-known poem of Tennyson, as an illustration of the modern critical approach. Many of you, I am sure, have had the pleasure of teaching it in the class-room and therefore you may feel a deeper sense of participation in its explication.

To me Tennyson's 'Ulysses' is one of the most complex poems in the whole range of Victorian poetry. It is rich in texture and meaning. Though it is short it is imbued with intensity of feeling and its depth of tension and growth of structure are fascinating elements in themselves.

From a historical point of view there are three distinct approaches to Tennyson's 'Ulysses'. Soon after publication it evoked almost universal approbation, which continues in a modified form even today. Carlyle was all praise for it and the Carlylean criterion continued to govern the Tennysonian canon for nearly a century. T. S. Eliot in his essay on Dante describes Tennyson's 'Ulysses' as a 'perfect poem'. In our class-room teaching we mostly absorbed and expressed variations of what Carlyle had laid down long ago: that the essence of the poem was the portrayal of a man of noble strength and resolute action indirectly suggesting a study in contrast to the mood of the typical inescapable Tennysonian melancholy and inaction expressed in the poem 'The Lotos Eaters'. In essence the traditional view is that 'Ulysses' expresses the hero's clarion call for action and the magnificent aspiration 'to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield'. This is the first major strand of the traditional attitude.

The second approach to Tennyson's 'Ulysses' is almost

totally opposed to the first. 'Ulysses' is sharply criticized, even vilified by critics like E. J. Chiasson, and shown not as a hero but as a Machiavellian figure. Tennyson's Ulysses seems to embody ideas and beliefs which are negative and destructive. He is hard, rigid, peculiarly self-reliant, impervious and insensitive to softer emotions. He is an aggressive embodiment of what may be described as a Renaissance *Superbia*.

The third approach to 'Ulysses' is as unfavourable as the second, but the target of attack is different. Hostile criticism is directed not so much against the hero as against the poem itself. Professor Baum is apparently shocked by the common reader's uncritical acceptance of 'Ulysses' as a great poem. In his view it is a highly flawed poem. He asks certain basic questions such as where Ulysses is and to whom he speaks and exactly when and finds no satisfactory answers. The whole poem is vitiated by 'bad drawing' and also suffers from unfortunate echoes of Milton's Satan and Byron's *Childe Harold*.

I should like to formulate the fourth approach to Tennyson which may be called modern because it is vitally different from the time-honoured Carlylean traditional view and also deviates from the other two attitudes already outlined.

This fourth and modern approach is based on the concept of the interaction between opposites and their ultimate reconciliation in the texture of the poem. All the three approaches, presented by critics, are partial truths since they contribute to the growth of contraries or opposites which are ultimately resolved in the poem's structure. The whole tension in the poem is created and sustained by these opposites. Although there is a degree of validity in the traditional Carlylean view of 'Ulysses' as the portrayal of a man of magnificent action, yet this attitude should not be allowed to degenerate into a dogma to the total exclusion of other viewpoints. No critic should work for steam-rolling these opposites or contrary strands since that would obliterate the complexity of the poem and make it appear deceptively simple which it is not. The easy road to oversimplification might turn into a descent towards falsification.

The second critical view comprising an attack on the concept of Ulysses as a simple, noble hero is to some extent valid because it brings into focus certain weaknesses inherent in Ulysses'

character ignored by earlier critics. Whether 'Ulysses' is a poem entirely governed by the personal element or it is an objective correlative of a certain emotion which governs the hero, there are some incongruities in it which nag us. To some Ulysses as a man seems to be without a sense of work or fruitful employment. This behaviour seems odd because the situation in Ithaca calls for magnificent work and men of imagination and adventure who can respond to that call. Why should Ulysses feel idle there and not look for work which would indeed be challenging? Why should he not feel a sense of commitment to the savage race and the state of their unequal laws? He seems to yearn for knowledge, experience and travel but this in reality amounts to escaping from duty to his people and his kingdom. In order to gain his soul, he seems willing to let down his people and his island ignoring the truth that one who loses his people also loses his soul. Thus his motivation for travel seems questionable. Is it the pursuit of knowledge and experience or is it a surreptitious mode of escape from the clarion call of duty at home? Is he a hero or an anti-hero?

These two opposites—Ulysses as a noble hero and Ulysses as an anti-hero—indicate that he is in effect a complex figure. All hostile attitudes help us to avoid the fatal error of reducing many levels of meaning to just one level of meaning, of being dogmatic and intellectually insincere. The depreciators of Tennyson's 'Ulysses' serve a very useful purpose: they build up the contraries out of which the tension of the poem emerges. Of course, the hostile critics too are wrong since they seem to attribute the failings of Ulysses as a character to the poem itself, which is surely a misreading of the poem.

A search for the source of Tennyson's 'Ulysses' reveals the complexity of the character and the intricacy with which it is built up in the poem. Though partly influenced by Homer's 'Odysseus', Tennyson in composing 'Ulysses' closely follows the concept of Dante's Ulysses. Dante's Ulysses is a complex figure, a plain sailor combined with the mighty sinner. He is a master of guile and his heroism stems from pride and will.

He meets with his death and is confined to the eighth circle of Hell and the description in *Inferno*, Book 16, seems close to Tennyson's portrayal in the poem. Tennyson himself admitted, —'Yes, there is an echo of Dante in "Ulysses".' On the basis of

this external evidence if Tennyson's Ulysses is to be observed in the shadow of Dante's Ulisse, he would be a complex figure, and not merely a simple hero of action. Thus the two mutually opposite concepts of Ulysses seem to grow in the poem, the Carlylean view of Ulysses as a man of action and the Dantean view of Ulisse as a complex combination of sailor and sinner. This paves the way for the operation of interaction of opposites.

Another very interesting aspect of Tennyson's 'Ulysses' is the nature and quality of the tension developed in the poem. The traditional critics envisaged a tension between the romantically inclined, inward looking Tennyson and the active, outgoing classically disposed Tennyson. This view, based on the belief that Tennyson was a divided self and that he was most unfortunate in his relationship to his age, seems to me rather far-fetched. The modern critics of Tennyson view the tension in 'Ulysses' on a very different level from that of the traditional critics. There are two conflicts in the poem: the inner conflict concerns itself within the mind of Ulysses between his duty to Ithaca and his obligation to himself. And the outer conflict develops between his mind and will in respect of the basic questions whether spiritual reality can be realized through death. His will is certain about the existence of spiritual reality but his mind is not sure of it in the initial stage. Ulysses' voyage is a kind of preparation for death. It is in fact an act of dying since reference to death is very explicit. Therefore death is conceived as a stepping-stone to the realization of reality. Time is conceived as a destroyer of value and physical nature and Ulysses asserts that he will not yield to it.

... You and I are old;  
Old age hath yet his honour and his toil;  
Death closes all: but something ere the end,  
Some work of noble note, may yet be done,  
Not unbecoming men that strove with Gods.

This is an assertion of his will against the destructive power of time and death. As the poem progresses towards its close, the inner and outer tensions concerning death are resolved. Ulysses casts a backward glance at the will which is a reassurance of the reality of the spirit.

The will perceives the reality of the life of the spirit after death. But Ulysses' mind in the initial stage is sceptical about this life after death.

It may be that the gulfs will wash us down:  
It may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,  
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.

It may be, thinks Ulysses, that he and the mariners will be drowned in the sea and thus meet their fate. On the other hand they may be able to see heaven and meet the great Achilles. The perception of the will that spiritual reality lies beyond death is slowly grasped by Ulysses' mind. The poem thus becomes a reconciliation of the contraries of the mind and the will.

One equal temper of heroic hearts,  
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will  
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

The 'form' of 'Ulysses' is another debatable issue and in some measure is part of the interaction of opposites and their reconciliation. It has been rather uncritically assumed that 'Ulysses' is a dramatic monologue, whereas lines 1 to 32 of the poem seem to be almost a soliloquy. There are three sections of the poem: the first section (lines 1 to 32) is a soliloquy; the second section (lines 33 to 43) is Ulysses' loud thinking about himself with a reference to Telemachus but no sure sign of a definite audience; only in the third section (lines 44 to 70) an audience is clearly shown, though the actual places are not pointed out. The beginning is marked by contemplation about the past life followed by an act of farewell. Then appear the shore, Telemachus, mariners, the ship and the anticipated voyage. There is no real link or continuity between one scene and another and the transitions are not smoothly brought out. This feeling makes it difficult for an intelligent reader to accept the poem as a dramatic monologue. The scenes are not perceived directly through the mind of Ulysses as is necessary in a dramatic monologue but rather we see them occur in his mind. Tennyson aims at establishing a connection between the outer world of action and the inner world of contemplation in

'Ulysses'—And moreover the action in the seen world becomes a symbol of action in the unseen world. Thus the actual embarkation and voyage become symbols of the unseen world.

The goal that Ulysses seeks also contributes to the formulation of opposites, Ulysses reminisces about his past travels in the 'known' world and then looks forward to the experience of an 'unknown' and untravelled world. The untravelled world, he declares, gleams through the travelled world. It is a world of spiritual being where he hopes to meet Achilles. This goal cannot be reached in terms of the world of time since its 'margin fades for ever and for ever when I move'. His purpose is 'to sail beyond the sunset and the paths of western stars, until I die'. Here it appears that the goal is death and the setting sun is the emblem of temporal life. Ulysses also refers to his own death. But the other aspect of this quest indicates that what he really seeks is not death, but life in death. To suggest that Ulysses seeks mere death and nothing beyond is without doubt a misreading of the poem. And yet the contraries seem to operate. The sea-journey is a symbol of spiritual voyage and includes the act of dying or the inevitable feeling of Ulysses' own death. The voyage and the death are both symbolized by the nightfall—'The long day wanes.' He also refers to his own death: 'when I am gone'. His mind is not quite sure about the consequential outcome of death: is it total annihilation or is it only the beginning of the realization of spiritual reality? His mind is involved in logical scepticism whereas his will undermines this logic and asserts the continuance of itself after death. Thus the opposition between mind and will is created and resolved in the supremacy of the will which sees beyond death the realm of the spirit. The balancing of motives and feelings is shown even in that significant line 'To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.' The first two verbs (to strive, to seek) speak about the past and are balanced by the next two verbs (to find and not to yield) refer to the future. This linking of two kinds of verbs is a linking of past with future. These pairs of verbs are divided by death but joined by will. Thus the opposition between mind and will, death and will is resolved in terms of a quest for spiritual reality. In conclusion of this analysis one must state that 'Ulysses' embodies the play of the interaction of opposites and this is reconciled towards the end of the poem.

Critics have pointed out that in 'Ulysses' Tennyson presented an objective correlative for braving the struggle of life. This is true, but for this presentation Tennyson chose a figure who was very complex, (based on Dante's *Ulisse*), therefore Ulysses becomes the correlative, not of one feeling, but indeed of a complexity of feelings. He becomes a symbol of the unification of divided sensibilities and illustrates the famous idea of Coleridge of 'balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities'. 'Ulysses' is a fine example of the modern approach to Tennyson.

Besides 'Ulysses', this idea of the reconciliation of opposites is true of other poems of Tennyson too, for example, the poem 'Two Voices'. 'Ulysses' as well as 'Two Voices' were composed within weeks of Tennyson's hearing of Hallam's death when the poet was deeply disturbed and his mind was involved in complex feelings. There is the urge to action but there is also the desire to commit suicide. This is a simple elucidation of the two voices. But modern criticism finds that more than two voices are involved. There is a third voice which becomes audible to a sensitive ear. There is the first 'still small voice' which informs the poet of the futility of existence. It says it were 'better not to be'. This is the voice of Dionysus and his vision. The second voice represents the poet and it refutes the argument of the first voice. It is the voice of Socrates and his wisdom. It is intellectual and within it are found the belief in progress and also the Platonic faith in immortality. It is objective as against the subjective quality of his first voice. The third voice which comes up towards the close of the poem strengthens the poet in his effort at overpowering his futility and incompleteness of the first two voices. The third voice represents the will to live and also hope for the future. Thus the conflict between head and heart, intellect and emotion of the two voices is resolved and the third voice is an attempt at reconciliation between the two mutually opposed voices.

An assessment of the *Idylls of the King*, Tennyson's major work, also reveals the difference between the traditional view and the modern approach to the poet's achievement. Early and late Victorian critics envisaged the value of the *Idylls of the King* as a fine, dexterous tapestry of allegorical figures on a medieval landscape, whereas a modern critic, Prof. S. C.

Burchell, finds that 'the way is clear to see its connection with such a poem, for example, at *The Waste Land*, on the surface so apparently antithetical.' He says that 'T. S. Eliot's use of the Grail Legend and his symbolic revelation of man's moral infertility have their counterparts in Tennyson's epic.' Both poems, says Burchell, (*Idylls* and *The Waste Land*) are a diagnosis of modern civilization—a 'civilization as hollow as the sacred Mount of Camelot'.

The *Idylls of the King* have always amused the critics. One critic saw the vision of Tennyson drifting 'down to many-towered Camelot with the Lady of Shalott, bringing in one pocket his Malory and in another a small parcel of allegory.' Swinburne made a contemptuous reference to the *Idylls of the King* as *Idylls of the Prince Consort*. One could consider the *Idylls* as (1) poetic patchwork of medieval and Victorian settings or as (2) a spiritual interpretation of the Victorian age and society or (3) a moral comment on the human condition in general with specific reference to nineteenth-century England. The question is this: Is there a unifying principle embodied in the *Idylls of the King*?

Tennyson shows a sort of shiftiness in respect of this important issue. He commented at length on the *Idylls* and upon being called to explain some contradictions, at last said, 'They (the critics) are right, and they are not right. . . . I hate to be tied down to say "This means that".' Traditional critics over-emphasized the allegorical element in the *Idylls*, whereas modern critics find that there is no such all-pervasive, omnipresent moral allegory in the poem. It is in fact a diagnosis of a diseased civilization, the symbolic study of a corrupt and decadent society. Of course, the allegorical element is significant but at best, to quote Jowitt's famous phrase, it is an 'allegory in the distance'.

The modern approach to King Arthur in the *Idylls of the King* is that he is essentially paradoxical and that the earlier view of the blameless King was just an oversimplification. The paradox arises out of the dual role of the King. He is in one way a blameless King, almost Christlike in moral stature. And yet he has to be blamed for the moral ruin and the material destruction of the Round Table. Although Cleanth Brooks did not observe much of paradox in Tennyson (it seems rare to him),

it is interesting to see the *Idylls* marked by a preponderant paradoxical portrayal. Modern critics of Tennyson such as Arthur J. Carr, Stanley Solomon, Clyde L. Ryal believe that the *Idylls of the King* are marked by paradox, irony and ambiguity. Arthur's character and his role in the thematic significance of the poem constitute a basic paradox. The concept of Arthur as a perfect man is itself paradoxical because Tennyson wishes to reconcile the two opposites—the human and the divine—embodied in the paradoxical King. Tennyson presents in Arthur the conflict between human perfectibility arising out of the heroism of the King and human imperfectibility traceable to the limitations of Arthur as man. In the dramatic context Arthur does not seem to suspect the sin of Lancelot and Guinevere. Arthur is not suspicious and innocence is one of his cardinal virtues. Yet paradoxically his innocence itself undermines the confidence of his Knights and leads to the destruction of the Round Table. What is more questionable is the fact that adultery (which is not a very uncommon sin) should spell disaster to Camelot, whereas kingdoms smaller than Camelot withstood even greater sins. Is adultery, a matter of personal conduct, a sufficiently convincing cause of the ruin of such an impersonal order as the Knights of the Round Table? Another rather poignant element of irony is that King Arthur, the mighty leader, could maintain order among powerful Knights but could maintain no order at all in the world of his marital relations. The quest for the Holy Grail is one of the most ironic portrayals in the whole range of Tennyson's poetry. The pursuit of this great Christian ideal is marred by many selfish motives. The way Lancelot looks at it is so different from the total dedication of Sir Galahad. It is ironic that Camelot, a state founded on Christian ideals, should be weakened by their pursuit of the Christian symbol itself. The paradoxes in situation and character of King Arthur have been clearly stated by many critics. Prof. Ryal makes a significant point when he says that Arthur who set out to found a society based on freedom ultimately learnt to his sorrow that he could not create a free man. Thus Arthur's will works in two ways: it desired social freedom but it produced social slavery. Thus Arthur stands in moral terms as both the hero and the villain of *Idylls of the King*. This is also the reason why Arthur should be destroyed as indeed

Tennyson does destroy him. Whereas traditional criticism conceived of Arthur only as a hero, modern critics observe in him the posture of an anti-hero.

The modernity of Tennyson is perhaps best reflected in that daring and unusual experiment in Victorian verse, *Maud*. *Maud* is a 'Monodrama' and, as Tennyson called it, a 'drama of the soul'. The hero of *Maud* is an extraordinary figure, young, abnormal, frustrated and unaware of himself. He broods on his painful destiny and tends towards depression, melancholy and even madness. He grows indrawn and his introversion and his cynicism make him a very unusual hero in Victorian poetry. Since *Maud* is in some measure a microcosm of Tennyson, its form and technique are of great significance. Whereas the traditional critics made much of the biographical element in *Maud*, for instance Tennyson's courtship of Emily Selwood over two decades and the impact of the death of Hallam on his mind, modern critics seem to concentrate on the union of form and content in *Maud*. They explore the new element in the Tennyson technique, which is so unusual, which is reflected in the narrative mode of *Maud*. Tennyson, like a skilful craftsman, hammered language into a new shape and he also created a bewildering variety of metrical and stanzaic forms. But this is not all. In *Maud* he anticipated the technique of modern poetry and superimposed it on the content he intended to convey. Modern poetry is marked by poetic flashes and poets endeavour to transmit these flashes into their work. To a conventional reader, there always seems a prosaic gap between one poetic flash and another. The modern poet overlooks these apparent disconnections and relies on the reader to fill these prosaic gaps. Tennyson realized in *Maud* that poetry is a series of apparently disconnected pastels and the reader must fill in the spaces between them in order to complete the circle of meaning. This is the technique, says Humbert Woolf, which T. S. Eliot used in *The Waste Land* (1923) but it must be said that the spaces Eliot leaves between one poetic flash and another are very wide, whereas in Tennyson these are very small. Yet they indicate the direction towards modernism in English poetry, however limited the trend might be.

Another significant aspect of the modern criticism of Tennyson is the concentrated analyses and interpretation of his

imagery. It is indeed surprising to see the Victorian Laureate use images derived from science and technology of the nineteenth century. The technological process of steel manufacture in the nineteenth-century England is used in this exceptionally beautiful image in *In Memoriam*:

This life is not as idle Ore  
 But iron dug from central gloom  
 And heated hot with burning fears  
 And dipped in baths of hissing tears  
 And battered with the shocks of doom  
 To shape and use.

The accuracy of Tennyson's observation of the technological process is impressive. He realized that poetry is the finer spirit and breath of knowledge and some fundamental laws of science are endowed with remarkable poetic beauty and charm. For instance the subtle fact of physics that the volume of ice is greater than the volume of water of the same weight is transformed into an expression of great poetic beauty (in section IV of *In Memoriam*):

Break, thou deep vase of chilling tears,  
 That grief has shaken into frost!

References to Neptune, Saturn, theories of Evolution, Osteology, botany, geology and other branches of science dominate Tennyson's poetic diction and afford new ground to the modern critic, for interpretative analyses. Thus in the use of imagery Tennyson approximates trends in modern poetry. Tennyson in some measure becomes a precursor of the master theme of Joyce's *Ulysses* and he also anticipates the great interest of Yeats and twentieth-century poets in the exploration of private myth. The surprising modernity of *Maud* paves the way for the daring innovations of *Prufrock* and the implied Victorian Wasteland in the *Idylls* indicates a remote parallelism to Eliot's *The Waste Land*.

*Time:*

Tennyson endeavoured to present, as Prof. Ryal has pointed

out, almost a new *Mythus* in *In Memoriam*. The pressing need for a new mythus in the Victorian Age was voiced by Carlyle since he was disillusioned by contemporary religious practices and beliefs. Hallam, as Tennyson presents him in *In Memoriam*, speaks for a religion which is a symbolic, and not a literal, representation of life, truth and human experience. He owes moral allegiance to the ideal. In this way Hallam becomes a divine figure, a Christian replacing the New Testament Christ. Thus a new mythus is created poetically embodying the divine spirit of Christianity. Carlyle had merely asked for a new mythus but it is Tennyson who presents it in some measure in *In Memoriam*.

Another aspect of *In Memoriam* which modern critics have noted, is its movement in terms of time. The complacent Victorian view of Time, as clearly outlined by Professor George Rawlinson, was completely shattered by 19th-century geology. The majority of Victorians believed that time had begun less than 6000 years ago but the study of rocks which opened a great vista of prehistoric Time totally refuted this view. Tennyson is deeply concerned with the ideas of time in *In Memoriam*. There are two specific movements in *In Memoriam*. The movement in time in which Tennyson secures his freedom from Hallam and a movement in eternity in which he brings about a spiritual reunion with Hallam. The modern approach to Tennyson attempts to explore Tennyson's new mythus and his movement in time in his poetry.

The modern approach to Tennyson is radically different from the conventional or traditional view of the poet's achievement. Conventional critics contributed to the generally accepted impression of Tennyson as a 'didactic poet', a Victorian laureate, which is far from an objective assessment of his work. He was thus read for his 'message' as a Sir Oracle of the complacent Victorian Age or alternatively he was admired as a subtle technical craftsman. Both these views in many ways seem to touch the surface of Tennyson's poetry. The intrinsic merit of Tennyson's poetry lies in his artistic power to merge form with content. The modern approach to Tennyson, while correcting the overemphasis on his didactic quality or his technical skill, brings into critical focus the essentially poetic qualities of his work, the richness of his texture, the exploration

of private myth, paradox, irony, ambiguity—qualities which inhere in the structure of his poetry.

In conclusion, I should say that the modern approach to Tennyson is one of the strands of belief and criticism: it does not preclude other and different approaches to his work. There is hardly any need, in spite of voluminous criticisms, for a critical limitation in relation to Tennyson, because we still have to establish a poetically valid and logically cogent mode of coming to terms with the reality in Tennyson.

# JOHN FORD & THEMES OF VIRTUE

BY TIRTHANKAR BOSE

✓THE object of this essay is to discover whether John Ford expresses in his dramas an attachment to moral values. In the context of dramatic literature an author's personal beliefs are only secondarily known and in Ford's case they are specially elusive because the bareness of his style does not allow his views to become obvious. Yet, since an author's mind must be known before a full assessment of his work may be carried out, an attempt has been made in this essay to discover his views. This has been done by making a survey of his treatment of the theme of revenge on the assumption that a category of behaviour to which Ford was so consistently drawn must have held for him some special philosophical connotation quite apart from its theatrical content.

Three tragedies of Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *The Broken Heart* and *Love's Sacrifice*, have been reviewed. Their action has been analysed to show that though they do not begin as revenge plays yet motives of vengeance soon take over the development of the action. The dramatist's preoccupation with revenge is even better seen in his treatment of the various revengers in the plays. Their desire for revenge is often insupportable and displays a vehemence that points to an infinite egoism. Yet to Ford theirs is an example not to be avoided but to be admired, even possibly emulated. The liberality with which he arouses sympathy for even morally degenerate revengers is not necessarily a sign of his admiration for a philosophy of private justice. It would be more correct to say that revenge and the justice implicit in it have less meaning to him than the realization that there is a certain kind of character-structure that can bear the load of private justice. Whether revenge is right or wrong is not the question. What Ford seems to suggest is that if the pursuit of revenge involves honour or virtue then it is not in the taking of revenge that these values consist but in the revenger's preparedness to shoulder responsibilities for what is unpleasant and fearful.

In this context it is useful to notice Ford's constant use of the

word 'resolution' or its equivalents. Ultimately this is the quality that is found to endure and in comparison revenge and popular acclaim are less important because they do not fundamentally affect the human condition. That Ford's is a stoical philosophy is evident. Whether this stoicism may also be interpreted to have undertones of optimism and faith must form the subject of more extensive studies than the present essay.

Nobody knows what sort of a person John Ford was except that 'Deep in a dump John Forde was alone got, / With folded arms and melancholy hat.'<sup>1</sup> It appears that he was for some time a law-student and later a lawyer, that he served an apprenticeship of letters under, among others, Thomas Dekker, and that intellectually he was deeply influenced by Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*.<sup>2</sup> His reputation rests mainly upon one play alone, 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, but it is not known how a dramatist whose usual ventures were more or less conventional should have come to conceive so extraordinarily unconventional a work. Although Ford wrote eight plays all by himself and had his hand in many others, yet he does not seem to have learnt much of the dramatist's craft from his wide experience. His handling of theme, character and situation is notoriously careless, perfunctory and uneven, though he has a knack for turning out extremely effective—if a little melodramatic—pieces of stage-business.<sup>3</sup> These cannot survive as qualities likely to attract for ever actors or producers, or even students. And so, a playwright who, Lamb thought, was 'of the first order of poets' remains a relative stranger to us.

To those who do read Ford today the one obvious thing about him is that his concern with drama seems to be primarily of an intellectual kind, mainly because his way with the inhabitants of his world is to put them between microscope slides. What seems to many to be his brooding nature—whatever that may mean—suits admirably this dissociation between his observations and his personal feelings. How this dissociation is maintained is a fascinating subject of research in itself and nothing but the fullest analysis of Ford's dramatic style will reveal the secret of his power. Yet, while that would prepare the way for a fuller qualitative assessment of Ford it

would tell us nothing about his moral preferences, and I do not see how we may eventually understand Ford without reference to his value-judgments. A hunt for moral principles is, however, likely to be difficult, first, because no two plays appear to be alike, and second, because as we have noted above it is Ford's constant endeavour to keep himself emotionally away from his plays. Yet since a complete withdrawal can never be possible we may continue to try to discover what Ford's values were. In the belief that these may reveal themselves in Ford's emphasis upon certain moral principles I have examined in the present essay his treatment of the theme of revenge. I have selected this partly because this was one of the most engrossing subjects of the drama of his time and more particularly because Ford's three best-known tragedies are all connected with revenge.

The three plays that I examine here, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*, *The Broken Heart*, and *Love's Sacrifice*, are on the face of it utterly dissimilar. The first is on incest, the second on thwarted love, and the third on the conflict between love and friendship. That they are nevertheless related is not merely because they are all tragedies but because they deal, though in different ways, with aspects of human love. What is however of much more moment for the purpose of this essay is that these plays, whatever their initial aims, eventually turn upon motives of revenge. The briefest outline of the plays will bear this out.

In *'Tis Pity*, Giovanni and his sister Annabella love each other. Their ruin draws near when Annabella is persuaded by others to marry Soranzo for it transpires that she is carrying Giovanni's child. Soranzo is furious and his vengeance upon his false wife and her brother seems imminent. But to Giovanni this matters little as he feels that with the loss of Annabella his life has lost its meaning. He therefore decides to take revenge upon the world by uniting his sister and himself in death. He kills her, makes a public confession—displaying Annabella's heart upon his dagger—causes their father to die of shame, kills Soranzo and at last has himself killed by Soranzo's hired murderers.

*The Broken Heart* is more complicated. Orgilus is embittered because his betrothed, Penthea has been taken away from him and married off to the vilely jealous Bassanes by her brother

Ithocles because of an old family quarrel. When Ithocles comes back from a campaign as his country's hero we find that he is repenting his harshness. He is a more understanding person now that he is himself in love with Calantha, the Princess. So he rescues Penthea from her cruel husband and makes friends with Orgilus. Penthea pleads for him with Calantha and, we understand, not in vain. Just as all seems to be set for general happiness Penthea, who had been a victim of ill-usage too long, dies. Orgilus, who has been biding his time all along seizes the occasion to trap Ithocles and kills him. When he discloses this to Calantha, who is now Queen, she orders his execution and herself follows Ithocles to the grave.

In *Love's Sacrifice* the Duke possesses two 'jewels', a loyal and noble friend, Fernando, and a beautiful and virtuous wife, Bianca. His sister Fiormonda offers her love to Fernando but he refuses her because he is secretly in love with Bianca. When he reveals this to Bianca she is indignant but later she finds herself returning his love and offers herself to him. But as they are both aware of the sinfulness of an actual liaison their relationship is a Platonic one. Meanwhile, the spurned Fiormonda, with the help of the Duke's wicked secretary D'Avolos, succeeded in finding out the truth about Fernando's coldness to her and Bianca's reciprocity of his passion. D'Avolos manages to arouse the Duke's jealousy and Fiormonda drives him on to plot for revenge. When Bianca and Fernando are discovered together the Duke kills his wife and after that rushes upon Fernando to kill him. But when he reveals how pure his relations with Bianca had been the Duke repents deeply, pardons him and arranges a solemn funeral for Bianca. As the procession approaches the tomb Fernando suddenly appears and declaring a greater love for Bianca than the Duke is capable of, kills himself. The Duke dies heartbroken (because he has lost his two 'jewels'), Fiormonda marries Roseilli who had been a victim of D'Avolos' machinations, and the manipulator of all these tragic happenings, D'Avolos, is suitably punished.

In this as well as in the other two plays the shape of the action depends upon two different kinds of motives. At the beginning of each play the main characters are related through a love-interest. As these are tragedies, lovers are necessarily prevented by cruel relations, or more subtly, by the customs of the world,

and their frustration drives them to seek revenge, which motivates the rest of the action. That their unhappiness should induce in the frustrated lovers a sense of injury is perhaps natural. That they should protest is also expected. It is even understandable when they feel, as Giovanni does, 'with me they all shall perish.'<sup>24</sup> But it is strange, if we wish to examine Ford's own evaluation of human motives, that these programmes of universal destruction should be shown to rest upon the virtues involved in the traditionally noble passion of revenge. This is strange not because most of the revenge motive is causeless but because revenge is used as an instrument of attaining honour. This status of revenge is again fairly conventional in Jacobean drama but Ford arrives at this position in the process of a logical understanding of the human phenomenon rather than in a spirit of accepting a convention of belief. In that sense the revenge in Ford's drama is not the positive quality that we find in *The Spanish Tragedy*, nor does it possess the sacrificial quality that we find in *Hamlet*. It is the kind of hollow, negative pursuit that *The Duchess of Malfi* explores. It is therefore no longer, as in older plays, an instrument of justice but has assumed the status of an instrument of self-affirmation in terms of honour. Historically speaking, this is no revolution for the relationship between revenge and personal honour had been implicit in the earliest of revenge plays. Even in Seneca revenge was important because it was a part of Virtue and therefore a necessary condition of honour. But in this relationship the concept of justice was ever-present. On the contrary if *The Duchess of Malfi* or *'Tis Pity* have anything to do with justice it is the perversion of it.

But the evolution of the concept of revenge is too large an issue for us. For our restricted purpose of examining Ford's moral bias it is necessary to note that he deliberately draws our sympathy to those who thus follow a goal which is patently egoistic and nihilistic. Not content with this he also makes heroes of those who deserve to be objects of revenge. that appears to us to be just. In *'Tis Pity* Giovanni should not find sympathy from any quarter and between him and Soranzo justice is on the latter's side. Yet it is Giovanni who is shown to be most of a man, the one who engages everyone's attention, and the one who exits in a blaze of glory. In *The Broken Heart*

there is no doubt that Orgilus is a dwarf compared to Ithocles, yet that noble and generous soldier falls a prey to Orgilus. In order that this may be achieved Orgilus has to be made into a dissembler, a villain and to act altogether out of character, but what of it? Revenge has triumphed. Later when Calantha passes what is a just sentence upon him she does it more as a commendation than a punishment and the stage is conveniently cleared for exhibiting the sturdy valour of Orgilus who kills himself under the admiring eyes of the assembled noblemen. This need not surprise us for Orgilus's revenge is approved wholeheartedly by the dying Ithocles himself.

Finally, in *Love's Sacrifice*, though the Duke as the undoubtedly wronged husband ought to have justice on his side, yet Fernando is permitted to steal all the limelight and more significantly all the sympathy that can be roused. Another astonishing example of this admiration for acts of vengeance is Fiormonda. She is the one who manipulates the action and is therefore the direct cause of the tragedy that engulfs Bianca, Fernando and the Duke, and yet the conclusion has nothing but bouquets—the Duchy, a noble husband—for her.

It would be absurd to see these as results of mere sensationalism. Melodrama for its own sake is an aim that requires highly flavoured language and Ford's language is well known to be lacking in rhetoric.<sup>5</sup> Besides, a sensation-monger is in business because he wishes to attract a large audience; now popularity is something of a red rag to Ford whose

aim was in the whole address  
Well to deserve of all, but please the best;  
(*B.H.*, Epilogue)

and who thinks that those

Who from the laws of study have not swerved  
Know begged applauses never were deserved.  
(*L.M.*, Epilogue)

for,

It is art's scorn, that some of late have made  
The noble use of poetry a trade.  
(*L.M.*, Prologue)

If then Ford is considering the theme of revenge in full seriousness, what precisely are his conclusions? On the superficial level they would seem to emanate from a central equation between revenge and virtue. But if we believe this we shall unduly magnify revenge as an ethical value. As I have said above, revenge is not to Ford an instrument of justice but an instrument of self-affirmation. It is clear that the desire for revenge does not have any intrinsic worth but is regarded as a possible way of proving one's nobility. To re-phrase this, we may say that if Ford's pursuit of the revenge theme discloses any kind of preference on his part, it is a preference not really for revenge but for the values that underlie this brand of revenge.

It is difficult to formulate Ford's feelings on this matter and put labels on these values. But it is interesting to note how many times in these plays the word 'resolution' or its equivalent phrases occur.<sup>6</sup> In the passage below for instance,

I am resolved; urge not another word;  
My thoughts are great, and all as resolute  
As thunder:

. . . . .  
Good sir, trouble not yourself about other business than  
your own resolution: remember that time lost cannot  
be recalled.

(*'Tis Pity*, V. ii.)

or,

I would be there: Not go! yes, and resolve  
To strike as deep in slaughter as they all;

. . . . .  
I have set up my rest.<sup>6</sup>

. . . . .  
Be all a man, my soul;

(*'Tis Pity*, V. iii)

the emphasis is entirely on the resoluteness of the speakers and they are to be admired precisely for the integrity of their resolution. Similarly in the *Broken Heart* the trapped Ithocles defies Orgilus in these terms:

Thou looks't that I should whine and beg compassion,  
 As loth to leave the vainness of my glories;  
 A statelier resolution arms my confidence,  
 To cozen thee of honour;

(*B.H.*, IV. iv.)

These words awaken in Orgilus the fullest approbation possible and he hastens to protest his own high-mindedness thus:

some few short minutes  
 Determined, my resolves shall quickly follow  
 Thy wrathful ghost;

(*Ibid.*)

following this up in a later scene with this summing up of his philosophy of dying:

But look upon my steadiness, and scorn not  
 The sickness of my fortune

(*Ibid.* V. ii)

This, we understand, is his claim to honour for his act draws from a spectator, '*Honourable* infamy!' (My italics). A similar translation of honour into resolution is accomplished by Fernando in *Love's Sacrifice* as he waits to kill himself before Bianca's tomb:

'tis not threats—  
 Maugre thy power, or the spite of hell—  
 Shall rend that honour: let life-hugging slaves,

. . . . .  
 . . . be loth to die!

(*L.S.*, V. iii.)

It will not be too much to claim that it is neither revenge nor honour that Ford analyses. What appears to him to be the one quality that allows humanity to save something, however abstract, from the ruins of tragedy, is this noble resolution which may therefore turn even a degenerate such as Giovanni into a character clothed in moral grandeur and a symbol of human triumph over misfortune.

Whether this is equal to 'the constant worship of high aristocratic' values that Ellis-Fermor discovers in Ford's works is debatable.<sup>7</sup> But there is at any rate no doubt that the heroic refusal of human beings to be conquered by misfortune and fear of death is to Ford a deeply moving vision. May one hope that to those who see in 'decadent' drama nothing but a denial of stable values, these nuances of hope may be an occasion for overhauling set notions?

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. An oft-quoted couplet that appears in a contemporary *Drollery*.
2. M. J. Sargeant, *John Ford*, Blackwell, 1935.; G. F. Sensabaugh, *The Tragic Muse of John Ford*, O.U.P., 1944.
3. U. Ellis-Fermor, *The Jacobean Drama*, Methuen, 1961, p. 234.
4. *'Tis Pity*, V. iii, 79. I have throughout used Havelock Ellis's Mermaid edition.
5. M. C. Bradbrook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy*, Cambridge, 1960, p. 251; and U. Ellis-Fermor, op. cit. p. 229.
6. Havelock Ellis's note on this is: 'i.e. I have taken my resolution.'
7. Ellis-Fermor, op. cit. p. 235.

# JOHN DENNIS AND THE UNITIES

BY M. N. SAXENA

IN Renaissance critical writings there was a lot of pother about the unities. The animated debate that had been once raised seems to possess little intrinsic interest; but delving below will certainly show some qualities of inner and permanent value.

The famous 'three unities' of action, time and place were often ascribed to the *Poetics* though Aristotle actually sponsors the unity of action only.<sup>1</sup> The Italian Castelvetro has generally been credited or taxed with the three unities of action, time and place in his translation and commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics* in 1570.

For Aristotle the unity of action is an ideal relationship of beginning, middle and end. The ideal tragedy is an imitation of a unified action, large enough to be perspicuous and small enough to be comprehensible. Aristotle's conception of unity is closely related to his artistic requirements of probability and necessity. As Humphry House has pointed out, the comparison of the unity of a literary work with that of a living organism<sup>1</sup> is important because it refutes the charge that 'Aristotle is describing a formal, dead, mechanical kind of unity.'<sup>2</sup>

Dennis with his neoclassical leanings could not grasp the true nature of the Aristotelian unity. In his letter to Moyle, 1695, he explains how, by maintaining the unities of time and place, that of action follows automatically:

For, that two Actions that are Entire, and Independent, should happen in the same short space of time, in the same little compass of Place, begin together, go on together, and end together, without Obstructing or Confounding one another, this indeed may be done upon the Stage, but in Nature it is highly improbable. (Edward Niles Hooker (ed): *The Critical Works of John Dennis*, Baltimore, 1943, Vol. II, p. 386.)

The Italian Castelvetro had said exactly the same thing:

In comedy and tragedy there is naturally one action, not because the fable is unfitted to contain more than one action, but because the restricted space in which the action is represented, and the limited time, twelve hours at the very most, do not permit of a multitude of actions. (J. E. Spingarn: *Literary Criticism in the Renaissance*, Columbia University Press (2nd edition, latest reprint), 1954, p. 99).

Dennis had little to do with Italian critics. He might have come across this statement in some French critics, because his knowledge of Italian critics was derived from them. (Cf. Hooker, II, Introduction, p. cxxi.) As an illustration Dennis had cited his own case in his play, *A Plot, And No Plot* (1697):

The Action is one and entire, the incidents parts of that Action, and naturally or probably produce one another; and the very last is the genuine result of the first. (Hooker, I, p. 145).

The linking of the scenes, Dennis thought, had a lot to do with the unity of action:

The scenes are connected and dependent, each of them upon the following and the preceding, so that if you retrench or transpose but one of them, you destroy, or maim, or confound the Action. (Ibid.)

Every character, according to Dennis, should be absolutely necessary for maintaining this unity: 'The characters are all of them absolutely necessary, and if you take away any one of them, there can be no Action and no Comedy.' (Ibid.)

The play was satirized for its 'Air of Formality'<sup>3</sup> and for its being 'laboriously Writ'; although Gildon had extravagantly praised its exact regularity, justness, and admirable conduct and design of the whole.<sup>4</sup> On the whole the play was not successful on the stage, and it seems to have attracted no extraordinary attention.<sup>5</sup>

With such a notion of the unity of action as Dennis had in mind in the above play, it is expected that he would accuse

Shakespeare of 'apparent Duplicity in some of his Plays, or Triplicity of Action, and the frequent breaking the Continuity of the Scenes.'<sup>6</sup> Commenting on Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor* he wrote in 1702:

...there are no less than three Actions in it that are independant one of another, which divide and distract the minds of an Audience, there is more than one insignificant Scene, which has nothing to do with any other part of the Play, which is enough to obstruct and stifle the Action.' (Hooker, 1, p. 280)

The fault growing out of Shakespeare's lack of art<sup>7</sup> to which Dennis gave most prominence was a weakness in plot-construction: when Shakespeare followed history, his plots lacked the compactness and organization necessary to produce the strongest emotional effects.<sup>8</sup>

In his alterations of two of Shakespeare's plays—*The Merry Wives* to *The Comical Gallant*<sup>9</sup> and *Coriolanus* to *The Invader of his Country*<sup>10</sup> Dennis was partly motivated by their weak plot-structure—and in this he was not altogether wrong.<sup>11</sup>

In Dennis's hands the unity of action remained a mechanical formula and ceased to be a really creative principle. That is why he could not appreciate the superb emotional unity attained by Shakespearean drama.

It will not be irrelevant to see what Dennis thought of tragi-comedy. In his day it was considered as a poem in which tragedy and humour were commingled, or, in Addison's words, 'a motley piece of mirth and sorrow.'<sup>12</sup> In condemning tragi-comedy Dennis followed the doctrine of the distinction of genres;<sup>13</sup> in it he was also supported by his notion of the unity of action. He was certainly right in denouncing Steele's play, *The Conscious Lovers* (1722) because it had failed to achieve a unity of impression, although his condemnation rested on its introducing tragic and comic moods simultaneously. I have not been able to find in Dennis any discussion of Shakespearean tragi-comedy. Dryden had not only accepted Shakespeare's tragi-comedy as a proper dramatic genre but also regarded it as England's most original contribution to world drama.<sup>14</sup> Prof. Sarup Singh in his article 'Shakespeare and the Neoclassical

Theory of Drama'<sup>15</sup> maintains that Dryden condemns not Shakespearean tragi-comedy but Restoration tragi-comedy,<sup>16</sup> which fails to achieve emotional unity attained by the former in a great measure. Dennis did not agree with Dryden about English tragi-comedy being an original contribution of England.<sup>17</sup> It seems that Dennis had mechanically condemned tragi-comedy without entering into the fundamental critical questions raised by this genre, or without considering matters of deeper import: it is the mixture of the tragic and the comic which gives Shakespearean tragedy a sense of reality which no other tragedy has possessed in this measure.

✓ Aristotle said very little about time or place. He touches the question of time only once:

Epic poetry...differs from Tragedy...in its length—which is due to its action having no fixed limit of time, whereas Tragedy endeavours to keep as far as possible within a single circuit of the sun, or something near that...though at first the practice in this respect was just the same in tragedies as in epic poems. (Ingram Bywater, op. cit. Chapter V, p. 34)

And the nearest he comes to any mention of the issue of place at all is in the comparison between Epic and Tragedy:

In a play one cannot represent an action with a number of parts going on simultaneously; one is limited to the part on the stage and connected with the actors. Whereas in epic poetry the narrative form makes it possible for one to describe a number of simultaneous incidents. (Ibid. Chapter xxiv, p. 82)

It is to Castelvetro that Sidney owes the inclusion of the unities of time and place in his Defence of Poesy, written round about 1583.<sup>18</sup>

At least one explanation for their formation was to be found in their association with 'verisimilitude',<sup>19</sup> which served as their theoretical basis till the middle of the 18th century. Rigidity in this attitude encouraged the view that drama can become a faithful imitation of nature only through the observance of the unities of time and place.

Dennis accepted the doctrine of verisimilitude, or probability, though not like rigid Aristotelian formalists. He subscribed to the view that poetry should be an exact imitation of nature.<sup>20</sup> Nature in neo-classical terminology was often equated with 'beauty', and set up as a criterion of excellence in the arts. The Augustans usually described beauty as consisting of harmony, symmetry, proportion, and order.<sup>21</sup> Thus Dennis was for the poetic imitation of *la belle nature*, that is nature idealized or the 'greater Universal Pattern'<sup>22</sup> expressed in Platonic phraseology, rather than for things as they seem. Dryden also stood for 'Nature wrought up to an higher pitch' but does not seem to have the Platonic touch in it. This conception of imitation naturally made him impatient with the rigid notion of verisimilitude. The nearest Dennis comes to the strict and formalistic view of verisimilitude is in the Letter to Moyle (1695): 'What I have said may evince a necessity of observing the Unities of Time and of Place, if a Poet would thorowly write up to Nature.'<sup>23</sup> But after a few sentences he shows his reasonable and sensible attitude: 'The Features (of a face) may be Regular, and yet a Great or Delicate air may be wanting. And there may be a Commanding or Engaging air, in a Face whose Features are not Regular.'<sup>24</sup> The quotation is indirectly an admission of the fact that probability is a complex thing, and that some factors may not permit of the strictest observance of the unities. In the *Remarks Upon Cato* (1713) he made his position clearer by showing that probability might be violated by servile obedience to the unities:

✓ The Unities of Time and Place are mechanick Rules, which, if they are observ'd with Judgment, strengthen the reasonableness of the Incidents, heighten the probability of the Action, promote the agreeable Deceit of the Representation, and add Cleanliness, Grace, and Comeliness to it. But if they are practis'd without Discretion, they render the Action more improbable, and the Representation more absurd, as an unworthy performance turns an Act of the highest Devotion into an Act of the greatest Sin. (Hooker, II, p. 68.)

Thus Dennis did not indulge in the absurdity of making them

immutable laws as many Renaissance critics did. As a matter of fact, he recognized different degrees of probability for different types of literary works: in comedy, for example, there should be a higher degree of verisimilitude than in tragedy.<sup>25</sup> The wonderful or the marvellous is not excluded from verisimilitude provided that it is in tune with the prevailing mood.<sup>26</sup> In criticizing Addison's *Cato* and *The Conscious Lovers* by Steele, Dennis applied the doctrine of verisimilitude only to the extent of pointing out incongruities or violations of plausibility which were easily detectable by common sense.

The absurd attempts of neo-classical critics and their followers to interpret Aristotle's phrase 'a single circuit of the sun' 'as meaning a day of twelve hours or so were governed by their own totally different conceptions of dramatic delusion.'<sup>27</sup> 'Dramatic imitation', it came to be believed during the Renaissance, produces in the spectator, 'a fancy, or a voluntary delusion that he is bodily present at the place and time of the supposed action.'<sup>28</sup>

Dennis had also held the notion of delusion. The talk<sup>29</sup> between Freeman (Dennis's mouthpiece) and Beaumont in his essay *The Impartial Critick* (1693) corroborates it:

Freem: How can an Action, the Scene of which is in Greece, be seen by us here in England?

Beaum: Nay, I will grant you, that there is an occasion for us to give way to a wholesome delusion, . . . But however, a Poet is still to endeavour, that his Representation be attended with as much probability as it is capable of. And it is much easier for a thousand Spectators to imagine themselves in some open place . . . than to imagine themselves in a King's cabinet . . .

Freem: I must confess what you say appears to be reasonable . . .

Humphry House cites the example of Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus* to show that there was no claim whatever to establish that time taken in performance precisely coincided with the supposed duration of the imagined action. Eugenius's<sup>30</sup> false assumption that Euripides in his *Suppliants* meant to tie himself to one day is derived, says Humphry House, 'from the notion

that the whole dramatic performance was meant to be a delusion, with stage time and imagined action running exactly *pari passu*.<sup>31</sup> House goes on to say: 'Eugenius's so-called defence of the Moderns is, in this matter, a defence of the *delusionist* method, and a blaming of the Ancients for inefficiency on the grounds that they tried to be delusionists and didn't do it very well. But in fact they did not even try to be.'<sup>32</sup> Dennis was also a victim of this misconceived notion of Eugenius. In the *Advertisement* to his play *A Plot, And No Plot* (1697) he says: 'The Unity of Time is exactly observ'd. For the time of the Action is precisely the same with that of the representation.'<sup>33</sup>

✓ Another feature of English drama, which made a complete nonsense of the unities and which, unhappily, Dennis could not grasp, was the treatment of love. He was content to allow it a place in English drama, though with certain reservations which had nothing to do with the unities. Once we concede the assumptions of the neo-classical critics it seems absurd for a dramatist to make two persons meet—who had presumably never met before—and to make them fall in love with each other with all the trials and tribulations<sup>34</sup> following within three hours or so seems grossly absurd.

Visually, throughout the action, only one place was represented in the Greek tragedies; very often it was the outside of a palace or a house. But Humphry House<sup>35</sup> cites the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus (there is a movement in it from Delphi to Athens) as an exception to this rule. Here are Dennis's views on the unity of place:

I do not remember that Aristotle has said any thing expressly concerning the Unity of Place. 'Tis true, implicitly he has said enough in the Rules which he has laid down for the Chorus. For by making the chorus an essential Part of Tragedy, and by bringing it upon the Stage immediately after the opening of the Scene, and retaining it there till the very Catastrophe, he has so determin'd and fix'd the Place of Action, that it was impossible for an Author upon the Graecian Stage to break thro' that Unity. I am of Opinion, that if a modern Tragick Poet can preserve the Unity of Place, without destroying the Probability of the Incidents, 'tis always best for him to do

it, because by the Preservation of that Unity—he adds Grace and Cleanness, and Comeliness to the Representation. But since there are no express Rules about it, and we are under no Compulsion to keep it, since we have no Chorus—; if it cannot be preserv'd without rendering the greater Part of the Incidents unreasonable and absurd, and perhaps sometimes monstrous; 'tis certainly better to break it. (Hooker, 'Remarks Upon Cato', Vol. II, pp. 75-76)

Dennis thus stood for a discreet observance of this unity; he was certainly not in favour of a reckless change of scenes from place to place unnecessarily. He pleaded guilty to the charge of violating the unity of place in his *A Plot, and No Plot* for the sake of variety and novelty and the effect had been so happy that he could hardly repent of it.<sup>36</sup> During the Restoration period also there were few English critics who did not affirm the desirability of observing the unity of place, whether in its strictest form or in the form as modified and liberalized by Corneille and Dryden. Dennis was at a loss to understand precisely why contemporary audiences preferred Shakespeare's plays<sup>37</sup> to those of their own age which more strictly preserved the unities.<sup>38</sup> He could only attribute it to the contemporary taste, which, he thought, was degenerate.

Before Dennis, Corneille and Dryden had liberalized the strict interpretation and application of the unities of time and place. For Dryden the rule of the unities had never become the rule of thumb; as a playwright he had almost discarded them. He had amply shown that the question of the unities was to be considered, if at all, from a dramatic point of view rather than from that of any rigid naturalism. He had never felt wholly comfortable with the rigid concept of verisimilitude, the theoretical basis of the unities. In his published thesis, *The Theory of Drama in the Restoration Period*, Prof. Sarup Singh<sup>39</sup> maintains that Dryden had done away, though not with a beating of drums, with this concept in the Preface to his last play, *Love Triumphant*, 1694. George Farquhar,<sup>40</sup> too, in his *A Discourse Upon Comedy* (1702) pointed out the worthlessness of all the pettifoggng arguments for the unities of time and place. His was a brilliant and witty attack which seemed to have the

last merry word. But he was also no friend to 'rambling plays'.

Dennis, we have to admit, failed to grasp so many implications in Dryden and Farquhar, and therefore could not strike at the unities of time and place the final fatal blow struck by Dr. Johnson in his *Preface to Shakespeare* (1765). Dr. Johnson claimed that 'the unities of time and place were not essential to a just drama.'<sup>41</sup> 'It is false,' he declared, 'that any representation is mistaken for reality; that any dramattick fable in its materiality was ever credible, or, for a single moment, was ever credited.'<sup>42</sup> 'The truth is,' he contended, 'that the spectators are always in their senses and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage, and that the players are only players.'<sup>43</sup>

In order to understand properly Dennis's utterances regarding the observation of artistic rules and at times their total disregard, we must view them against the critical dilemma he had inherited from the Restoration age. The age faced the dilemma 'inasmuch as it had intellectually embraced a critical creed which did not justify its literary tastes.'<sup>44</sup> Consequently, inconsistencies and contradictions, uncertainties and doubts did not allow the character of neoclassicism in England to remain homogeneous. It was due to this dilemma that there existed an unbridgeable gulf between dramatic theory and practice in the Restoration age. The age 'tried to escape from its dilemma through its beauties-and-faults criticism in which beauties were referred to taste, and faults to the rules, but inevitably the beauties cast suspicion upon the faults.'<sup>45</sup>

The basic points at issue before Dryden<sup>46</sup> were whether Greek drama should serve as a model for English, and if so, to what extent this supposition invalidated Elizabethan dramatic practice. 'To free English drama from Rymer's French classical strictures' Dryden should have asserted 'a radical differentiation in kind.'<sup>47</sup> He could not make a decisive distinction between the two types of tragedy—Greek and English. 'Dryden failed to recognize what the perspective of literary history makes plain to us: the English dramatic tradition was indigenous and unique.'<sup>48</sup>

On the one hand Dennis's classical temper was strengthened by Ben Jonson's 'assimilative'<sup>49</sup> classicism which was well

defended both in theory and in practice, and an undeniable French<sup>50</sup> influence.

On the other hand was the indigenous English dramatic tradition of irregular plays especially the Elizabethans and Shakespeare.<sup>51</sup> The English audience had been fed on Beaumont and Fletcher and could not be satisfied without plenty of action and variety; the playwrights had become used to exhibiting a dual attitude—formal allegiance to the rules and offering the audience what it actually wanted.

Dennis's vigorous championship of the rules was further encouraged by two factors: first, the opposition to neo-classicism till 1700 was well within the system and was not serious enough to destroy it;<sup>52</sup> and secondly, under the name of Shakespeare careless and third rate writing was being defended.

An interesting example of the dilemma baffling Dennis is found in his following utterance on Shakespeare's tragedies:

...they often touch us more without their due Preparations, than those of other Tragick Poets, who have all the Beauty of Design and all the Advantage of Incidents.  
(Hooker, II, p. 4. ll. 28-30)

Hooker's comment on this is worth quoting:

...Dennis seems not to have realized its full significance. In effect it recognizes that the drama of characterization, in which Shakespeare admittedly excelled, might attain the end of tragedy—that is, arousing the emotions of pity and terror—more successfully than other plays which perfectly fulfill Aristotelian requirements as to design and incidents. In other words, there are two types of tragedy, and Shakespeare's type, depending on fine characterization in scenes which are sufficient to arouse the passions, has by pragmatic test proved its worth. (Hooker, II, p. 425)

Dennis also tried to escape from the dilemma by resorting to the beauties-and-faults criticism: 'Wherever Genius runs thro' a work I forgive its Faults, and wherever that is wanting no Beauties can touch me.'<sup>53</sup>

While considering Dennis's views on the unities the context of the critical dilemma should not be overlooked.

In general, the large purposes of the three unities throughout their reign were to foster verisimilitude and to obtain artistic concentration. Under them grew up the great French classical drama of the 17th century, despite the occasional grumblings of Corneille. But their fate in England has been inimitably summed up by Saintsbury. He picturesquely calls them 'the Weird Sisters of dramatic criticism.' They were not allowed by the English playwrights and critics to develop into 'the vampires that sucked the blood, out of nearly all European tragedy.'<sup>54</sup> v. 3

But a penetrating critic like Lessing has shown that the unities as used by the ancients (originally they were the logical requirements demanded by the presence of the chorus) had something of permanent worth in themselves:

They (the Greeks) submitted bona fide to this restriction; but with a suppleness of understanding such that in seven cases out of nine they gained more than they lost thereby. For they used this restriction as a reason for simplifying the action and to cut away all that was superfluous, and thus, reduced to essentials, it became only the ideal of an action which was developed most felicitously in this form which required the least addition from circumstances of time and place. (G. E. Lessing, *Hamburgische Dramaturgie*, No. 46 in Barrett H. Clark, *European Theories of the Drama*, New York, 1947 (Rev. ed.), p. 266)

T. S. Eliot's opinion is virtually the same:

'The Unities have for me, at least, a perpetual fascination. I believe they will be found highly desirable for the drama of the future.' (T. S. Eliot, 'A Dialogue upon Dramatic Poetry', 1928, in *Selected Essays*, 1932, London, 1951, p. 58)

As Dennis's arguments for the observance of the unities show, I am sure, he did not fully understand the deeper import of Lessing's observations; but all the same, he pleaded for their discreet handling. Considering the declining fortunes of

dramatic art in his time, it seems, Dennis's was an approach of common sense and to that extent it was justified.

## NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Cf. Ingram Bywater (Tr.), *Aristotle On the Art of Poetry*, Oxford, 1959, Chap. XXIII, p. 79. Bywater uses 'with all the organic unity of a living creature.'
2. Humphry House: *Aristotle's Poetics*, Second Indian Reprint, Ludhiana, 1966, p. 49.
3. Hooker, I, p. 465.
4. Ibid. p. 466.
5. Cf. Hooker, II, Introduction, p. xlix.
6. Hooker, 'Letters to Steele and Booth', II, p. 168.
7. Dennis uses the word 'art' here in its strictest contemporary sense, as a system of rules. Cf. Hooker, II, p. 283.
8. Cf. Hooker, 'An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear' (1712), II, pp. 5-6. Moreover, because the chronicle plays did not fit into any recognized genre, the Augustan critics were inclined to regard them with small favour. They were regarded as dialogues in the lives of princes. Lack of a single action was the glaring fault obvious to neo-classical critics.
9. The play (1702) was a complete failure. (Hooker, II, p. 1). It had brought forth the comment that Dennis should 'stick to his criticisms and find fault with others, because he does ill himself.' (Ibid. p. 1). The prologue to the play has: 'His [Shakespeare's] haste some errors caus'd, and some neglect,/ Which we with care have laboured to correct.' (Hooker, II, p. 392).
10. The prologue has: 'Where [Shakespeare's Coriolanus] Master-strokes in wild Confusion Lye,/ Here brought to as much Order as we can'. (Hooker, II, p. 407).
11. But at the same time Dennis had realized fully that Shakespeare possessed a different kind of art—that of characterization and depicting human passions—in a very high degree. (Cf. Hooker, II, p. 4, ll. 28-30). See below pp. 35-36.
12. *The Spectator*, No. 40. He had of course not disapproved of that type of tragedy which contained a double plot; he insisted only on the close relation of the sub-plot to the principal action.
13. See Hooker, II, p. 21, ll. 43-44 and I, p. 178.
14. See George Watson (Ed.), *Of Dramatic Poesy and other Critical Essays*, Everyman's Edition, Vol. I, p. 58. Hereafter referred to as Watson.
15. In *The Indian Journal of English Studies*, Vol. I, 1964, p. 109.
16. Prof. Singh says that the heroic play and the comedy, of manners cannot be mixed together: they are not only incompatible but mutually destructive. Ibid. p. 109.
17. See Hooker, II, p. 22, ll. 2-4.
18. See Humphry House: op. cit. p. 67.
19. It is a literary doctrine that poetry should be 'probable' or 'likely' or 'lifelike'. The primary source is the concept of 'to eikos' (the probable, the verisimilar) in

- Aristotle's *Poetics*. It is closely related to his fundamental notion of the imitation of nature. Almost all critical theory has in some measure accepted this idea, though differences in strictness and laxness of interpretation are major. See *Encyclopaedia of Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Alax Preminger, Princeton University Press, 1965, p. 883.
20. Hooker, I, p. 202: 'I humbly conceive, that it is the same in Art, and particularly in Poetry, which ought to be an exact Imitation of Nature.' See Hooker, II, p. 386 also.
  21. Cf. Hooker, I, p. 202, ll. 11-14.
  22. Cf. Hooker, I, p. 418, ll. 8-15.
  23. Hooker, II, p. 386.
  24. Ibid. p. 386.
  25. See Hooker, II, p. 262, ll. 41-43 and p. 263, ll. 1-4.
  26. See Hooker, II, p. 47, ll. 12-13.
  27. Humphry House, op. cit. p. 65.
  28. Verrall, A. W., *Lectures on Dryden*, p. 134. In his article 'Dryden and the Unities' in *The Indian Journal of English Studies*, Vol. II, 1961, Prof. Sarup Singh cites the example of Shakespeare subscribing to the view that the audience is *bodily* present at the place of the supposed action. The chorus in *Henry V* tacitly assumes such belief.

The King is set from London; and the scene  
Is now transported, gentles, to Southampton;  
There is the playhouse now, there must you sit;  
And then to France shall we convey you safe.

(Prologue to Act II)

Rymer (see his objections to the second set of *Othello* in J. E. Spingarn, *Critical Essays of the 17th Century*, II, p. 231), and Shakespeare disagree only about the means, not the end, which is to dupe the audience into believing that they are actually present at the supposed place of action. But this view is contrary to general belief.

29. See Hooker, I, p. 36.
30. See Watson, I, p. 36, ll. 9-17.
31. Humphry House, op. cit. p. 66.
32. Ibid. p. 66.
33. Hooker, I, p. 145.
34. See Eugenius's speech in Watson, I, p. 42, ll. 15-20. His assertion seems to be that whatever the effect of the unities on classical drama, their application to contemporary drama would be disastrous.
35. Op. cit. p. 67.
36. See Hooker, I, p. 145.
37. Dennis cites the case of *The Moor of Venice* which, according to him, begins in Europe and ends in Asia. See Hooker, II, p. 162-9.
38. The demand for the observance of the unities of time and place may have been prompted by laudable artistic motives but often its effect was to reduce characters and action to a neat mechanical pattern. In its attempt to achieve perfect 'contrivance of the plot' (Watson, I, p. 74) contemporary drama lost

- its imaginative hold on life and did indeed cease to be 'animated with the soul of Poesy' (Watson, I, p. 56).
39. Sarup Singh, *The Theory of Drama in the Restoration Period*, Orient Longmans, 1963, p. 167. It may be absurd, Dryden said, for an audience to suppose themselves 'sometimes to be in a field, sometimes in a garden, and at other times in a chamber.' But there is the greater, 'the original absurdity for the audience to suppose themselves to be in any other place than in the very theatre in which they sit, which is neither chamber, nor garden, nor yet a public place of any business, but that of the representation.'
  40. 'A Discourse Upon Comedy' is included in *Eighteenth Century Critical Essays* edited by Scott Elledge, Cornell University Press, 1961, Vol. I. If we are not disturbed by watching in three hours an action that presumably took twenty-four hours in life why should we be upset by a play in which a year-long action is condensed? (Cf. Vol. I, p. 97, ll. 26-40). And if the imagination can fly in Act I from the theatre to Cairo, why can it not in Act III fly from Cairo to Astrachan? (Cf. Vol. I, p. 98, ll. 10-23).
  41. Walter Raleigh (Ed.), *Johnson on Shakespeare*, p. 30.
  42. Ibid. p. 26.
  43. Ibid. p. 27.
  44. R. F. Jones, 'Science and Criticism in the Neo-classical Age of English Literature' in B. N. Schilling (Ed.), *Essential Articles: For the Study of English Augustan Backgrounds*, London, 1964, p. 357.
  45. Ibid. p. 357.
  46. R. D. Hume has recently given a lucid exposition of Dryden's encounter with the critical dilemma of his age. See his 'Dryden's Heads of an Answer to Rymer: Notes toward a Hypothetical Revolution', in the *Review of English Studies*, New Series, Vol. XIX, No. 76, Nov. 1968, pp. 373-86.
  47. Ibid. p. 379.
  48. Ibid. p. 378.
  49. Ben Jonson's classicism has been termed 'assimilative' because his classical theories were put forward and defended with a liberality of spirit and a sense of the need of their adaptability to changed English conditions. See F. E. Schelling, 'Ben Jonson and the Classical School' in B. N. Schilling (Ed.), *Essential Articles: For the Study of English Augustan Backgrounds*, London, 1964, p. 173.
  50. See Hooker, II, Introduction, p. cxxi.
  51. In Addison's words he was 'a stumbling block to the whole tribe of rigid critics.' *The Spectator*, No. 592.
  52. See the conclusion of Paul Spencer Wood's article, 'The Opposition to Neo-classicism in England from 1660 to 1700' in B. N. Schilling (Ed.), op. cit. p. 416.
  53. Hooker, II, p. 400.
  54. As quoted in Sarup Singh, *The Theory of Drama in the Restoration Period*, Orient Longmans, 1963, p. 175.

## TWO FACES OF CATHLEEN

BY S. RAMASWAMY

The wind has bundled up the clouds high over Knocknarea,  
And thrown the thunder on the stones for all that Maeve  
can say;

Angers that are like noisy clouds have set our hearts abeat,  
But we have all bent low and low and kissed the quiet feet  
Of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan.

(‘Red Hanrahan’s Song About Ireland’—W. B. Yeats)

IN SPITE OF the rather mysterious if not misleading title, this paper is simply an attempt to take note of the spirit of sacrifice that was forthcoming for the sake of Ireland—Cathleen—with reference to two plays—Yeats’s *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and Lady Gregory’s *The Rising of the Moon*.

A comparative study of these two plays is worthwhile not merely because both of them basically deal with the same theme, but because Yeats and Lady Gregory influenced each other. Yeats gathered folklore under the guidance of Lady Gregory who familiarized him with the Kiltartan style through her *Cuchulain of Muirthemne* and the poet turned to drama and wrote what is probably his most significant play—*Cathleen Ni Houlihan*. Yeats, in his ‘A letter to Lady Gregory’ entitled ‘A People’s Theatre’, says—‘We thought we could bring the old folk-life to Dublin, patriotic feeling to aid us, and with the old folk-life all the life of the heart, understanding heart.’ This is what has been accomplished by Lady Gregory in *The Rising of the Moon*.

*Cathleen ni Houlihan* is a ‘patriotic tragedy’ and *The Rising of the Moon*, equally patriotic, has a comic setting. However, in both the plays, there is conflict in the minds of the protagonists and in both the plays, the spirit of sacrifice for the sake of Cathleen triumphs over every other thought and consideration. In these two plays, we see the two faces of Cathleen in her influence over her devotees—one in a tragic and the other in a comic setting.

The very beginning of the two plays *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and *The Rising of the Moon* are indicative of the difference in the tone and spirit of the two plays. The scene of *Cathleen ni Houlihan* is set in a simple and austere cottage and the opening line of the play 'What is the sound I hear?' evokes an atmosphere of foreboding. *The Rising of the Moon*, on the contrary, opens with a large barrel at the centre of the stage and two policemen and a Sergeant discuss whether it would a good place to put up a notice for a 'Wanted' man who has just 'broken gaol'. Though *The Rising of the Moon* has serious implications and there is a conflict in the mind of the Sergeant, essentially it is comic in spirit.

The sense of contrast is beautifully set forth in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* because right from the beginning, we are conscious of the happiness that the family is expecting with Michael's wedding. They talk about his 'grand wedding clothes' when 'an old woman' comes up the path—

*Bridget*: Do you see anything?

*Michael*: I see an old woman coming up the path.

At the end of the play, we read—

*Peter*: Did you see an old woman going down the path?

*Patrick*: I did not, but I saw a young girl, and she had the walk of a queen.

What happens to this simple little family between the coming of the 'old woman' and the going out of the 'young girl' with 'the walk of a queen' constitutes the play. The play is about the spirit of sacrifice that was responsible for this metamorphosis of the 'old woman' into the 'young girl'. In *The Rising of the Moon* also, there is a sense of contrast woven into the texture of the play. The police Sergeant who starts off by being a zealous advocate of his profession finds out during the course of the play that there were 'more things in heaven and earth' than were dreamt of in his philosophy, and he also undergoes a 'metamorphosis'. Just as the young man Michael loves his bride dearly and wanted to marry her before he encountered Cathleen, the Sergeant is all for doing his 'duty' and making

a little money before the 'Man' for whom the search is on comes along. If he catches the 'wanted' man, there is the professional satisfaction—the promotion, and there is also the satisfaction of having discharged his 'duty'—'Well, we have to do our duty in the force. Haven't we the whole country depending on us to keep law and order? It's those that are down would be up and those that are up would be down if it wasn't for us.' The conflict that develops later on in the mind of the Sergeant is indicated right here and the Policeman X drives it home at rather a different level—'And if we get him itself, nothing but abuse on our heads for it from the people and may be from our own relations.' However, it is not because of this reason that the Sergeant later on allows the 'ballad-singer' to escape but because of a higher reason. He has found out that essentially he belongs with his people whatever his official 'duty' may be, in the narrow sense of the word. Thus the essential and ultimate devotion to Cathleen is brought out. After all Cathleen does not accept small favours. As she says in *Cathleen ni Houlihan* 'If any man would give me help, he must give me himself, he must give me all.'

There is conflict in the mind of Michael as well as in the mind of the Sergeant. If it is the conflict between 'love' and 'duty' in the mind of Michael (or it may be the love for his bride and love for Cathleen), in the case of the Sergeant, it is the conflict between devotion to 'duty' and his 'love' for Cathleen (or it may be the conflict between the 'duty' in 'the force' and a greater 'duty' which he owes to Cathleen). Whatever way we look at it, we see that love and duty are involved in both cases which results in a conflict in the minds of the protagonists, but the way they make their ultimate 'choice' is very different and this accounts for the difference in the spirit of the two plays.

In *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, since Cathleen herself is a character in the play, Michael is swayed into the ultimate 'right action' by the direct spell of Cathleen. Michael is so completely under the spell of Cathleen that even his mother's supplication—'Maybe you don't know, Ma'am, that my son is going to be married to-morrow. Nor did you tell us your name' is of any use. It only brings forth the answer from Cathleen—'There are some that call me old woman, and some that call me

*Cathleen ni Houlihan*. They that had red cheeks will have pale cheeks for my sake; and for all that, they will think that they are well paid.' Michael is completely under her spell and the mother's attempts to counteract it are completely in vain. The chant of Cathleen is ringing in his ears, it has permeated his whole soul and spirit and he dashes his bride aside who clings to him and rushes out. Since the whole setting of the play is sombre and serious (in spite of the comic touches in the beginning of the play,) and since Michael's departure results in the personal tragedy of the human beings who were dear to him, one can easily see the spirit of tragedy at work in this play. On the other hand, in Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*, there is no such personal 'tragedy'. All that the Sergeant loses by allowing the 'Man' to escape is the monetary benefit and the benefit of promotion but he has gained a great deal—the satisfaction of not having to live the rest of his life ashamed of himself. He has risen in his own estimation by making the 'right choice'. After all, the lure of doing the right thing by Cathleen is too strong a feeling to be resisted by any individual. But the method by which the Sergeant is convinced about doing the right thing is through songs and appeal to patriotic sentiment by the so-called 'ballad-singer' and the whole play from the beginning to the end, in spite of the strong patriotic feeling, is steeped in the spirit of comedy and thus we see another 'face' of Cathleen, through the 'ballad-singer,' who, like Michael in *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, had directly come under the influence of Cathleen. Thus, if Michael comes directly face to face with Cathleen, the Sergeant recognizes the face of Cathleen—which he has temporarily chosen to forget—through the evocative songs of the 'Man'. The influence of Cathleen on Michael is sudden and overwhelming. The influence of the spirit of Cathleen which is imparted to the Sergeant is gradual and subtle. When the 'Man' starts singing—

As through the hills I walked to view the hills and Shamrock plain,

the Sergeant shouts at him—'Stop that; That's no song to be singing in these times.' After a few minutes, the song is having its subtle but sure effect on the Sergeant, and without showing

it, he says,—‘Well, you can sing if it gives more courage.’ Then the ‘Man’ who is sitting on the same barrel facing the other way, brings home the point to the Sergeant that both of them have the same background. The ‘Man’ forces the Sergeant to face the spirit of Cathleen which is as much a part of him as of the ‘Man’.

*Man:* Now, I dare say, Sergeant, in your youth, you used to be sitting upon a wall, the way you are sitting upon this barrel now, and the other lads beside you, and you singing ‘Granuaile’...?

*Sergeant:* I did then.

*Man:* And the ‘Shan Bhean Bhocht’?...

*Sergeant:* I did then.

*Man:* And the ‘Green on the Cape’?

*Sergeant:* That was one of them.

*Man:* And may be the man you are watching for to-night used to be sitting on the wall, when he was young, and singing those same songs....

This is exactly what Yeats meant when he wrote in the letter to Lady Gregory about bringing the old ‘folk life’ and the ‘patriotic feeling to aid us.’ The ‘Man’ in Lady Gregory’s play is an agent who makes the Sergeant come under the spell of the spirit of Cathleen and the Sergeant realizes only too clearly, ‘If it was’nt for the sense I have, and for my wife and family, and for me joining the force the time I did, it might be myself now would be after breaking jail and hiding in the dark, and it might be him that is hiding in the dark and that got out of jail would be sitting up where I am on this barrel...and it might be myself would be creeping up trying to make my escape from himself, and it might be himself would be keeping the law, and myself would be breaking it....’

Thus the Sergeant realizes how easy it is to ‘change places’ at ‘The Rising of the Moon’ and sees the need to be with the ‘People’ and not with the ‘law’ and to be ‘on the side of the country’, which is in our sense, going all out for Cathleen. The Sergeant not merely allows the ‘Man’ to escape but he even shields him from the other policemen. But the entire spirit of

the play, when the Sergeant says, 'I wonder now, am I as great a fool as I think I am?'

In Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* as well as in Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*, the songs that are sung play a very prominent part—that of arousing the patriotic feeling. But there is a difference in the tone of the song, in keeping with the spirit of the play. In *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, the old woman's songs evoke the tragic atmosphere—

I will go cry with the woman,  
For Yellow-haired Donagh is dead,  
With a hempen rope for a neckcloth,  
And a white cloth on his head,—

The other song that the old woman sings is truly the summary of the spirit of this play—

Do not make a great keening  
When the graves have been dug tomorrow.  
Do not call the white-scarfed riders  
To the burying that shall be tomorrow;  
Do not spread food to call strangers  
To the wakes that shall be tomorrow;  
Do not give money to the prayers  
For the dead that shall die tomorrow...

The songs of the old woman are intensely affecting and when she sings—

They shall be remembered for ever,  
They shall be alive for ever,  
They shall be speaking for ever, ✓  
The people shall hear them for ever

Michael 'has the look of a man that has got the touch.' He doesn't hear a word of what people are saying around him and the reminder from Delia—'We are going to get married' has absolutely no effect on him and he 'breaks away from Delia, stands for a second at the door, then rushes out, following the old woman's voice.'

In contrast to this tragic atmosphere, the song of the 'Man' in *The Rising of the Moon* evokes the comic spirit—

There was a rich farmer's daughter lived near the town  
of Ross

She courted a highland soldier; his name was Johney  
Hart;

Says the mother to her daughter, 'I'll go distracted mad  
If you marry that highland soldier dressed up in highland  
plaid.'

Thus in Yeats's *Cathleen ni Houlihan* and Lady Gregory's *The Rising of the Moon*, we see two faces of Cathleen, the daughter of Houlihan. ✓

# I. A. RICHARDS'S AESTHETICS : ILLUSION AND REALITY

BY CHETAN KARNANI

THE aesthetic theory of I.A. Richards is fascinating in its sweep and in its confusion. It seems to supply easy solutions to some of the intricate problems which have been baffling the thinkers on the subject since the days of Aristotle. On the other hand, Richards has not given many instances to prove his theories which are occasionally full of contradictions. Besides, it is difficult to get a coherent picture of his Aesthetics because it is spread through a large number of books such as *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, *The Meaning of Meaning*, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, *Practical Criticism*, *Coleridge on Imagination* and *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Here I shall make an attempt to bring these scattered insights at one place and judge them for what they are worth. Still if this essay appears to be discursive, part of the blame should be shared by Richards himself.

Richards's aesthetics created a stir because he had certain startling things to say. In *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, we are told that there has been no progress in aesthetics because either the earlier thinkers did not know semantics or they were positively silly. The whole book regards the earlier writers on the subject as not only instructive but amusing as well. The mistake that earlier aestheticians made was that they assumed too readily that 'similar language involves similar thoughts and similar things thought of.'<sup>1</sup> With this assumption they ignored that Beauty can have sixteen different senses which they confused one with another in different permutations and combinations. The earlier authors never bothered to define the range of reference of the word 'beauty', so that when some of them said that 'Anything is beautiful which leads to desirable social effects', they ignored, for instance, the Police. The view that 'Anything is beautiful which is an imitation of nature'<sup>2</sup> has been dismissed by Richards with the wry comment that it has become outmoded with the arrival of photography. In this manner, Richards has spoken disparagingly of almost every other thinker on aesthetics who preceded him. His forthright

comment on their performance is: 'Inferior poetry, too much of sack, too little bread.' Because of this sharp criticism, it becomes all the more essential to assess Richards's own positive contribution to aesthetics.

Richards claims that he is the first writer who has emphasised the role of reason in the arts. According to him, the greatest mistake which earlier writers made since Kant's *Critique of Judgment* was 'to fit Beauty into a neat pigeon-hole with Feeling.'<sup>3</sup> The aim of Richards's aesthetics is to prove that reason is not the prerogative of sciences alone. However, he does not succeed in pursuing this aim owing to the following reasons. Firstly, he invokes the mythical impulses and the future advances of neurology. In so doing he either creates weird tautologies or seeks shelter behind analogies. Secondly, in his early theory, he allows feelings, emotions and attitudes to make a back-door entry. Thirdly, he makes an irrational base of the keyword 'impulse'. On the one hand, he gives a narrow definition of impulse as 'a process apparently whole beginning in a stimulus and ending in an act.'<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, he gives the broad, Benthamite definition of impulse-desire in his statement: 'The satisfaction of every impulse is in itself good.'

In spite of this vagueness and evasion, Richards manages to appear rational because of his psychological approach to aesthetics. He is interested not in the art object but in the experience induced by the arts. This aesthetic experience is described in terms of 'emotions', 'attitudes' and 'impulses'. Richards is interested more in the effect than in the cause. He regards 'Beauty' not as a quality of the art object but as the character of our response to the art object. When we say that a Beethoven symphony has form and tension, we are only saying 'What gives the effect, gives the effect x'. This is the fallacy of 'projecting the effect and making it a quality of its cause.'<sup>5</sup> Richards is such a firm believer in this view that he regards painting, a part from mind, as only 'an assemblage of pigments' and poetry, 'merely ink and paper'.

It is difficult to understand why Richards stops half-way between Locke and Berkley. He had better go the whole hog and say that these pigments, paper and ink are also only the projection of the mind. It is difficult to deny that M. F. Hussain's cubist horse or Bhim Sen Joshi's intricate 'tan'

(figure) cannot be objectively verified. But Richards personally contradicts himself on this point. After denying the existence of objective categories, he proceeds to point out the various categories which are peculiar to each art. Thus he says that painting has these formal elements: texture, volume, structure, picture space, weight tension, colour harmony and plastic rhythm; verse has rhythm, metre, pitch and movement; and so with sculpture and music.

The trouble with Richards is that he tries to have the best of both the worlds. To say that the stimulating object does not exist and then to proceed to describe it in terms of its objective categories is to commit an obvious contradiction. After all, *Principles of Literary Criticism* begins with the distinction which implies the dichotomy between the art object and the experience induced by this art object. We are told that there is the difference between the critical and the technical part of the aesthetic experience. The critical part refers to the value of the experience while the technical part refers to the means through which that experience comes about. Because of Richards's excessive preoccupation with the psychological approach, he has no patience for the objective analysis of the technical parts whose existence he does admit.

Besides, Richards assumes that there is good art and that there is bad art. That is why he advises us that we ought not to expose ourselves to the mediocre arts for that will incapacitate us for the appreciation of other great art. The problem arises: how does he determine the nature of mediocre art? His statement implies that a good and a bad poem create a different sort of organisation and that while the one is preferable, the other is not. Since he is concerned only with the organisation of impulses, hence Richards maintains an unusual silence about the art object. In fact, Richards goes occasionally to the extreme when he asserts that the most aesthetic categories are more vacua or noises. 'Such terms as "construction", "form", "balance", "composition", "design", "unity", "expression", for all arts, as "depth", "movement", "texture", "solidity", in the criticism of painting, as "rhythm", "stress", "plot", "character" in literary criticism; as "harmony", "atmosphere", "development", in music are instances.'<sup>6</sup> His excessive faith in nominalistic behaviourism makes him say that all these terms are bogus

ellipsis because we commit the fallacy of projecting our own effect in the object. Instead Richards tries to provide a psychological definition of these terms. Thus rhythm becomes 'texture of expectations, satisfactions, disappointments, surprisals',<sup>7</sup> metre becomes 'increased expectancy', and style becomes only 'a matter of tone'. Not only this but by making the whole aesthetic experience a matter of muscular and kindred aesthetic movements, we get completely dissociated from the original source which gave rise to that response. This dissociation is all the more surprising because Richards does not ignore the medium. He insists that an artist should have the mastery of medium, that he should master the art of getting the thing right before communication can take place. Besides, in his discussion of painting, sculpture and music, he brings back surreptitiously the objective categories to provide us with the technical analysis of a work of art. But his psychological theory of aesthetics has no place for the existence of these categories. All this leads to a hopeless confusion. We know neither the criterion nor the method of evaluation of a work of art, because his subjective criterion—the organisation of impulses—only makes every one his own best judge. ✓✓

✓ The other aspect of Richards's aesthetic theory which created a sensation was his belief in the continuity principle, which was earlier enunciated by Charles Sander, Pierce and later used by John Dewey. This daring view states that the aesthetic experience is in no way different from an ordinary experience, say eating or drinking. All these activities tend to give us poise which is the source of pleasure. To quote Richards's oft-repeated statement: 'When we look at a picture, or read a poem, or listen to music, we are not doing something quite unlike what we were doing on our way to the gallery or when we dressed in the morning.'<sup>8</sup> The difference, if any, is not of kind but of degree—the difference being only in 'an intensification, a broadening or a deepening of the mood.'<sup>9</sup> In this way we can dispense with 'the phantom aesthetic state' and 'the unique aesthetic emotion', and no longer regard Beauty as a mystic, unanalysable and ineffable entity. The continuity principle will also save us from believing that the arts provide

a 'private heaven for aesthetes'. Besides this view can help us in not creating an unnecessary divorce between art and life. Thus by explaining the value of the arts in terms of our everyday experiences, Richards is able to reduce the whole of aesthetics to the twin consideration of communication and value. Value and communication are two most important inter-related aspects of aesthetics because 'Value cannot be demonstrated except through the communication of what is valuable.'<sup>10</sup> This sort of aesthetic analysis will help us in regarding the values no longer in the intra-personal but in the inter-personal realms, so that we no longer regard any man as an island unto himself.

This emphasis on communication has been Richards's most important contribution to aesthetics. He agrees with the psychoanalysts that our minds are private but all the same we manage to communicate because of all-in-each of every mind. This communicative aspect is what matters the most in the arts. Those who indulge in finding out the motives, the drives and the unconscious of the artist are only amusing themselves because that sort of detective work is a good exercise in biography but has no relevance to a work of art itself. We may be interested in Dylan Thomas because he is abnormal but the reason why we attend to his work lies in the fact that he can organise his eccentricities in a certain form which helps us in recreating the same experience. It is not unoften that we come across the practice of diverting the whole process when people start arguing from a poet to his poem. This is an instance of the logical sequence turned upside down. As a matter of fact, what we need to understand a work of art is not the knowledge of an artist's inner life but the command of life itself. Ultimately poems bring to us what we bring to them. Hence Richards has been unusually fond of quoting Coleridge's lines:

...we receive but what we give  
And in our life alone does Nature live.

Thus Richards is able to establish that our command of life is a great help in the proper appreciation of the arts. The relationship between art and everyday experiences is established by him in these terms: 'Aesthetic experiences are closely

similar to many other experiences, that they differ chiefly in their connections between their constituents, and that they are only a further development, a finer organisation of ordinary experiences and not in the least a new or different kind of thing.<sup>11</sup> This statement gives rise to many allied issues which have not been adequately answered by Richards. Firstly, why should we attend to the arts, which are thrice removed from reality? Why not care for the greater artist—nature herself? Second, what is the difference between aesthetic and non-aesthetic perception? Third, where do the non-aesthetic experiences end and where do the aesthetic experiences begin? Fourth, why is the aesthetic experience more valuable than the non-aesthetic one and within the realm of aesthetic experiences, why is one preferable to another? ]

Richards's answers to these four queries are vague and generalised. As far as the first two questions are concerned, he tells us that the uniqueness of aesthetic perception lies in the fact that we respond actively to a tree in a painting as opposed to the passive reception of an ordinary tree in nature. When we look at Ustad Mansur's Falcon in that celebrated painting, we are not looking at any original falcon of nature but the falcon as seen through the eyes of the great Moghul artist. The interest shifts from the object to the unique perception of that object by the artist. The uniqueness of an artist's perception arises from the fact that the perfect imitation of a natural object is not possible because our perception is selective. Yeats was right when he said: '... only God, my dear, could love you for yourself alone/And not your yellow hair.'<sup>12</sup> It is due to this factor that we perceive an object in a painting in a different way than we perceive it in nature. The works of art unfold to us these newer avenues of perception. In this way we avoid those stock responses with which we normally react to our daily surroundings. This implies that every art lover should have a great amount of plasticity. He should be able to react to every new artistic situation in a new way in the interest of perfect communication.

The experiences of the highest value can be available to us only when the wastage in communication is avoided. If this happens, then we are able to perceive things with a greater sense of differentiation. It is only by the help of the arts that we

become conscious of the individuality of things—what Thomas Aquinas called—'quidditas'. To quote Richards: 'Simultaneously as another aspect of the same adjustment, our individuality becomes differentiated or isolated from the things around us. We become less 'mixed into' other things.'<sup>13</sup> In this way, the arts enable us to enrich our personality.

Richards went on giving many such explanations why the arts are useful for us. They were valuable because they enable us to satisfy the largest number of appetencies, which he regarded as the special forms of impulses. In the highest form of aesthetic experience, we have synaesthesia—the perfect organisation of impulses which has equilibrium and harmony. In this state of mind we are able to reduce the diversity of life to one ordered unity by the help of esemplastic imagination.

It is significant to note that Richards's theory of the organisation of heterogeneous impulses applies only to one kind of art—i.e. the Poetry of Inclusion which runs parallel to Nietzsche's Apollonian art. If one looks at the actual words used by Nietzsche, it appears that Richards has unconsciously echoed him. Nietzsche tells us that in the Apollonian art, 'Contrasts are overcome, the highest sign of power thus manifesting itself in the conquest of opposites; and achieved without a feeling of tension; violence being no longer necessary, every thing submitting and obeying and doing so with good grace.'<sup>14</sup> Richards has nothing to say about the other kind of art which Nietzsche called Dionysian—the art which is the expression of the overpowering, orgiastic impulse of man. Richards does talk about the Poetry of Exclusion but in this only one dominant emotion or mood is expressed, and this sort of poetry does not approximate to Nietzsche's view of the Dionysian art.

However Richards emphasised the poetry of inclusion because it fitted in well with his theory of value since this is the only sort of poetry which helps us in the maximum satisfaction of our impulses. Value is a positive thing and is derived from the satisfaction of our appetencies, which, in Richards's aesthetic spectrum, are opposed to aversions. The least possible value will emanate from that organisation of our impulses which is the first step from a neutral state—the least possible satisfaction of the physiological needs. On the other hand, value will range to the most possible impulse-organisation, which is the state

of perception of beauty called synaesthesia. But the main trouble with his strait-jacket system is that it is form without content. Nowhere except in that one solitary instance of six masterpieces of the Shakespearean tragedy does Richards give any instance of this balance or the reconciliation of opposite impulses. He admits that psychology is not enough advanced to enable us to know the exact nature of these impulses and attitudes. Heaven knows how he himself came to know about it.

Richards's theory of value is defective because he is not willing to consider any approach other than the psychological. Such an approach excludes both ethics and metaphysics. Richards has some really harsh words against those thinkers who seek shelter behind the capitalised, Absolute values. His chief attack was directed against G. E. Moore's *Principia Ethica* wherein 'good' is regarded as indefinable. It was Richards's hope that he can define 'good' in neurological terms but by forgetting that value implies choice, he indulged in amateurish oversimplification. One reason why *Principles of Literary Criticism* has such fascination is the seeming ease with which every complex issue pertaining to the arts is simplified in terms of impulses and attitudes.

The truth of the above statement can be seen from his explanation why the arts are useful for us. To answer this question, he formulates an elaborate psychological theory of value which posits that the end of all human activities is to attain the equilibrium of impulses. Since all human beings pursue this end all the time hence he is easily able to rule out the individual and the cultural differences in the organisation of impulses. This incidentally lends universality to his theory which, in its effort to appear scientific, tries to encompass all the human beings. However, Richards gives a very indirect test of his theory when he says that 'the debauchee and the victim of conscience alike have achieved organisations whose price in sacrifice is excessive.'<sup>15</sup> Not only he demonstrates his theory indirectly but himself goes on to point out the difficulty of knowing consciously the sort of organisation which he suggests because this systematisation of impulses is 'not primarily an affair of conscious planning and arrangement, as this is understood, for example, by a great business house or by a railway.'<sup>16</sup> His neat design begins to show even greater loopholes when he

says that our appetencies are unconscious and that we ought to be wary of 'too conscious a delight' because noise is no sure sign that the motor cycle is all right though it is good enough an an indicator that the machine is working.

Richards manages to find a way out of these difficulties by talking about the value of the arts in general terms. We are told that the arts will enable us to be better organised than other people. Towards this end he formulates his theory of formal and material transfer. According to the former, the skill gained in the organisation of impulses in one sphere of activity is helpful in another. In other words, the skill gained in skiing will enable us to solve a more difficult problem in mathematics. Richards is such a good man that he refuses to believe that the transfer has its own limitations. While it is true that the skill gained in hockey may make one a better player of football, it is doubtful whether a person who can render an intricate 'tan' (a musical figure) can also despatch a googly to the midwicket boundary. But Richards's claims were not limited to the formal transfer only. He had equal hopes from the material transfer, i.e. the sort of organisation we get in our experience of the arts is helpful in organising ourselves in our life. This is hardly true whatever that loosely used term 'life' may mean. Mostly, artists are men of great feeling but hardly men of sound judgment or common sense. Beethoven's quarrels with his patrons or the kathak dancer's addiction to drink is hardly a sign of better organisation in 'life' as well.

But in spite of the high claims that Richards makes for the arts, he admits that the arts influence our mind unawares like 'the uncertain heavens received/Into the bosom of the steady lake.'<sup>17</sup> All the same, it is surprising that he demolishes the false fiction of the 'Aesthetic man' or the 'Aesthetic mode' and the useless bogey of 'Art for Art's sake' but proceeds to create the same surreptitiously in his theory of value. This can be seen from the lack of social content in his theory of value. His aesthetics posits an individual who is busy organising himself through a classical symphony or the pop art as the need may be.

Consciously or unconsciously, Richards imbibed a part of the tradition of the sentimental aestheticians who preceded him. His elaborate apology for the arts is in direct line of the roman-

tic writers on the subject. All that he could do was to define, by the help of his new semantics, all the key concepts in terms of the psychological states of mind. This was his greater achievement than those startling doctrines whose only use was to compel us to attend to his theory. Nearly forty years have passed since the publication of *Principles of Literary Criticism*, but the impressive sketches drawn therein are yet to be proved true by the new findings of neurology. The only advantage from those fascinating designs was that the age-old questions in aesthetics were posed from a new, Behaviouristic, Logical Positivist angle and a certain temporary consolation gained from those pseudo-scientific explanations. In fact Richards's aesthetics remains an impressive illusion without much reality.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *The Foundations of Aesthetics* (1922); 2nd ed., 1925, pp. 15-16.
2. For these sixteen senses of Beauty, cf. *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, p. 21, and *The Meaning of Meaning*, pp. 142-3.
3. *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 12. ✓
4. *Ibid.* p. 86.
5. *Ibid.* p. 21.
6. *Loc. cit.*
7. *Ibid.* p. 137.
8. *Ibid.* p. 20.
9. *Ibid.* p. 80.
10. *Practical Criticism*, p. 12.
11. *Principles of Literary Criticism*, p. 16.
12. "For Anne Gregory".
13. *The Foundations of Aesthetics*, p. 79.
14. *Will to Power*, p. 245.
15. *Principles of Literary Criticism*, pp. 52-53. ✓
16. *Practical Criticism*, p. 57.
17. Wordsworth, 'There was a Boy'.

## AN UNACKNOWLEDGED SOURCE OF SOME OF D. H. LAWRENCE'S IDEAS

BY DR. D. K. BARUA

A WORD must be said at the outset in explanation of the title. It is not the purpose of this essay to suggest that Lawrence borrowed ideas without the courtesy of any acknowledgment. Every writer works in a climate of thought for which he does not have to be particularly grateful. Besides, in the inspired visionary style of Lawrence's writings there was hardly any room for acknowledgement. But as students of literary history we cannot be indifferent to those forgotten sources of his ideas; the danger being that without a fair estimate of these sources we are likely to extol or dismiss Lawrence's ideas simply in terms of their uniqueness or his eccentricities.

D. H. Lawrence was as much a product of the thoughts and ideas current in the impressionable time of his youth as any other writer worth the name. And one writer who had a considerable influence on the younger minds between the mid-nineties and the years immediately preceding World War I was Edward Carpenter. His name unfortunately has now been forgotten, though the subjects on which he wrote have not lost any of their relevance. In some of his pursuits, especially in his outspoken attitude to sexual questions, Carpenter's works form a link between the nineteenth century and our time. Among his intimate friends and admirers were Havelock Ellis, the humanitarian Henry Salt, J. A. Symonds, Lowes Dickinson, E. M. Forster, Robert Graves, Siegfried Sassoon and Bertrand Russell, not to mention the whole host of radical writers beginning from Shaw and Morris down to Orage, Orwell and Herbert Read. Edward Carpenter's correspondence with his friends and admirers can be read in the special Carpenter Collection of the City Library of Sheffield, George Ryland's Library of Manchester and the Alf Mattisen collection of the City Library, Leeds.

Lawrence's connection with Carpenter can be established from their various common interests, and through several common friends. Carpenter was highly honoured as an interpreter

of Whitman, and for his prose-poem *Towards Democracy* (1883) he was popularly known as the Walt Whitman of England. A historian of Whitman's influence in England, Harold Blodgett, calls Carpenter 'One of the worthiest of Walt's friends' and remarks that Carpenter's *Days With Walt Whitman* (1906) and supplied the most valuable study of Whitman's personality, 'far surpassing in penetration the personal estimates of Conway and Buchanan' (Blodgett, *Walt Whitman in England*, 1934, p. 204). John Addington Symonds has also remarked in his book on *Walt Whitman* (1893) that in interpreting the spirit of Whitman's poetry no one in England has played a greater part than Carpenter (*see* p. 147). So it is very likely that Lawrence read Carpenter in his youth and his passion for Whitman must have led him to take some interest in one of Whitman's renowned admirers.

✓ Secondly, we are told by Lawrence's biographers<sup>1</sup> that Lawrence's early friends were all socialists. And Edward Carpenter was the prophet of socialism in whose *Towards Democracy* (1883), according to Lord Elton, 'the soul of the Labour Movement found expression before as yet there was a Labour Movement.'<sup>2</sup> Elton called his history of the Labour Movement *England Arise*, borrowing the title from the first line of a song which Carpenter wrote and which was sung by the British socialists in the nineties with the same gusto as the French revolutionaries sang their 'Marseillaise'. Edward Carpenter's house at Millthorpe, near Sheffield, to which he retired after resigning from a clerical Fellowship at Cambridge and where he practised the art of simple living, depending on the produce of his own hand, was a place of pilgrimage to most socialists of England. E. M. Forster says that though Carpenter's greatness 'scarcely got into his book, the spell of his personal influence was tremendous';<sup>3</sup> and it is very likely that Lawrence felt its impact as much as his contemporaries did.

✓ Lastly, Carpenter was held in very high esteem by the younger generation in the 1890's and in the first decade of the twentieth century for his courageous essays on sexual questions, and especially for his advocacy of a humane attitude to homosexuality. Robert Graves wrote from his school in 1914, after reading Carpenter's book on *The Intermediate Sex*, that Carpenter's writings on this subject had absolutely taken the scales

from his eyes and caused him 'immense elation'.<sup>4</sup> In answer to a query from the present author, Lord Russell confirmed that he was also 'a good deal influenced by some booklets' that Carpenter wrote on sex questions, but added that he did not like Carpenter's mysticism.

Lawrence, however, could not say so, as Carpenter's mysticism was very similar to his own. This has been noticed also by Bonamy Dobrée and Edith Batho in *The Victorian and After* (1938). In a short note on Carpenter, they said that Carpenter's mystical attitude 'was a queer mixture of Whitman and D. H. Lawrence; with sunny Gods, however, instead of dark ones.' Besides, that Lawrence had some sympathetic understanding of the homosexual attraction is apparent from many<sup>5</sup> of his novels and especially, *The White Peacock* (1911). Once he wrote to Henry Savage that he should like to know why nearly every man that approached greatness tended to homosexuality, whether he admitted it or not.<sup>6</sup> Carpenter wrote several books on homosexuality and compiled an anthology of friendship called *Iolaus* (1902) in order to vindicate the nobility of the homosexual instinct which he usually described as homogenic love. This book had four reprints between 1902 and 1906. One of the chapters of this anthology was called 'The poetry of friendship' which could have suggested Lawrence's chapter heading 'A poem of friendship' in *The White Peacock*, written during the period 1906-1911, when Carpenter's popularity was at its height.

I think it will be conceded from what we have enumerated above, and, from the fact that both Lawrence and Carpenter contributed to *The English Review* at one time during the first decade of this century that Lawrence knew Carpenter's work.

Carpenter wrote more than twenty books of which *Towards Democracy*, his Whitmanesque prose-poem, and the collection of essays called *England's Ideal, Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure, Love's Coming of Age* were most widely known. After reading *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* Tolstoy wrote to Aylmer Maude in February 1905: 'I consider him the worthy heir of Carlyle & Ruskin.' (See Carpenter Collection, 386-119) A reviewer in *The Athenaeum* remarked in its issue of 2 April, 1921, that 'by the middle nineties Carpenter's influence was incalculable'.

Especially among the young, he added, who found in Carpenter a man possessing the strength to live what he taught. Another factor that was responsible for Carpenter's popularity, the reviewer thought, was that in Carpenter the man himself as well as in his books, 'there was a hopefulness and sunshiny exhilaration that filled his readers with responsive joy, like the sight of the mountain or the smell of the moorland air.' It is perhaps this tender serenity of Carpenter's writings, to which the reviewer has alluded, which outwardly differentiates Lawrence's sociological writings from those of Carpenter. And, of course, as social philosophers the final solutions offered by them appear widely different; since Lawrence swung more and more to an authoritarian or Carlylean position. But their intuitions about the fundamental problems of society were very similar and as successive links in the chain of thought Carpenter's works are bound to be of interest to any student of Lawrence.

Both of them felt the need for a new emphasis on human relationship. Edward Carpenter (born in 1844), brought up in the heyday of Victorian individualism, found the prevailing 'ideal of gentility' hopelessly corrupt and declared that 'it must be our avowed aim to destroy it.'- The idle life of the Victorian gentleman 'by fine irony called having an independence' which carried the stamp of respectability, Carpenter castigated as a 'human sink into which much flows but out of which nothing ever comes—except an occasional putrid whiff of charity and patronage.' That is how he described the usual philanthropic gestures of the Victorian middle class. Carpenter believed that 'the true condition of man consists in his organic relation with the whole body of his fellows.' So if a man abandons his relations with his fellows 'he abandons his true self.' He believed that 'education if decently conducted, does not turn a man into a creature of blind wants; it brings him into relation with the world around him.' And by the world Carpenter meant not only the inter-relation of the various classes, but one's attitude to nature as well. Man must develop the right relations with his own bodily instinctive needs, with society as well as with nature. The central theme of Carpenter's Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure (1889) was that with the progress of civilisation man has been increasingly fragmented, he is living continually

farther and farther away from the centre of life and from nature, and as a result the vitality of the self is being stamped out, and man has lost all spontaneity and urge for self-realisation. So, to keep the impulse of life alive under the suffocating covers of civilisation, Carpenter argued, some amount of 'savagery' had to be rehabilitated. On this ground he based his appeal for simplification of life, took up manual labour, wore sandals<sup>8</sup> and pleaded for sunbaths and nudity 'within decorous limit'. These were of course dangerous ideals as they could easily degenerate into fads, and cranks from all over England and abroad did swarm to his cottage at Millthorpe (near Sheffield).<sup>9</sup> But no one who knew Carpenter or read any of his important works could call him a crank. On the contrary, he had the honest English chuckle at all fanaticism. *The Times* of London truly remarked, while reviewing his autobiography, *My Days And Dreams*, on 22 June, 1916 that 'the driving power of his career, literary and practical, has been the hunger of the spirit in which the whole of man is summoned.'

This concern for 'wholeness' amounted almost to a passion in Carpenter. The words 'wholeness', 'holiness' and 'health', Carpenter reminded us repeatedly, were derived from the same root. So 'man to be really healthy must be a unit or entirety.'<sup>10</sup> Borrowing his language from physiology, he said that disease sets in whenever any passion asserts itself as an independent centre of thought and action and the central radiation of life is blocked. Carpenter applied this argument to castigate all evils, social or economic, psychological or spiritual. He thought, following the analysis of many nineteenth century thinkers like Morgan, Marx and Engels that by 'setting up material property as our deity we have dethroned the ruling power in our nature,'<sup>11</sup> since we own our property without any living and human relationship. For true ownership 'there must be use, which means "mastery", which means exercise of wills, of human power.' Hence the burden of Carpenter's sociological thinking was this emphasis on retracing our way back to the centre of life:

Till you have established a right relation with the centre, till you have loyally sought and found within yourself the password, do not think she (nature) will be such

a fool as to surrender to you her outposts. (*England's Ideal*, p. 161)

This process was what he called a true self-realisation or attainment of freedom, which meant living in perfect relation with the universal laws of nature: 'the central life ruling and radiating among all organs.' In this emphasis on the ordering or unifying of man's inner life, and in imagining it to be the most important factor in determining not only the health of the individual but of society, Carpenter was one with Lawrence. In his 'Reflections on the Death of a Porcupine' Lawrence also speaks of 'mastery' in the struggle of conquests towards his own consummation. . . . every man must master the inferior cycles of life, and never relinquish his mastery. And earlier in the same essay: 'In the kingdom of heaven in the fourth dimension, each soul that achieves a perfect relationship with the cosmos, from its own centre, is perfect and incomparable'. So, according to Lawrence also, the heaven of the traditional concept is nothing but 'the state of perfected relationship'. Both Carpenter and Lawrence believed that the vitality of man depends on this inner at-oneness with the cosmos. Carpenter pointed out that the main inadequacy of the sociological thinkers of the nineteenth century was their failure to recognise this fact:

'that the true explanation, theories of social changes we see around us, that the forces which produce them, that the purposes which they fulfil, lie deep, deep down, unsuspected.'<sup>12</sup>

If we examine this view, we will of course see that it was a version of the same evolutionary theory which was so popular in the nineteenth century. As Lamarckians both Carpenter and Lawrence tried to present it through the image of a flower in the process of *exfoliation*, a word which Carpenter said he derived from Whitman, and he wrote a whole chapter on it in his widely known book *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* (which was reprinted 24 times between 1889-1929).<sup>13</sup> According to this view everything in the universe proceeds from within outwards. Carpenter presented it in *Towards Democracy* in his characteristic amalgam of scientific sociological and mystical language:

Outwards all proceeds; Brahma from himself sheds and shreds the universe; I from myself, you from yourself. (Section XII)

Lawrence similarly asserts in his inimitable manner:

Everything proceeds from the creative quick. Outwards into exfoliation and blossom; the actual living quick itself is alone the creative reality 'Democracy'.

For this reason Lawrence like Carpenter was suspicious of all intellectual postulates or ideals. Though Carpenter used the word ideal a great deal, he was constantly emphasising that it was sustained by feeling and emotion rather than by any intellectual concept. He believed social changes could be effective only by the generation of a new desire and once a desire was born it would unfold from within like a flower, each petal pushed out by the next. In *Towards Democracy* (Sec. XI) he declared:

When a new desire has declared itself within the human heart, when a fresh plexus is forming among the nerves—then revolutions of nations are already decided and histories unwritten are written.

Anyone acquainted with Lawrence's psycho-sociological writings will recognise this language as familiar. Lawrence also sought to draw a line between these two concepts of a desire and an ideal:

We must discriminate between an ideal and a desire. A desire proceeds from within, from the unknown, spontaneous soul or self. But an ideal is super-imposed from above, from the mind.<sup>14</sup>

So when Carpenter dreamt of the new millennium, never for a moment did he believe that it could be achieved by any doctrinal approach. The growth of a new sentiment, a new morality only could bring socialism to us. And he explained this concept of morality in a very Lawrencian tone:

And when I use the word 'Moral' here, or anywhere above, I do not, I hope, mean that dull pinch-lipped conventionality of negation which often goes under that name. The real morality arises from the deep lying ineradicable desires, fountains of human actions, . . . born in flame and darkness, in joy and sorrow, in tears and triumph within the heart and are as a rule anything but conventional.

Lawrence also wanted a morality of similar form in his essay on Whitman:

A passionate implicit morality, a morality which changes the blood rather than the mind.

Both Carpenter and Lawrence gave the greatest importance to the individual, not simply as a self-glorifying unit in a social class or a nation but as an organism which must keep itself robustly alive if, at all, to be useful, or to be able to participate in life creatively. So both of them talked of restoring man to the centre of life.

Earlier we have noticed how Carpenter discussed political and social questions in the light of human physiology, and talked in terms of plexuses and centres as Lawrence did in his sociological writings. In the *Art of Creation* (1904) where Carpenter tried to erect a philosophic ideal of a universal heightened consciousness to postulate a state of universal harmony, he made the most elaborate use of his physiological knowledge. Students of Lawrence will probably appreciate that Carpenter revealed the sources of his studies whereas Lawrence made a mystery of the whole thing by saying in *The Fantasia of the Unconscious* that he took only hints and proceeded by intuition.

It may be that Lawrence benefited from Carpenter's 'Note on the Great Sympathetic Nerves' and came to know J. G. Davey's book *The Ganglionic Nervous System* (1858). Davey established the notion that the solar plexus was the first part of the nervous system formed in the embryo. That it and the Great Sympathetic generally exercised an architectural power, presiding over the formation and life of the body and the organs, and that to this seat of power even the brain and the spinal chord were subordinate. Davey, on his part, acknowledged his debt

to the great eighteenth-century physiologist Bichat and to Dr. Fletcher's *Rudiments of Physiology* (1837) for his ideas on the function of the Great Sympathetic nerves. It is apparent that the ideas which Davey brought together systematically were also known to other physiologists of his time, but Davey drew the important conclusion—that the Great Sympathetic nerves perform the vital life-conducting part independent of the mind, and that the brain is subordinate to it. This scientific physiological assumption helped Carpenter and, for that matter, Lawrence, to assert the superiority of the instinctual or, as Lawrence put it, the 'mind-less knowledge'<sup>15</sup> over mental consciousness.

Though Lawrence was always suspicious of others' spirituality and laughed occasionally at those who claimed cosmic consciousness,<sup>16</sup> he was much imbued with similar ideas. He said in *Fantasia of the Unconscious* that he did not believe in evolution, but in the strangeness and rainbow-change of ever-renewed creative civilisations (p. 8). He also welcomed some dynamic idea or metaphysics or some vision of the future to help unfold a new life and a new art. He acknowledged also some influence of the theosophical writers in the making of his psycho-sociological theories. But that his essays on human psychology and social evolution were not all nonsense or 'Polyanalytics' as Lawrence apologetically called them,<sup>17</sup> and that they had some scientific basis, can only be realised if we compare them to the works of Edward Carpenter. And Carpenter, a Cambridge educated wrangler as he was, riding in the wave of late-Victorian utopianism and the half-mystical science of the early years of the twentieth century—did not doubt that his ideas and visions were based on solid scientific ground. It was on such a foundation that Lawrence had the confidence to erect his brilliant imaginative superstructures.

While discussing social and mental evolution both Carpenter and Lawrence posited three stages in the growth of consciousness; but whereas Lawrence studied them in the life of a child, Carpenter with his predominant sociological interest and pre-Freudian orientation analysed the growth of human consciousness through different phases of society. Lawrence's three stages were: primal or dynamic consciousness, when the child does not know his apartness from his mother (the undifferen-

tiated consciousness of Carpenter's primitive society); secondly, mental consciousness (of modern time) against which both Carpenter and Lawrence lashed their whips; and for the third stage, both of them conceived a mystical state of unity. It is a stage of consciousness when the intellectual processes are superseded by a state of illumination: which Carpenter described in words very similar to those of Lawrence in *Fantasia*,<sup>18</sup> '... To still the brain, and feel, feel, feel, our identity with that deepest being within us is the first thing. There in that union, in that identity all the sins and errors of the actual world are done away. We are most truly ourselves; we go back to the root from which all that may really express us most inevitably spring.' (*The Art of Creation*, p. 220)

From this analysis of the mystical consciousness of unity with one's deeper being as well as with the circumambient universe—both Lawrence and Carpenter arrive at political conclusions which, however, are poles apart. Carpenter's socialist utopianism led him to discover in the vision of the heightened consciousness the springs of a spontaneous social relatedness; the fruition of his democratic socialist dream. But Lawrence was not a believer in the usual democratic ideal which, he suspected, glorified the average and preached a kind of merging, in which there was no respect for individuality. Besides, when Lawrence was writing *The Fantasia* in the twenties, in Germany, the wave of authoritarianism was slowly rising in Europe. So Lawrence's dream of the future was equally tainted by the prophetic spirit of the times. Referring to the analysis of the growth of consciousness, as if he was recapitulating the ideas put forward by Carpenter in *The Art of Creation* (1904) Lawrence half-ironically, half in self-parody says:

Well, first and foremost, that every individual creature shall come to its own particular individual fullness of being. Very nice, very pretty, but how? Well, through a living dynamic relation to other creatures. Very nice again, pretty little adjectives. But what sort of living dynamic relations? Well, [and here Lawrence abandons Carpenter's chain of development] not the relation of love, that's one thing, nor of brotherhood, nor equality. The next relationship has got to be a relationship of men to-

wards men in a spirit of unfathomable trust and responsibility, service and leadership, obedience and pure authority. Men have got to choose their leaders and obey them to the death. And it must be a system of culminating aristocracy, society tapering like a pyramid to the supreme leader.' (p. 179, Phoenix Edn.)

Perhaps Lawrence was proved a true prophet by the course of European history immediately after his death. But how smeared with blood and dirt his vision stands after the Second World War! It seems Lawrence's thinking on democracy and social or human relationship was always thrown out of balance by his oppressive concern for duality; 'love' for him was coming together from a state of separateness and must fulfil itself through a respect for separateness. Huxley was right when he remarked in his introduction to Lawrence's *Letters* (1932) that on matters of human relationship Lawrence was torn with conflict and that though he spasmodically tried to establish contact with others—he was condemned by his gift to an essential separateness. To Carpenter on the other hand, human relatedness was the true condition of existence, and he believed that 'every person in the depth of his individual heart . . . touches also that of society . . .'<sup>19</sup>

Barring these differences which arise mainly in the areas where they sought to apply their prophetic intuition into solving current political problems, there was considerable similarity in their basic attitude and nowhere are they closer than in their attitudes to sex. In *Towards Democracy* Carpenter announced that in the hierarchy of the human body:

Sex still goes first, and hands, eyes, mouth, brain follow: from the midst of belly and thighs radiate the knowledge of self, religion, and immortality. (Sec. XI)

Carpenter hated the sexual pruderies of his time and like Lawrence idealised primitive cultures where the animal vitality in man was recognised. In *Pagan and Christian Creeds* (1920) Carpenter says that he used the word 'animal' man' not with any flavour of contempt or reprobation as 'the dear Victorians' would have it, but with a sense of genuine respect and admira-

tion such as one feels towards the animals themselves. Earlier in *Towards Democracy* he expressed his longing:

For the sight of the naked bodies of the bathers bathing by the hot sea-banks... the beautiful proud step of the human animal on the sand. (Sec. LXIV)

In their reverence for sex Carpenter and Lawrence were most akin. Carpenter cites an example of primitive society in the *Art of Creation* to bring home this truth to the modern reader:

A curious instance of the rousing of the communal or race consciousness is given by the word testis, which signifies both witness and a testicle; the double signification being illustrated by the fact that among many people taking of an oath is confirmed by the placing of the hand on the part indicated. (Vide 'Genesis', Ch. 24, V2, 9)

Carpenter adds, that more than any other fact this helps us to understand the sacredness in which sex was held in early times.

Carpenter showed great interest also in the sex-symbolism of the older religions. His uninhibited approach to the subject is particularly interesting—considering the fact that he had a thorough Victorian upbringing. He tried to explain why primitive men worshipped the snake and the trees in a manner which was as forthright as a Lawrencian interpretation. The primitive people worshipped the snake, Carpenter said, 'as the snake has an unmistakable resemblance to the male organ in its active state.' About the attraction of the tree to the primitive man, Carpenter thought, 'it was beloved and worshipped by reason of its many gifts to mankind—its grateful shelter, its abounding fruit, its timber, etc.—why should it not become the natural symbol of the female to whom through sex man's worship is ever drawn.'<sup>20</sup> These two symbols, Carpenter finds, had come down in mysterious conjunction to the Bible story. But as soon as the harmonious sex-instincts were ruptured by self-consciousness, the notion of sacredness disappeared; man began to look upon sex as 'The great antagonist, the old serpent lying in wait to betray him.'<sup>21</sup> Man did not succeed in driving the snake out of paradise, he drove himself out.

Carpenter was sure that man would some day re-enter paradise by attaining the consciousness of a unified being in the third stage of human development. And when he returned to paradise, he would find 'The good snake there as of old, full of healing and friendliness the branches of the tree of life.'<sup>22</sup> Lawrence was not so sure of this utopian vision. It was too much of a pishgah-sight to him. In fact, Lawrence's words in the Introduction to *Fantasia of the Unconscious* may be applied to Carpenter:

Descendez, cher Moïse, Vous voyez trop loin. You see too far all at once. Too much of a bird's-eye-view across... the Promised Land to the shore. Come down, and walk across, old fellow. (p. 18)

It may be just a coincidence that Carpenter wrote a drama called *Moses* (1875) which was reprinted in 1909 as *The Promised Land* and there were three reprints of this book between that year and 1916. After his address to the old Fellow to walk across Lawrence adds:

Allons, there is no road yet but we are all Aarons with rods of our own. (p. 18)

Lawrence seems to say that every person should search the secret out from the quick of his own self, restoring thus the forces of his dynamic consciousness. It is certain that Carpenter would not have broken this 'Aaron's rod'. They were both willing to creep back to paradise and throw out the apple (i.e. the mental consciousness) and live with the snake happily ever after. Like Lawrence, Carpenter was fascinated by the snake:

The fascination of its mysteriously gliding movement, of its vivid energy, its glittering eyes, its intensity of life, combined with its fatal dart of Death.

We find this description in *Pagan and Christian Creeds* (p. 82) which was published in January 1920. Lawrence's famous poem 'Snake' was written in July that year. I think it will be admitted from such resemblance that there was a striking similarity of

sensibility between this old, Victorian-bred ex-clergyman, Edward Carpenter, and the most imaginative writer on sex of our time. So a revival of interest in the forgotten works of Edward Carpenter will provide a proper historical perspective to many of Lawrence's brilliant and eccentric-seeming ideas on life and sex.

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. See *The Intelligent Heart* (p. 352) by H. T. Moore.
2. *England Arise: A Study of the Pioneering Days of the Labour Movement* (1931), p. 74.
3. *Edward Carpenter: In Appreciation* (1931), ed. Gilbert Beith, p. 75.
4. The Carpenter Collection (Sheffield City Library) Mss. 234-386. Date of the letter 30 May, 1914.
5. Birkin and Gerald (*Women in Love*), Lilly and Aaron (*Aaron's Rod*), Ramon and Cipriano (*The Plumed Serpent*); *The Rainbow* (Ch. 'Shame'), *Phoenix II*, pp. 103-4.
6. *Letters*, Vol. I, ed. H. T. Moore (Heinemann, 1962).
7. All quotations, unless mentioned otherwise, are from *England's Ideal* (1887). The title essay of this book appeared in the Socialist Journal *To-Day* in May, 1884.
8. The first pair of which was sent to him by a friend, Harold Cox, later a Liberal M.P., who was Professor of Mathematics in Aligarh in 1886-1887.
9. See *My Days and Dreams* (1916). Ch. 'Millthorpiana'.
10. *Civilisation: Its Cause and Cure* (1889), p. 14.
11. *England's Ideal*, p. 157.
12. *England's Ideal*, p. 56.
13. See *A Bibliography of Edward Carpenter* (Sheffield, 1949)
14. See *Selected Essays*, p. 90 (Penguin, 1965)
15. 'Education of the People', *Phoenix I* (Heinemann, 1961), p. 620 and *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, p. 29.
16. See 'Nobody Loves Me', *Selected Essays*.
17. *Fantasia*, p. 9 (Phoenix Edn., 1961).
18. *Ibid.* p. 122. Cp. 'Seeking, seeking the fulfilment in the deep passional self; (with) the courage to withdraw into his own stillness and singleness'. See also p. 131.
19. *England's Ideal*.
20. *Pagan And Christian Creeds*, p. 81.
21. *Ibid.* p. 186.
22. *Ibid.* p. 187.

*LIE DOWN IN DARKNESS:*  
A PORTRAIT OF THE MODERN PHENOMENON

BY THAKUR GURU PRASAD

THE aim here is to analyse the main features of the first novel of William Styron (b. 1925), *Lie Down in Darkness* (1951), in order to bring out its striking appeal as a powerful and terrible portrait of the modern phenomenon. To be accurate, it is a novel by a contemporary American with formative Southern white background. The narrative treats (in terms of external time and place) the progress of a hearse from the railway station to the cemetery between 11 A.M. and 3 P.M. on a weekday in August, 1945 in Port Warwick, Virginia. As a matter of fact, there is a good deal of local colour in the work—enough to class it as a regional novel of sorts. But the cumulative effect of it as a work of art telescopes the local and the universal with extraordinary success; and that is the point. It is precisely by its accentuated Southernness and Americanness, as we shall presently see, that the wider aspects of the modernness in the novel are deeply underscored.

I

The theme and content of this novel are strikingly 'modern'. The modern sensibility is notoriously sensitive to a world of flux, death, disintegration and disorder—a world which seems to fall apart. Generally speaking, the image of life created in the mass of modern literature is that of our fluid society without a foundation of traditional values. Man is depicted as if in a vacuum, or else in a painful predicament, being smothered under violent pressure of the caged structure of values where he does not fit in at all. The Machine Age gives out a mechanistic view of life, showing the helplessness of man, himself a mechanical or chemical accident, being crushed relentlessly by the cold indifference or outright hostility of a mechanical world. Loneliness, guilt, depravity, loss of identity, anxiety and anguish, disaster and disintegration mark the personalities of

outstanding fictional characters emerging from modern writing. More often than not, the typical modern artist, in the absence of a solid external frame of reference like customs and manners, turns inward; his main concern is the 'inner man', and he portrays not people so much as psychic states and patterns of morbid behaviour. Quite characteristically, the focus turns to the dark recesses of life, such as incest, insanity, promiscuity, suicide and strangulation.

Coming out just this side at the parting of the two halves of our century, *Lie Down in Darkness* gives an aesthetic rendering of all these symptoms of modernity. It tells the story of the disintegration of a modern family, with all the typical paraphernalia of decay, disaster and disarray, insanity, incest and depravity. Milton Loftis, the 'non-hero' of the novel, is quite a representative type of modern man. Upcaught, as he himself says, 'in the tragedy of a middle class morality,'<sup>1</sup> suffering in wedlock as weak, man-of-straw, parasite husband of the paranoic and puritanically self-righteous Helen, all the time emotionally starved and hankering after drops of love in the forbidden doses of adultery with Dolly Bonner and incestuous escapades with his devilish, beautiful daughter, Peyton, hopelessly drowned in the deep sea of dipsomania, he is the perpetual Dangling Man. 'At the age of fifty, he was beginning to discover...that his whole life was a hangover, with faintly unpleasant pleasures being atoned for by the dull unalleviated pain of guilt.'<sup>2</sup> Styron, 'by projecting his failure as a sign of human vulnerability'<sup>3</sup> (as Louise Y. Gossett has observed), makes him a peculiarly modern Man—'at once everyman and nobody.'<sup>4</sup>

Still more harrowing is the impression of what Peyton undergoes: the artistic centre of the story, as the title indicates. In her tragic and intense search for love and understanding, she stands out for 'most kids these days', as she tells her father during her disastrous wedding party, 'who are just aimless and lost,'<sup>5</sup> looking for home where Daddy and Mother want them, a home where they want to belong, and which they never find. She is a psychic innocent abroad, stalking out of her claustrophobic lonely existence, so well imagined in her dreamy desire to rest inside a clock, 'in a womb of brass', reflecting her actual career, as 'revolving on that spring like a dead horse on a

merry-go-round.<sup>6</sup> Thwarted in her bid to belong to mother, father, and husband, she floats on and on in the waters of dipsomania, bitchery, and masochism, tortured by constant dread of 'drowning' until the final plunge in space out of the window of a skyscraper. Stray eddies of her stream-of-consciousness, so effectively charted in the last but one section of the novel, reveal the causation at work in her doings:

...how many times have I lain down to sin out of vengeance....<sup>7</sup>

...Oh, my Harry, my lost sweet Harry [her Jewish husband, Harry Miller], I have not fornicated in the darkness because I wanted to but because I was punishing myself for punishing you....<sup>8</sup>

...not out of vengeance have I accomplished all my sins but because something has always been close to dying in my soul, and I've sinned only in order to lie down in darkness and find, somewhere in the net of dreams, a new father, a new home....<sup>9</sup>

Perhaps I shall rise at another time, though I lie down in darkness and have my light in ashes....<sup>10</sup>

Her aspirations are but 'poor flightless birds'<sup>11</sup> that gain the freedom to fly in the shape of self-destruction. In this her last act of rebellion prompted by frustration, she becomes the modern psychic phenomenon of death-wish incarnate, attaining to the height of a myth of an age characterized by homelessness and faithlessness.

The pattern of behaviour exemplified by Helen Loftis is another somewhat archetypal<sup>12</sup> figure of the modern phenomenon—a monstrous product of the no-man's-land between the male-dominated and the feminist societal spheres. Resulting from a wrong mating of species of the sexes, her essentially soft and feminine frame of mind ('she had wanted the future to be like a nice, long congenial tea party, where everyone talked a little, danced a little, and had polite manners.'<sup>13</sup>) is forced into such darkness of dementia that the disappointing failures of her father, her husband, and her priest have made Man himself the enemy haunting her nightmarish dreams,<sup>14</sup> and the craving for rightfully due conjugal love (snapped and showered

on her stupid rival, mainly as a reaction to her own failing in conjugal relationship) turns into jealousy of her own daughter. At the heights of her insane fits, her three enemies concretized as inhabiting the 'city of corpses' of her dreams are Dolly, Milton and Peyton. If one thing is most responsible for the destruction of the Loftis family, it is her madness; and formal, lifeless religion, symbolized in the figure of the sportive, goody-goody priest Carey Carr fails to save. Helen tells Carey: 'Your God is a silly old Ass, . . . and my God . . . my God is the Devil.'<sup>15</sup> This novel powerfully stamps upon the reader's minds the profound truth emanating from the modern way of life and death: that Love and Faith must endure, if man is to endure.

## II

The 'modernity' of this novel in theme is only too well-matched by modernity in style. For one thing, violence characterizes much of modern writing. It is part of the acute criticism to which Western writers in the twentieth century have subjected their culture. It is also part of the total response of creative artists to jarring changes in man's view of himself. Affected by theories of evolution and psychoanalysis and faced by the threats of automation, the totalitarian State, and nuclear annihilation, the thinking man has come to question both his humanity and his being. The existential image of life as absurd, and the surrealist insight seeing it as a massive chaos with many dark lurid recesses naturally find characteristic expression in violent ways. When life is depicted as having no dignity or significance beyond instinctive holding on from moment to moment to the bare necessities of food or sex, violence becomes the mode of revealing the meaning of life. Again, it gives artistic value to all kinds of grotesqueness—the incongruous, the ugly, the repulsive and the chaotic—which the sensitive moderns inevitably seize upon as their media to work upon. Violence directly helps to negate the faith in progress and human self-sufficiency by depicting the darkness in the heart of man. For those, like Faulkner, who see the hope of survival in man's capacity to endure, violence and distortion show how

much man can endure for the sake of discovering that his spirit is indestructible.

Violence in its comprehensive perspective, both physical and psychological, has played a significant role in the articulation of *Lie Down in Darkness*. At the obvious level, the story begins with the arrival of Peyton's corpse, and ends with its burial. Peyton has brought upon herself death by violence. Thus the whole action is violent. Even the flashback action is replete with violence. Just like her death, Peyton's life is punctuated by acts of violence, such as constant encounter in days of innocent childhood with her crippled sister Maudie (herself a symbol of distortion and violence in the order of Nature), the environmental violence of crushing antagonism between her parents, slappings by Helen and pervert advances of affection by Milton, leading to self-exile from home, and her cracked marital life marred by violent promiscuous sexual aberrations in futile efforts to hold on to life and to drops of love. Her relationship with her father is marked by a more subtle kind of psychic violence. As she significantly vents out at the critical moment of her wedding party, Milton's intense emotional approaches to her are drunken and incestuous; they 'smother' her. There is a peculiar love-hate relationship (this tension naturally generates immense violence) between Peyton and Helen, Helen and Milton, and Milton and Peyton—a tripolar radiation of violence that enwraps the whole picture of life presented in this novel. The violence involved in the relationship between Milton and Helen is still more horrifying. It is a thick blanket of cruelty, causing constant choking and smothering between them. In this drama of suffering, the Atom Bomb dropped on Hiroshima lurks as the cosmic background.

On the surface, it is still quite a smooth make-believe: Helen heroically attempting to drown her frustration in domestic life with redoubled church-going, and Milton carrying on his sophisticated dipsomania and country-club socializing, and too well-known but politely ignored clandestine adultery. Their separation and divorce also run the usual correct course of conformity. And yet what terrible violence is enveloped in the polished manners! The last act of Milton described in the novel—his attempt to strangle Helen—is the only act of physical violence between them in their conjugal life. The rest of it can

be termed a masterpiece in the portrayal of violence on the 'infra-physical' level, a kind of psychological violence.

The use of violence in this novel is not confined to situations. It goes deeper into the narrative technique, imagery and diction. The narrative technique employed in this novel is that of the stream-of-consciousness—itself a peculiarity of the modern phenomenon—which brings about a liaison between theme and structure. As Gossett puts it, 'the crushing accumulation of violence is supported structurally by the circuitous chronology of the novel as the action moves back and forth between the immediate present . . . and the past which has led to it. In each chapter an incident of Helen's irrationality appears.'<sup>16</sup> In reaching down whole stretches of time of much greater sweep and lives of the three principal characters through concentrated chaotic bursts of the stream of consciousness in the actual clock time of a few hours, Styron has brilliantly achieved a violent juxtaposition of the immediate present and the remote past.

Again, violence flows through the elaborate rhythmic sentences punctuated often by polysyllabic words meditating violent scenes of human tragedy, weaving and rolling off gaudy, grotesque images. When Milton goes to his wife's room after a telephone call from his mistress has broken up a party, 'red fire, reflected from the snow, the sinking sun, had fallen upon the bed, and her folded arms seemed to gather this light to her breast like roses.'<sup>17</sup> When he makes drunken love to silly Dolly at a club-house dance, she has an unlikely vision of 'shells, rocks and sea things, sad as the universe, drowsing beneath the summer moon.'<sup>18</sup> When Peyton and Dicky Boy ('the bicycle seat' who 'took her maidenhead'<sup>19</sup>) lie entwined after drunken love-making, 'Twilight fell over their bodies. They were painted with fire, like those fallen children who live and breathe and soundlessly scream, and whose souls blaze for ever.'<sup>20</sup> The flashing moment when Milton tried to strangle Helen is 'one flash of violence spread out like momentary lightning against the storm.'<sup>21</sup>

Yet another set of stylistic features which pin-point modernity are such matters of technique as the use of Freudian psychology. The relationships between Milton, Helen and Peyton are variations upon the Oedipus and Electra complexes. The nightmarish dreams of Helen reveal aspects of her subconscious

which indicate, by application of psychoanalysis, that she is an insane person—a curiously representative modern species in the light of the general belief that some ten per cent of the present-day population of the United States, the most modern country of today, suffer from insanity of one kind or degree or another. Again, it is all too obvious that all the disorder and destruction that fills the lives of Milton, Helen and Peyton are rooted in sexual maladjustment.

✓ One more typically modern thing, amply illustrated by the narrative technique of this novel, is the deep concentration and brevity, forced by the 'sick hurry and divided aims' of the 'strange disease of modern life', as Matthew Arnold put it.<sup>22</sup> The decay of the three generations of the Loftis family is conveyed in a seven-section narrative outwardly covering happenings within a few hours, and by selecting half a dozen episodes in Peyton's life. One of the most imaginative postwar novels, it charts out the story of generations in moments of anguished, crowded consciousnesses of the three characters. Every moment is a living present which for the moment is the world. This novel is charged with the power of intense poetry—descriptive, lyrical, elegiac. It is often said that the modern novel has come very close to poetry. Few modern novels can testify to this more adequately than this one. ✓

### III

That Lie Down in Darkness is an outstanding work of recent Southern American fiction does not at all belittle its striking universality as portrait of the modern phenomenon in the annals of imaginative literature. On the contrary, its Southernness and Americanness deepen its modernness. The universal aspects of modern literature depicted in this novel—such as violence and disorder, darkness and nothingness, loneliness and guilt, horror, madness and immorality—are also often counted as peculiar to American literature as also to Southern literature. Walter Allen echoes the generally accepted critical opinion in his observation that 'The classic American novels have dealt not so much with the lives of men in society as with the life of solitary man, man alone and wrestling with himself.'<sup>23</sup> ... the

novels being really interior dramas in which the author works out, often violently—the violence being as much evidenced by the texture of the prose as by the action delineated—the causes and consequences of what Henry James called, in a famous phrase, the complex fate of being an American.<sup>24</sup>

As for violence, it has not only been widely described as a distinctive feature of the American way of life and literature, but recently often been claimed as part of 'tradition' in the literature of the South. Paul West has called it the 'brutal, atavistic ritual'<sup>25</sup> fertilizing the Southern literature of today. Louise Y. Gossett, in her book, *Violence in Recent Southern Fiction*, has made out the thesis that 'Violence dominates Southern fiction written since 1930'<sup>26</sup> and has cited many significant items in the cultural experience of the region as contributory factors to the phenomenon: the westward moving frontier fathering a lusty humour, an agrarian society with the aristocratic ideal of power vested in ownership of land and Negro labour on the plantations, the Civil War and Reconstruction with their bitter memory of violence, the despair which accompanied failure, the glorification of the military, the private assumption of force to restore an order based on white supremacy, and violent rhetoric, eloquence and embellishment of language in public speech and writing of sermons, newspaper columns, correspondence, conversation and belles-lettres.

Such generalizations go pat when applied to *Lie Down in Darkness*. Milton Loftis, a failure in everything, took enough glory in military colours to dream of an Army Commission in 1941, and actually became captain in the local militia. His father, a ghost character in the novel, was full of fatuous advice cloaked in irreproachable rhetoric. Above all, the centre of the story is full of the universal elements of the South; it is too archetypal. John W. Aldridge makes the point admirably in his following remarks on the novel:

Behind Milton's father-guilt and incest guilt is the whole Southern blood-guilt. Behind Helen's jealousy and Puritanism is the timeless Southern gentlewoman madness, the madness that comes from too much inbreeding, too much Negro fear, too much sexual neglect. Behind Peyton's

father-complex is a century of paternalism and man-hatred and sexual masochism.'<sup>28</sup>

✓ Mr. Aldridge is only elucidating what Styron has put into the mouth of the homosexual Albert Berger as he admonishes Peyton: 'it is symptomatic of that society from which you emanate that it should produce the dissolving family. . . I know you say symptomatic not of that society, but of *our* society, the machine culture, yet so archetypal is this South with its cancerous religiosity, its exhausting need to put manners before morals, to negate all *ethos*—Call it a *husk* of a culture.'<sup>29</sup>

#### NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. William Styron, *Lie Down in Darkness* (New York: The Bobbs-Merill Co., Inc., 1951), p. 76.
2. *Ibid.* p. 152.
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## HAROLD PINTER—A REAPPRAISAL

BY MOHINDAR SINGH

THE need for a fresh appraisal of Mr. Harold Pinter's plays was never so urgent as it is now. John Simon<sup>1</sup> still holds: 'Those who can understand our time, which is an incomprehensible mess, and its theatre, which has sunk to depths beyond fathoming, are charlatans or fools, whose respect or admiration Pinter can certainly count on....' Simon was actually replying to a remark of Harold Clurman to the effect: 'Those who do not respect and appreciate Pinter's talent understand little of our time or its theatre.'<sup>2</sup>

Pinter's plays 'resemble a child's vision of existence'. This has been another view which asserts that 'in retaining a child's sense of the world's fearsomeness, he [Pinter] taps the adrenal flow of contemporary guilt and anxiety. But to attain full stature as a dramatist, he needs to poke a hole in that sealed nursery-dungeon of fears and take a look at the man-sized world outside.'<sup>3</sup>

Added to this is the usual complaint of Pinter's ambiguity. 'Less the Better' or 'Show, don't tell' are the techniques ascribed to Pinter. Martin Esslin remarks: 'The area of the unknown that surrounds us includes the motivation and background of the characters. What Pinter, in his search for a higher degree of realism in the theatre, rejects in the "well-made play" is precisely that it provides too much information about the background and motivation of each character.'<sup>4</sup>

'The search for a higher degree of realism' is actually the key to understanding Pinter. Henry Hewes is of the view that Pinter aficionados claim that his showing the horror of society as it exists is the most effective way of attacking it, and that his attack goes deeper than that of playwrights who pick at specific social targets.'<sup>5</sup>

This is very much the case at least of his first play The Room. Much fault has been found with the appearance of the negro in Rose's room, when her husband is away. It is only his presence that explains what Rose had been earlier afraid of and what she had been trying to avoid. Rose was once Sal and she

is being urged by the negro to 'come home'. She does not deny being Sal but only forbids the negro from mentioning it. It is this past, obviously a negro past, which she has been trying to hide by practically hiding in her room.

The negro is a messenger. But most probably he is her father. This relationship leaves no ambiguity about the situation. Rose has negro blood but is white. She is naturally ashamed and also afraid of owning up this relationship. But paternal love pursues her. This also, in a way, explains the attitude of Bert, Rose's husband. He is a slow-moving and non-speaking person. He probably must have discovered the negro antecedents of Rose after his marriage. This makes him glum and he is quiet. But when on his return he finds the negro in the room, he suddenly explodes in a violence that kills the negro. The one thing he could never tolerate was any link with the negro past and his reaction is as violent as the intensity of his suppressed feelings. The death of the negro causes blindness to Rose. Now she would not be able to see the jeers of the white society. Her suppressed and self-denied love for her father actually consumed her into blindness.

What Pinter is depicting here, in this subtle manner, is the agony of so many white families who dare not reveal their negro antecedents. The play is the tragedy of colour prejudices. Practically round about the same time, Edward Albee produced *The Death of Bessie Smith*, depicting the extent to which the colour bar worked. Bessie, a singer, died as she could not be admitted to a hospital because she was black. Albee's play underlined not only the colour problem but also the moral courage of a white intern who sacrificed his job for the sake of the dead negro singer. This is shown as a symbolic revolt of the young against the inhuman cruelty of racial prejudices. Pinter, on the other hand, without being ostensibly a social reformer, presented the problem at a higher human plane, depicting the life-long suffering of an individual, caused by the 'crime' of having been born to parents of mixed blood. On this theme he enacts this powerful tragedy of human drama.

Pinter's next two plays, *The Birthday Party* and *The Dumb Waiter* actually form one connecting link. One can say that Goldberg and McCann, after having deposited Stanley with 'Monty', whatever Monty stood for, had returned to their

Birmingham den for further instructions regarding their next victim. In *The Birthday Party*, Goldberg already mentions three other names of his, namely Nat, Simey and Binny. So they could now easily be Ben and Gus also. What the two plays depict is the new phenomenon of syndicated terror organisations which reduce their agents to mere trigger-happy machines and the victim becomes a mere object. The whole thing is absolutely cold-blooded, mechanical and devoid of emotions. But life is so uncertain that even the most trustworthy can become an 'object' or victim without having any idea about it. What Pinter has done is to humanise the situation by showing firstly how Stanley became the victim and later, by depicting how those who had made others victims reacted when it came to be their turn to become victims. It is no retribution that he is depicting in these plays but the inhuman approach to human life that modern life has brought about.

*The Birthday Party* shows in detail this merciless assignment being carried out heartlessly. The focus on this aspect relegates to the background the question of guilt, and how much of it, on the part of Stanley. The climax is achieved in the party itself which is held by the 'killers' to celebrate Stanley's birthday though he keeps on denying that day being his birthday. It is a strange party. Stanley is subjected to grilling interrogation by the 'killers'. The cross-examination is nonsensical but terrifying in its impact:

*Goldberg*: You verminate the sheet of your birth.

*McCann*: What about the Albigensienist heresy?

*Goldberg*: Who watered the wicket in Melbourne?

*McCann*: What about the blessed Oliver Plunkett?

*Goldberg*: Speak up, Webber, why did the chicken cross the road?

*Stanley*: He wanted to—he wanted to—he wanted to—.

*McCann*: He doesn't know!

*Goldberg*: Why did the chicken cross the road?

*Stanley*: He wanted...

*McCann*: He doesn't know. He doesn't know which came first!

*Goldberg*: Which came first?

*McCann*: Chicken? Egg? Which came first?

Goldberg and McCann: Which came first? Which came first?  
Which came first?<sup>6</sup>

It is clear that the interrogators are professionals. The only place where Stanley responds is to the question: Why did the chicken cross the road? He tries to answer, to give an explanation as to why he deserted the 'organisation'. But he hesitates, for being once a part of the organisation, he perhaps feels that any explanation to these hired hands would be futile. McCann cuts him short but Goldberg repeats the question again. This time McCann gives him no opportunity of speaking. It is clear to Stanley that his fate is sealed. The verbal onslaught continues, however. The party succeeds at first in reducing Stanley to a 'state of infancy' when he plays on the toy-drum savagely.<sup>7</sup> The party and the strangling questioning actually do much more to Stanley. The party is really the 'centre of the play';<sup>8</sup> for Meg the party is all enjoyable, for Lulu it is a sexual adventure, later to be regretted, and for Stanley it is a moment of blindness and doom. He knows his end is come. So like a trapped, naked, frightened animal he tried to strangle Meg who is the only one in the group who does not mind Stanley doing anything to her. Thus the party, actually, ends up in 'celebrating' Stanley's death on the day of his birth. While beating the drum he was actually bidding farewell to his existence.

Pinter here succeeds in creating a tragic moment. Next morning, Stanley is dressed up as a corpse. He had actually died the previous night. Now he was a mere 'living-dead', waiting for his formal disposal. And Petey's warning at this stage: 'Stan, don't let them tell you what to do!' is absolutely too late.

The impact of the play is what Pinter had desired. He 'opens our eyes to the constant anxiety and the overwhelming sense of guilt which haunt personal existence in western society today!'<sup>9</sup> And Pinter appears to be saying that 'life is fascinatingly dangerous, and the need for extra care is consequently urgent.'<sup>10</sup>

No one is free from this 'constant anxiety', not even the hirelings themselves. That is what Pinter shows in *The Dumb Waiter*. The names of the killers are now changed to Ben and Gus. They are waiting in a basement for orders. They do not

know their next victim. The small talk that they indulge in actually highlights their nervousness. It is here that Pinter actually humanises them. These merciless, mechanical cockneys are shown with common human anxieties when it comes to be their turn. Their anxiety heightens with the persistent demand for more varieties of dishes ordered through the dumb waiter. The nutty prank in the form of novelty of the dishes ordered ('two braised steak and chips; marconi pastitsio; one Char Siu and bean sprouts', etc.) ceases to be funny for the two hoodlums any more. They are really panicky. They feel that they are being put to some sort of awkward test—which they have failed. The speaking tube has already announced that their food was unsatisfactory. This is an obvious sign of displeasure on the part of the 'boss', whosoever he is. Gus, who is elderly, leaves for a drink of water and the speaking tube comes to life at once, announcing the death of the man who enters the room. The curtain falls as Ben raises his pistol at Gus who walks into the room.

Was death meant for Gus only or for any one of the two who opted to leave the room first? Ben kills Gus but perhaps death is lurking for him somewhere, even outside the room the moment he is going to step out. These hoodlums have served their purpose, they are needed no more. They must go the Stanley way. Only for them there is to be no birthday party. The victim and the executioner have met again, they are one finally in the fold of death. Pinter produces this effect of horror of operation of impersonal forces of terror and blind obedience where man is menaced by the unknown and where the real 'brain' manages to remain unidentified.

However, these three plays of Pinter were subjected to a great deal of criticism for being ambiguous. It was said that Pinter makes no effort to show the 'who' and 'why' of each character and situation. Pinter cuts his trails to heighten the effect of suspense. He has been really concerned with the main motivation primarily, the basic issue, believing at the same time that once the main motivation was there the other details did not matter. 'A character on the stage,' he said, 'who can present no convincing argument or information as to his past experience, 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 the expression.<sup>11</sup>

Thus creating a situation devoid of rational explanation or bringing in sudden shifts are to be understood as effective dramatic means to bring about the atmosphere of suspense, menace, terror and loneliness. But in his next plays, perhaps influenced by the criticism, he tells more. In *The Caretaker* there is no ambiguity. Pinter even obliges us to have a peep into the inner recesses of the mind of Aston, when he makes Aston deliver a long speech about the electric shock-treatment at the mental hospital.

Davies is undoubtedly the most unforgettable achievement of Pinter in this play. He is one of Pinter's most skilfully drawn characters. He is stupid, garrulous, helpless; something like a Chaplin tramp in his shabby costume, overgrown hair and his gaping toothless mouth. Mick's remark is noteworthy; 'You're nothing but a wild animal, when you come down to it, you're a barbarian. And to put the old lid on it, you stink from arse-hole to breakfast time.'<sup>12</sup>

Davies is society's outcast. He reminds one of Lear's Tom, the Bedlam beggar. His very existence is a most powerful commentary on the society which has reduced a human being to sheer animality and a thing of nothingness. He is not merely a 'personification of human weakness' as Martin Esslin<sup>13</sup> describes him but the personification of social degradation. He has suffered so much at the hands of society that he has even forgotten his name.

This outcast felt that at least in Aston he had found a messiah and that he might find in that junk-cluttered room (even Davies calls it 'lousy, filthy hole') some sort of haven for some time. But Aston's brother, Mick, treats him as cruelly as society has hitherto treated him.

Such a 'dunghill' of society is bound to be stupid. He does provoke laughter. But the laughter is different as his speeches proceed. Take, for instance, his outburst stressing the need for a clock.' At first we laugh because of all people an unemployed, unkempt man would seem to need a clock least. And then we laugh slightly differently at a frustration we *can* understand as he tells of his unsuccessful attempts to keep the time in his

head so that when he wakes from a nap he will know whether it is time to go have a cup of tea. At other times there is sadness, as when Aston is relating the details of his shock treatment in a mental institution to a man who has no capacity to interpret these as anything more than evidences that Aston is a 'nut.'<sup>14</sup>

Pinter gave a most befitting reply to those who saw in *The Caretaker* nothing but the funny humour of the stupidity of the tramp. '*The Caretaker* is funny, up to a point. Beyond that point it ceases to be funny, and it was because of that point that I wrote it.'<sup>15</sup>

Davies is after all a human being. Despite all the crushing poverty to which he has been reduced, he still objects to shoes which are not of proper size or the shoe-laces not being of matching colour. But this haven is not going to be his. He is turned out despite all his best efforts and worst tricks. His tragic existence and miseries will continue endlessly. The success of Pinter lies in the fact that 'one just hadn't noticed people exactly like them before, but now they exist.'<sup>16</sup>

The picture becomes all the more grim when Davies is pitted against two other people who also possess delusory hopes like him. Aston consistently talks of building a workshop at the place. Mick's plans are more elaborate:

You could have an off-white pile of linen rug, a table in afromosia teak veneer, sideboard with matt black drawers, curved chairs with cushioned seats, armchairs in oatmeal tweed, beech-frame settee with woven sea-grass seat, white-topped heat-resistant coffee table, white tile surround...<sup>17</sup>

And the poor tramp hopelessly tries to fit in the dreams of the two brothers. None of the three persons matched in the room may ever have their dreams fulfilled. Each one of them stands on the brink of rejection, disillusionment and unfulfilment as each of the three is paralysed by failure of the will. Davies is the first to go. Aston and Mick stand on the verge of fall. Today it is Davies, tomorrow it may be their turn. Each one of the three can be a tramp, only a thin line separates the two brothers from Davies. The play, indeed, is a forceful tragic rendering of life. '*The Caretaker* is a study of the human condi-

tion at the outer limit of endurance, both funny and tragic, paradoxically baffling and plausible, gifted with the poetic touch of universality, and turned out in colloquial dialogue that is breathtakingly cadenced and exact.<sup>18</sup>

This brings Pinter face to face with the 'basic problem of being', as Martin Esslin puts it.<sup>19</sup> His two plays, *The Dwarfs* and *The Collection* seem to be inspired by this basic urge. He now addresses himself to the question of all questions: What is truth? What is the truth about human beings? He himself raises the problem: '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 either true or false; it can be both true and false.'<sup>20</sup>

Len, in one of his streams of consciousness outbursts in *The Dwarfs*, poses the same problem:

The point is, who are you? Not why or how, not even what. I can see what, perhaps, clearly enough... But who are you I can't even begin to recognize, and sometime I recognize it so wholly, so forcibly, I can't look, and how can I be certain of what I see? You have no number. Where am I to look, where am I to look, what is there to locate, so as to have some surety, to have some rest from this whole blood racket? You are the sum of so many reflections...

Len further chides Pete: 'You've got no idea how to preserve a distance between what you smell and you think about it. You haven't got the faculty for making a simple distinction between one thing and another. Every time you walk out of this door you go straight over a cliff. What you've got to do is nourish the power of assessment. How can you hope to assess and verify anything if you walk about with your nose stuck between your feet all day long?'

A human being is 'the sum of many reflections'—it helps Pinter's quest for truth 'at a deeper level than demonstrable fact. This involves a new preoccupation with the means of communication, since the question comes back, will people tell the truth about themselves, and if they will, can they?'<sup>21</sup>

*The Collection*, clearly, is a pursuit-for-truth comedy. Stella's

story to her husband that she slept with Bill sends James to Bill for verification. Why does he want to verify? Why does he wish to know the truth? To find out what Bill has in him that he does not possess? Or, to see if such a man named Bill exists at all or not? He probably does not believe the story fully. Perhaps Stella is trying to make him jealous. What is the truth that James discovers finally? Perhaps, some traits of homosexuality in himself! Besides that, the truth remains illusive. Stella, on Bill's homosexual friend's urging, changes her statement and James's question remains unanswered: 'Is it true?'

*The Collection* brings to the focus the basic question of relationship between man and woman, husband and wife, and this relationship is saved not by the truth but, maybe, untruth finally. James has learnt one truth, namely, as Pinter himself said: 'simple truth can often be something more terrifying than ambiguity and doubt.'<sup>22</sup> And in *The Lover*, the husband and wife are determined to shun the truth. So much so that they feel that by facing the simple truth of their relationship as married people they would be putting an end to their blissful make-believe world in which they meet as lovers. Hence their decision to continue to avoid the truth.

The maturity of Pinter's art finds its full expression in *The Homecoming*. Many basic issues raised in the earlier plays are touched at a deeper level here. Graham Kemper<sup>23</sup> describes the play as the portrait of Beelzebub and his relatives; sons representing three forms of evil in man:

evil of intellect (Teddy)

evil of flesh (Lenny)

evil of brute force (Joey)

Max: Progenitor of evil; and

Ruth: Instrument by which evil is made manifest.

'The characters,' he adds 'are thus representative of the appearances, claims and consequent projections of pervasive evil.'<sup>24</sup> But even Graham Kemper admits that this analysis does not satisfy the question of motivation: why does Ruth agree to become the family prostitute? why does Teddy not react? why does no one react to Sam's death?

✓ Pinter always raises more questions than he answers. The play is Pinter's 'most lucid and complex' attempt, according to Kelly Morris who regards its themes as: Generation, heredity, family, home.<sup>25</sup> The complication begins when Teddy, the Philosophy Professor in America, brings his wife, Ruth, after six years to his home in England which is a male-den populated by his two brothers, father and an uncle. Finally, Ruth agrees to stay behind as a sort of family prostitute while Teddy quietly packs off.

Pinter's own explanation of the play is interesting. When asked what was *Homecoming* about, he said: 'It is about love and lack of love.'<sup>26</sup>

The one thing that has irked the critics and the audience is: why does Teddy watch quietly when his brother Joey moves Ruth to the couch and lies on top of her? Pinter was also asked: Is it realistic for a husband to stand by while his wife rolls on the couch with another man? This is his answer: 'Look, what would happen if he interfered. He would have had a messy fight on his hands, wouldn't he? And this particular man would avoid that. As for rolling on the couch, there are thousands of women in this very country who at this very moment are rolling off couches with their brothers, or cousins or their next-door neighbours. The most respectable women do this. It is a splendid activity. It is a little curious certainly, when your husband is looking on, but it doesn't mean you are a harlot.'<sup>27</sup>

In this play, Pinter has succeeded in bringing to the surface deepest sexual obsessions of family life. The cannibalistic male household can be anywhere. All Pinter has done is to make an advance from James (*The Collection*) to Teddy. James was only told that his wife had rolled over a couch with Bill. But here Pinter makes Teddy watch the whole thing. What is the effect? Teddy perhaps knows his wife too well to make any move. The question why Teddy did not hit somebody at that time is purely a question of prestige for the male audience. The real question is: Why Ruth did it in Teddy's own house and with his own people? She must have caused quite a headache to Teddy in the American university campus where Teddy worked. But by doing all this with Teddy's brothers was she seeking some sort of revenge on Teddy for his lack of

manhood? Or was she a nymphomaniac, as Martin Esslin suggests?

Ruth's behaviour is clearly a satire on the facade of respectability. A mother of three kids leaves her children for a life where she finds more freedom. Is hers a revolt, revolt against the tyranny of marriage? Pinter has a word in her defence: 'Ruth did not want to go back to America with her husband. So what the hell she is going to do? She is misinterpreted deliberately and used by the family. But eventually she comes back at them with a whip. She says, "if you want to play this game I can play as well as you."' She does not become a harlot. At the end of the play she is in possession of a certain kind of freedom. She can do what she wants, and it is not at all certain she will be off to Greek Street. But even if she did, she would not be a harlot in her own mind.'<sup>28</sup>

Ruth's infidelity is comparable to Martha in Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, who rolls on the floor with Nick, and at the same time makes it a point to produce sufficient voices to leave her husband, George, in no uncertainty of her action. Martha was certainly taking revenge on George out of her frustration. So is Ruth.

Is every woman somewhat of a tart? Is this the theme Pinter is touching upon? Meg and Flora have much in common with Ruth, except the difference in their age. But with all the defence Pinter may offer, the play on the whole rejects the values represented by Ruth or Meg and Flora. In all these cases, there is a certain emptiness in them which is causing all this havoc. 'It isn't simply that Pinter's characters are grubby; it is that their souls are grubby also.'<sup>29</sup> In confronting the impotence of contemporary society, Pinter castigates the lack of inner life. It is this emptiness which is responsible largely for tragedy in human relations. 'Our lostness from cause and origin and our inability to maintain creative associations with each other—both have to do with the failure of some inner focus and stability.'<sup>30</sup>

In *A Slight Ache*, the life of Edward and Flora is so empty that a dumb match-seller is good enough to make him lose his nerves and to fill her emptiness. Instead of the couch, Pinter resorts to a symbolic gesture. Flora gives the matchseller's tray to Edward to show that Edward and the matchseller have

changed places. This emptiness is all the more pronounced in Pinter's upper-class characters. The thread of this emptiness passes, in Pinter's plays, through Petey (Meg's husband), Bert (Rose's husband), Teddy (Ruth's husband) and James (Stella's husband). Most of these husbands are slow-thinking and slow-moving and they pale to insignificance. Of these only Teddy and Edward are intellectuals. James is also an educated person. Significantly enough, James is seeking the truth whether his wife slept with someone else; Edward gives his place to the matchseller and, worst of all, Teddy looks on helplessly when Ruth rolls on the couch with her brother-in-law. George in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* is also an intellectual, to be more precise a Professor like Teddy. The only difference between him and Teddy is that he places a book before his eyes while Teddy looks on. Is Pinter, and so also Albee in this play, trying to point out that intellectuals make bad husbands or that they, after some time, regress into their intellectual confinements, leaving their wives to look for matchsellers, brothers-in-law or midnight guests? Pinter is positively suggesting that 'direct involvement intellectually and interpersonally is necessary for life to be truly meaningful and truly secure.'<sup>31</sup> And, also 'a secure "professional" existence which resists life's challenges becomes a sterile condition, vulnerable to destruction.'<sup>32</sup>

On the other hand, in case of his women characters, Pinter definitely seems to be more fond of seductive 'Moms'. Meg, Flora, Rose are all Moms and the first two, despite their age, retain seductive instincts. Of his younger women, Stella has not much of a role to play. Sally of *The Night School* is also not impressively delineated. The only noteworthy young woman character of Pinter so far is Ruth. And she is 'Mom' of all the earlier Moms in seductiveness. This Pinter heroine is far different from his contemporary John Osborne's Alison (*Look Back In Anger*). Osborne's women are loving and they suffer for the sake of love. Alison goes away, unable to bear the mental torture Jimmy subjects her to for her crime that she belonged to a higher class. But the death of her child brings her back to the arms of Jimmy. Jimmy could have said only to such a woman as Alison: 'I may be a lost cause, but I thought if you loved me, it needn't matter.'<sup>33</sup>

There is no such Alison in Pinter's plays. Ruth has three children, yet she leaves them and her husband not for the sake of love for someone else but to become a prostitute in the home of her husband's family. Is Ruth a real representative of the modern woman or Alison? Perhaps both. And Pinter has yet to create a more rich woman character who may also be young.

Despite this, the characters he has produced are convincing, ordinary people taken out of reality. They are representations of human thoughts, emotions and fantasies. They suffer from normal human weaknesses and pretences. Sally (*Night School*) poses as a teacher and wants to hide the fact that she goes to a night club and not a night school. Walter poses as a romantic gunman to Sally. Davies still insists that he has papers at Sidcup to establish his respectability. Goldberg even on a killing job talks endlessly of his respectable Jewish family. Stanley's claim of a pianist of repute is for anyone to believe. But Pinter punctures these pretences and shows his men and women in their true colours.

It has been said that the Pinter world is confined to a room and that he seldom goes out of the room. But room in Pinter plays carries different meaning in each case. For Rose and Stanley, room was a place of shelter. For Ben and Gus it became a tomb. For Davies, it could have meant the end of miseries. For Ruth, home or room meant freedom to do anything. For Albert (*A Night Out*) room becomes a place like hell, a suffocating place because of his nagging, over-possessive 'Mom'. The other room of the prostitute he goes to makes no difference to him and he cries out: 'You're all the same. You're all the same. You're just a dead weight round my neck.'<sup>34</sup>

What matters really is not the room itself but what the occupants make of it. And the occupants go out in the world, they come from outside. Outside the room, they are men of professions performing their regular chores. Inside the room, they are human beings and it is here they can be caught best. This is what Pinter does. That is why often he makes 'as his central image a room—any ordinary room where people live—to serve as a microcosm of the world.'<sup>35</sup> And thus in Pinter we have 'a kaleidoscope of pieces of experience: of memories, fears and hatreds, which every now and then get shaken into configurations of character and situation.'<sup>36</sup>

Every play of Pinter represents a vision of life, his vision. One may not see life as he does but it is imperative that his vision is a part of truth. And with his 'instinctive sense of theatre and rhythm', to quote his first Director, James Roose-Evans, every play of Pinter is an event to be experienced.

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35. George Wellwarth, *The Theatre of Protest and Paradox*, p. 198.
36. R. F. Storch, 'Harold Pinter's Happy Families', *The Massachusetts Review*, Autumn, 1967.

## MORAL DILEMMA IN *TROILUS AND CRESSIDA*

BY A. A. ANSARI

✓ THE ambiguity at the heart of the play derives partly from its structural peculiarity and partly from its moral uncertainties. The two major themes that run concurrently in it are war and love, and they are intertwined. But the action is seen now from the point of view of Hector or Troilus, again from that of Ulysses or Achilles, and still again in the light of the choric comments of Thersites. These different mirrors which are reflected on to the action being about shifts of emphases which make the reader's responses rather indeterminate. It has been reiterated that the play concerns itself with two different orders of experience—the one represented by the Trojans and the other by the Greeks. These two approaches may be designated as romantic and realistic, the former resting upon individualistic or subjective perceptions, the latter upon an open-eyed sense of practical realities. And both these have been dramatized by Shakespeare with complete detachment. But what is very much worth stressing is not that they are diametrically opposed to each other but that both are flawed and are of doubtful validity in the ultimate analysis.

The Trojans and the Greeks are at loggerheads and the bone of contention is Helen, the wife of Menelaus, who has been raped by Paris. The fantastic and unreasonable conflict initiated by this event is in the background as the play opens and we are also allowed a glimpse into the characters of Helen and Cressida, the latter being the focal point in the fortunes of Troilus. But it is significant that early in the play is set Ulysses's speech to the Greek conclave on the need to observe 'degree, priority and place' at different levels. Among the Greek leaders Agamemnon is ineffective and pompous, Achilles is self-centred and a bully, Patroclus is his closest associate, and both are given to lolling in laziness and mimicking others in the most grotesque way. They are entirely lacking in the sense of equipoise between thought and the instruments of action:

So that the ram that batters down the wall,

For the great swing and rudeness of his poise,  
They place before his hand that made the engine,  
Or those that with the fineness of their souls  
By reason guide his execution.

(Act I, Sc. iii)

Ulysses, like the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, holds the reins of action in his hands. He is aware of the fact that the Greeks, by and large, have been rendered ineffective partly for being too ratiocinative and partly owing to their involvement in petty jealousies. The speech on degree not only epitomizes certain medieval commonplaces but also offers a corrective to the chaos prevailing on account of lack of proper co-ordination. It embodies an implicit criticism of the excesses of the Greeks which have dried up the springs of action. Ulysses evokes the vivid and horrifying sense of dislocation when belief in hierarchy is disturbed. This holds true in the case of the heavens, the elements, the state, the social organism and the individual self:

Take but degree away, untune that string,  
And hark! what discord follows; each thing melts  
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters  
Should lift their bosoms higher than the shores,  
And make a sop of all this solid globe:

. . . . .  
. . . . .  
Then everything includes itself in power,  
Power into will, will into appetite;  
And appetite, an universal wolf,  
So doubly seconded with will and power,  
Must make perforce an universal prey,  
And last eat up himself. Great Agamemnon,  
This chaos, when degree is suffocate,  
Follows the choking.

(Act. I, Sc. iii)

The speech covers many aspects of the visible universe and excludes the mention only of the angelic beings. But specifically with reference to the individual the observance of degree perhaps amounts to the coherence between thought and action.

Properly integrated individuals, with a sense of interrelatedness and mutuality, constitute the ideal body politic. If and when this inner cohesion suffers a jolt, the individual self becomes indistinguishable from the nature of an insurrection. The same principle applies to both the macrocosm and the microcosm. When will and appetite become predominant among human motivations and the harmonizing faculty of judgment is inoperative or suspended, chaos is come again. Ulysses' mind oscillates between heaven and earth and explores all phenomena for confirmation of his basic thesis.

Parallel to this oration of Ulysses may be set the debate in the Trojan Council regarding Helen. The point at issue is whether she ought to be sent back to the Greeks. Hector, the half-hearted idealist, is in favour of restoring Helen and bases his plea on the law of Nature and the custom of nations. Troilus counters this argument because he thinks that the Trojans, in conniving at her abduction by Paris, were honour-bound to retain her. He is naturally enough supported by the arch-offender, Paris. Priam rebukes Troilus, and Hector brings fresh reinforcements to his own contention. Troilus makes his point by saying that the worth of a thing depends not so much on itself as on the evaluation of the perceiver. 'What is aught but as 'tis valued.' Moreover, once the choice has been made in accordance with one's will it ought to be adhered to with rigorous consistency. And arguing like a raw, impulsive man he thought that manhood and honour would be drained of their significance were we to depend overmuch on logical reasoning:

Let's shut our gates and sleep: manhood and honour  
Should have hare hearts, would they but fat their thoughts  
With this cramm'd reason: reason and respect  
Make livers pale and lustihood deject.

(Act II, Sc. ii)

Troilus's specious reasoning is shot through and tainted with passion and he doesn't admit judgment as a mediator between senses and the imagination. But Hector, in spite of being an ardent defender of objectivity and pleading for moderation and equipoise in the settlement of disputes, capitulates in the end:

Hector's opinion  
Is this, in way of truth; yet ne'ertheless,  
My spritely brethren, I propend to you  
In resolution to keep Helen still.

(Act II, Sc. ii)

Not only is Troilus possessed by fatuity and submerged in his own phantasy but the Trojans, by and large, seem to be wedded to a false concept of honour—a concept which is insubstantial and incorporeal. There is a thinness about this idealism which is supported by an empty and deceptive rhetoric. It is born not out of a devotion to spiritual values but of 'hot, distemper'd blood'.

It may be added here that Helen is certainly not worth the stakes made on her behalf by the Trojans. She hardly emerges as a sharply individualized person but reveals herself as a shallow, frivolous creature of the moment. Troilus the poet makes a tall Marlovian claim about her:

Is she worth keeping? Why, she is a pearl,  
Whose price hath launch'd above a thousand ships  
And turn'd crown'd kings to merchants.

(Act. II Sc. ii)

But Paris, in spite of himself, comes nearer the truth:

But I would have the soil of her fair rape  
Wip'd off in honourable keeping her.

(Act II, Sc. ii)

And Diomedes later refers to her in a withering comment as a 'flat tam'd piece'. One is strongly tempted to identify her as the false Helen of legend, a phantasm and a mask rather than the genuine, authentic person. The fact that she is made the pretext of an idealist position discloses the hollowness of the Trojan way of thinking. Further, the way in which he is swept off by the rhetoric of Troilus and Paris proves that though strong in reason Hector is weak in determination.

The fortunes of Troilus and Cressida are closely linked up with the war theme in the play. This affair is apparently

enclosed within the framework of the Courtly Love tradition. Troilus is naive, forthright and impetuous. Both of them vie with each other in their protestations of love like the protagonists in Shakespeare's early comedies. That Cressida is not only mentally wide awake but has also an element of shrewdness about her is brought out in the aphoristic lines of an early soliloquy:

Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing:  
 Things won are done; joy's soul lies in the doing:  
 That she belov'd knows nought that knows not this:  
 Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is:

· · · · ·  
 Achievement is command; ungain'd, beseech.

(Act I, Sc. ii)

Nevertheless one need not question her sincerity when talking to Pandarus in a later context she unburdens herself thus:

Time, force, and death  
 Do to this body what extremes you can:  
 But the strong base and building of my love  
 Is as the very centre of the earth,  
 Drawing all things to it. I'll go in and weep.

(Act IV, Sc. ii)

Troilus's consuming passion for Cressida is brought out in the following passage where he is looking forward to meeting her:

I am giddy, expectation whirls me round.  
 Th'imaginary relish is so sweet  
 That it enchants my sense. What will it be  
 When that the wat'ry palate tastes indeed  
 Love's thrice-repured nectar? Death, I fear me,  
 Swooning destruction, or some joy too fine,  
 Too subtle-potent, tun'd too sharp in sweetness,  
 For the capacity of my ruder powers.

(Act III, Sc. ii)

This is the poetry of anticipation. It may also be regarded as an

expression of love in terms of a refined sensuality. The personality of the speaker is revealed more with reference to the palate than through a keenly-sensed identification with the beloved. The tone is anxiety-ridden and fevered. It would not be far wrong to uphold that Troilus and Cressida do not emerge as full personalities as do Antony and Cleopatra. The transcendental love of the latter seems to impose itself upon the recalcitrant reality. Troilus and Cressida live on the brink of the moment and the fruition of their love also proves itself to be something evanescent.

Though Troilus speaks some splendid poetry in the first half of his course of love, yet he undergoes a distinct change after the Greek generals, at the request of Calchas, decide to exchange Antenor for Cressida. The very first night after she is delivered through Diomedes she crassly forswears her constancy to Troilus. This is both sudden and incomprehensible. True, Troilus had an uncanny perception of the fact that the more sophisticated Greeks, with their eloquence and subtle arts of persuasion and merry-making would be able to conquer the heart of Cressida. Yet her falling-off, precipitate as it is, causes deep and utter disillusionment to him. It may be mentioned in passing here that it was the wilfulness of the Trojans, including that of Troilus himself, which helped the continuance of the state of belligerency. If peace could be won with the restoration of Helen to the Greeks the new situation involving Troilus and Cressida could not arise.

It is significant that, though belonging to hostile camps, Ulysses feels attracted towards Troilus and becomes his confidant. His estimate of Troilus, now that the element of iron has entered the fibre of his personality, is worth a glance:

The youngest son of Priam, a true knight;  
Not yet mature, yet matchless; firm of word,  
Speaking in deeds and deedless in his tongue;  
Not soon provok'd nor being provok'd soon calm'd;  
His heart and hand both open and both free:  
For what he has he gives; what thinks he shows;  
Yet gives he not till judgment guide his bounty,  
Nor dignifies an impure thought with breath.  
Manly as Hector, but more dangerous.

It is also Ulysses who conducts Troilus to the camp of Calchas where, with Thersites at their elbow, they overhear what transpires between Cressida and Diomedes. It is a breathtaking scene and Troilus, now ripened into wisdom, exhibits a remarkable degree of 'patience'—a sort of tough-mindedness in the face of an excruciating experience. When the perfidy of Cressida is established beyond any doubt Troilus expresses himself thus in tortuous rhythms of grief:

This she? No; this is Diomed's Cressida.  
 If beauty have a soul, this is not she;  
 If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimonies,  
 If sanctimony be the gods' delight,  
 If there be rule in unity itself,  
 This was not she.

. . . . .  
 . . . . .  
 Within my soul there doth conduce a fight  
 Of this strange nature that a thing inseparate  
 Divides more wider than the sky and earth;  
 And yet the spacious breadth of this division  
 Admits no orifice for a point as subtle  
 As Ariachne's broken woof to enter.

(Act V, Sc. ii)

This brings Shakespeare's favourite and persistent motif of appearance and reality into sharp focus. The creature of the moment—the Cressida who has abjectly betrayed Troilus—is the mask, the Cressida of Troilus's phantasm is the reality. But this real Cressida of Troilus's dream is, perhaps, not much different from Helen who is the symbol of falsity. And this is the tragic delusion, the toils in which Troilus is enmeshed. At the core of this rhapsodic utterance lies the idea that the self-contained entity of Cressida, which he had fervently believed to be inviolate, has suffered a rupture. And the rupture is so complete that it seems to be irreparable. 'It was a deep non-logical apprehension', comments L. C. Knights with great lucidity, 'that prompted Shakespeare to run together, in "Ariachne", the subtle filament of the spider and the clew given to Theseus.' For Troilus this apostasy is symptomatic,

and here the splendid 'degree' speech of Ulysses comes into service, on the disintegration of the entire cosmos because of the law of correspondences.

Instance, O instance! strong as heaven itself;  
The bonds of heaven are slipp'd, dissolv'd and loos'd.

Following the Marsillian metaphysics Shakespeare tends to believe that the soul-pattern and the cosmic pattern mutually sustain each other. Pandarus provides an excellent comment on the situation when he, perhaps unconsciously, speaks out:

Fair prince, here is good broken music.

But Troilus still believes that it is only the ignoble contents of her fragmented self that will fall to the share of Diomedes:

And with another knot, five-finger-tied,  
The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,  
The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy reliques  
Of her o'er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed.

This is perhaps an ironic confirmation of what Cressida had herself foreshadowed:

I have a kind of self resides with you;  
But an unkind self, that itself will leave,  
To be another's fool.

(Act III, Sc. ii)

It has been insisted on by a large number of critics, with varying degrees of emphasis, that the phenomenon of love in *Troilus and Cressida*, as in the *Sonnets*, too, is subject to 'the envious and calumniating time'. What is implied is that it is not the individuals who are responsible for undermining the sanctity of love but it is in the very nature of things that this relationship cannot endure. It has been further suggested that the very fact of our being involved in the world of appearances renders us vulnerable to the mutations and vicissitudes of time. Time, as a metaphysical category, functions undoubt-

edly as the groundswell in the play. Cressida, in an attempt to assure Troilus of her constancy and unswerving devotion to the ideal of love, speaks thus:

If I be false, or swerve a hair from truth,  
 When time is old and hath forgot itself,  
 When water-drops have worn the stones of Troy,  
 And blind oblivion swallow'd cities up,  
 And mighty states characterless are grated  
 To dusty nothing, yet let memory,  
 From false to false, among false maids in love,  
 Upbraid my falsehood!

(Act III, Sc. ii)

But when Tillyard remarks: 'On the other hand Shakespeare did, in this play, choose to show things happening rather than men so making things happen as to imply a clear and powerful moral scheme', it amounts to minimizing the responsibility of the protagonists for the deterioration in their fortunes. But it may be maintained with some plausibility that it is the betrayal of their higher self that prevents Troilus and Cressida from triumphing over the cataclysms of time. When the genuine self of the lover is attuned with that of the beloved or when the integrity of self is demonstrated on both sides, then the thievery of time may be resisted and overcome. In the over-all pattern of Shakespearean ethic the soul is superior to the fact of mutability; it is in fact the determinant. The radiant and absorbing passion of Antony and Cleopatra leaves its impress on the conditions of their fateful and mortal existence.

It was pointed out earlier that Achilles was both exceedingly proud and eaten up by the canker of inaction. The process of his deflation and emergence out of his morbid self-centredness is quite intriguing. This has been effected skilfully and in instalments. Achilles's pride and inordinate preoccupation with himself is condemned by Agamemnon thus:

He that is proud eats up himself: pride is his own glass,  
 his own trumpet, his own chronicle; and whatever praises  
 itself but in the deed, devours the deed in the praise.

(Act II, Sc. iii)

This is a pretty generalized comment. Ulysses's verdict is even more scathing:

possess'd he is with greatness,  
And speaks not to himself but with a pride  
That quarrels at self-breath: imagin'd worth  
Holds in his blood such swol'n and hot discourse,  
That 'twixt his mental and his active parts  
Kingdom'd Achilles in commotion rages,  
And batters down himself.

(Act II, Sc. iii)

In an earlier context Ulysses has used a more vivid image that suggests the discomfoting sensation produced by Achilles's pride:

And we were better parch in the Afric sun  
Than in the pride and salt scorn of his eyes,  
Should he escape Hector fair.

(Act I, Sc. iii)

Achilles is slighted through the pampering of Ajax and this causes deep embarrassment to the former. It is also suggested by Ulysses and Agamemnon that all the Greek commanders should ignore Achilles while passing by him. This would naturally exasperate him and make him suffer from chagrin. A more deliberate stratagem is hit upon to the effect that when he passes by Achilles Ulysses shows himself to be engrossed in reading something from Plato, the meaning of which he is trying to puzzle out. What Plato, or inferentially Ulysses, drives home to Achilles, in a seemingly innocuous way, is the fact that however richly gifted one may be, he cannot be assured of that except through reflection of these gifts in others. In other words, one has to go out of oneself to realize one's potentialities fully. The insulated self has to be broken in order that it may be harmonized with the larger self and be rendered adequate for the processes of creative living. The pretended ignorance of Ulysses does the trick and the latent meaning of Plato's thought is borne on Achilles, in spite of himself, in a flash of illumination. In fact the latter becomes, for the time

being, the mentor of the former. Beauty, sight and vision become what they are when they are projected in a medium other than and outside themselves:

This is not strange, Ulysses.  
 The beauty that is borne here in the face  
 The bearer knows not, but commends itself  
 To others' eyes: nor doth the eye itself,  
 That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself,  
 Not going from itself; but eye to eye oppos'd  
 Salutes each other with each other's form;  
 For speculation turns not to itself  
 Till it hath travell'd, and is mirror'd there  
 Where it may see itself. This is not strange at all.  
 (Act III, Sc. iii)

It was proposed to make Achilles realize that he could not very well prosper in his bounded universe. Self-regarding virtues are parasitic by nature, and instead of being instrumental in releasing one's energies for fine and spacious living, may breed a sort of animal perversity in us. Hence a kind of moral therapy is administered to Achilles partly by destroying his egotism and boosting up a much inferior person, Ajax, and partly by the subtle and intricate exposure of the littleness of self-regarding instincts and attitudes.

Though the bubble of his vanity is pricked, for the time being, by the eulogy poured upon the unworthy Ajax, and Achilles is made to see the goodness of the altruistic self, yet he lapses into his arrogant and ungracious identity. His concept of honour is narrow and superficial and rests upon the externals:

And not a man, for being simply man,  
 Hath any honour, but honour for those honours  
 That are without him, as place, riches, and favour,  
 Prizes of accident as oft as merit:  
 (Act III, Sc. iii)

When Achilles is touched deeply with the news of the death of Patroclus he is finally roused to action and challenges Hector to single combat. Hector had refused to fight with Ajax because

the latter happened to be cousin-germane to him. He is, however, dissuaded from engaging himself in the fateful grapple with Achilles by Andromache, Cassandra and Priam, both severally and jointly. He disregards the counsel of love, divination and wisdom and pursues the ill-conceived resolve with total indifference to the logical contradiction of his stand. Similar contradictions in the stand taken up by Troilus regarding the defence of Helen were quite manifest and were exposed by him with ruthless objectivity. He is also moved by covetousness in attacking the strange Greek with the sumptuous armour and unarms himself after taking possession of the booty. Achilles, too, in spite of receiving word from Polyxena, is overcome by the instinct of wreaking vengeance for the death of Patroclus. Thus the unarmed Hector is attacked in a brutal and dastardly manner by Achilles and his Myrmidons. Both Hector and Achilles are equally guilty of a heinous crime. Hector's integrity is compromised by his covetousness and he turns his back, through sheer stubbornness, upon the appeal of love made to him by Andromache. He reveals himself as much a victim of self-delusion as any one of the Trojans. Achilles is guilty of apostasy to Polyxena and goes mad in his lust for vengeance for the sake of Patroclus. The result is instantaneous death for Hector, and Achilles is threatened to be pursued for life by Troilus:

No space of earth shall sunder our two hates:  
I'll haunt thee like a wicked conscience still,  
That mouldeth goblins swift as frenzy's thoughts.  
(Act V, Sc. x)

The play evokes a sense of moral uncertainty, the sense of being in a labyrinth. We witness the violation of order, and the betrayal of love. The war fought for unworthy causes ends in futility and senseless frittering away of energies and love given to sordid or at least undeserving objects leads to the unhappiness of disillusionment. Similarly the concept of honour is here associated with a degree of fragility; and honour and love, based on chimeras, come to grief when exposed to the bitter test of reality. But though this is what happens under the conditions of mundane life our belief in love and honour as

ultimates need not be lost. Similarly Hector's yielding to covetousness or Achilles's frenzy to wreak vengeance, both being evil, contaminate their persons also. These two last acts as also the tragic flaws of Troilus and Cressida may be traced ultimately to a kind of spiritual apostasy on their part. When the unitive self not only disintegrates but the higher self is offered as a sacrifice on the altar of the lower the result is the resurgence of chaos. Troilus remains a pathetic figure and is denied true tragic greatness because he does not attain to self-knowledge even after traversing the Inferno of pain in the last Act. His dilemma thus remains unresolved even towards the end.

## ART AND ARTISTS IN *THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY*

BY A. K. CHANDA

(My intention in this paper is to study the civilisation embodied by Madame Merle and Osmond, that is civilisation as the art of living. James subjects the philosophy that 'one ought to make one's life a work of art' to a severe critical scrutiny.) He demonstrates (naturally, in terms of art) that the search for perfection in life, or the attainment of it is a contradiction in terms, and hence impossible. Perfection and life are not only incompatible but also antagonistic. When art is applied to life, it impoverishes life and hence becomes suspect as art. The novelist's art provides a contrast to that of the artist in life. In a novel the 'amount of felt life' is directly proportional to the amount of art. As James once wrote to H. G. Wells, 'It is art that makes life, makes interest, makes importance....'

James portrays Madame Merle as a 'great artist' who has fashioned her own person and life into works of art. Her thick, fair hair is 'arranged somehow "classically" and as if she were a Bust—a Juno or a Niobe'. She is ranked as a 'mistress of the social art', a mistress of 'the art of conversation'. But a person who so self-consciously strives to mould her life inevitably becomes something of an actress, albeit an actress who for the most part plays her own role. The art of social living turns out to be by its very nature little more than the art of performing.

Madame Merle makes her debut at Gardencourt. Isabel hears 'the sound of low music proceeding apparently from the saloon'. Attracted by this 'source of harmony' she enters the room unnoticed.

'She was playing something of Schubert's—Isabel knew not what, but recognised Schubert—and she touched the piano with a discretion of her own. It showed skill, it showed feeling; Isabel sat down noiselessly on the nearest chair and waited till the end of the piece. When it was finished she felt a strong desire to thank the player, and rose from her seat to do so, while at the same time the

stranger turned quickly around, *as if* but just aware of her presence.

“That’s very beautiful, and your playing makes it more beautiful still”, said Isabel with all the young radiance with which she usually uttered a truthful rapture. (italics mine).

The unobtrusive ‘*as if*’ clearly indicates that Madame Merle hasn’t merely been playing the piano; having by some sixth sense become aware of an audience, she has in fact been performing on it. Isabel naturally doesn’t suspect that she is attending a performance. Her ‘young radiance’ and ‘truthful rapture’ throw into relief Madame Merle’s cunningly studied behaviour. The whole scene is symbolic of their impending fateful relationship. We should also note that Madame Merle’s skill in playing the piano symbolises her accomplishments in social life generally. And her distinctive delicacy and self-effacing quietness are suggested by ‘she touched the piano with a discretion of her own’ and the reference to ‘low music’.

Since we rarely see Madame Merle as anything but a performer of the social graces, we wonder whether she has any self which is distinct from her role, or any existence apart from the social. Like Isabel we begin to wonder ‘what commerce she could possibly hold with her own spirit’. Her will which is the mistress of her life has crushed most of her emotional spontaneity. Ironically, therefore, because of the hypertrophy of her civilised graces—graces which ideally should imply true concern for other people—her inner life has shrivelled up and she has become almost as much as Mrs. Touchett, who is utterly incapable of emotion, a spiritually desiccated woman.

Since the warmth of inner life is the source of any viable moral sense we have ‘a sense in [Madame Merle] of values gone wrong or, as they said at the shops, marked down’. The metaphor of commercial devaluation points to Madame Merle’s main passion in life—wealth, and all that wealth can buy in the form of position, power and fame. We discover that Madame Merle, the artist in social living, doesn’t live *for* her civilised graces, i.e. for her art, at all, but merely *by* them.

The most living thing about Madame Merle is in fact her ambitions. When she returns to Rome to find that Warburton has taken himself off, her thwarted ambitions goad her into dangerous life. She becomes almost natural. In the way Madame Merle challenges her Isabel senses 'a nameless vitality which she could see to have been absent from her friend's professions of delicacy and caution.'

So obsessed is she with her ambitions that she will stop at almost nothing to procure her 'spoils'. She commits the cardinal Jamesian sin of using people as means to fulfilling her ambitions rather than as human beings in their own right. As she brazenly remarks, 'I don't pretend to know what people are meant for. I only know what I can do with them.'

One of James's great achievements is to make us respond to moral corruption not only as morally but also as aesthetically repulsive, and to moral goodness (at times) as aesthetically satisfying. Although James had a highly developed aesthetic sensibility it was fused with an equally complex and strong moral sense. Unlike Osmond and the *fin-de-siecle* aesthetes he never allowed his sense of beauty to hold sway over him. He never made beauty the touchstone of the good. In fact his art can induce us to respond to beauty, when accompanied by moral ugliness, as mere sham beauty. I shall illustrate my point from James's portrayal of Osmond and then come back to Madame Merle. When Osmond declares his love for Isabel, 'the words he had uttered made him, as he stood there, beautiful and generous, invested him as with the golden air of autumn.' Although Isabel is deeply moved by this image that Osmond projects, James induces the reader to sense that this beauty and generosity are sham by making the scene, the ugly sitting-room with its 'false' colours' and 'sham splendour', which were like 'vulgar, bragging, lying talk to Osmond', a comment on Osmond's treacherous wooing of Isabel.

Similarly with Madame Merle, the reader's and Isabel's attitude to her beauty, sophistication and social poise changes. We come to notice something hard and cold-blooded about her social graces. Even that famous smile of hers 'at the left hand corner of her mouth' which Isabel had always considered graceful, assumes a sinister cast. Just before it comes over Isabel that Madame Merle had married her to Osmond, she gazes

up desperately at her face for enlightenment. 'But the light of this woman's eyes seemed only a darkness.' The enlightenment she receives eventually is that all Madame Merle's dazzling sophistication is nothing more than moral darkness.

Despite her sterile graces and wickedness Madame Merle emerges as a somewhat poignant figure. This is mainly due to her having, unlike Osmond, a remnant of human feelings, a vestige of moral sense, which naturally conflict with her role as the perfect social organism and with her ambitions. Her tragedy is focused in her relationship with her daughter, Pansy. Although she has some instinctive maternal affection for Pansy ('she took the child's other hand and drew her nearer') she is so accustomed to suppressing intimate feelings, to playing her role that she finds it difficult to express these feelings in any natural manner. To the mother's shame and sorrow Pansy instinctively senses this falsity and dislikes her. What redeems Madame Merle to some extent is that she is conscious at times that she is a failure as a human being. Like Mrs. Touchett, but more acutely than her, she realises that she will see herself in the future as an old woman without memories.

When we come to Gilbert Osmond we find that everything about him bears the stamp of an aesthete and artist. His beard is 'cut in the manner of the portraits of the sixteenth century'. As in a work of art every detail about him tells: Isabel notices 'that light, smooth slenderness of structure which made the movement of a single one of his fingers produce the effect of an expressive gesture'. His rooms are richly adorned with works of art and tell of 'arrangements subtly studied and refinements frankly proclaimed'. Even his daughter and footboy look like figures out of paintings. In addition Osmond has the gift of placing himself, whether consciously or unconsciously, in situations that appeal to a painter. The first time we see him, he is, James remarks, a member of 'a small group that might have been described by a painter as composing well'. On Isabel's first visit to him, Osmond draws his shy daughter out of her chair and makes her stand between his knees, 'leaning against him while he passed his arm round her slimness'. Isabel is no doubt attracted by this charming and touching tableau of a lonely, helpless, but dignified father embracing his only joy in life, his convent-flower of a daughter.

The imprint of art is not only visible in Osmond's person, environment, and the situations he engineers. It is present in every aspect of his behaviour including his social and personal relationships. Like Madame Merle he is a virtuoso performer. Everything about him is a pose, but a pose so 'subtly considered that if one were not on the look-out one mistook it for impulse'. His art is so artful that he mystifies Isabel to the top of her bent and lures her into marrying him. According to Ralph he is 'the man to whose deep art she had succumbed'. His art consists of projecting in a cunningly sincere way a romanticised image of himself which will appeal to Isabel. Just one example will suffice to show how he practises this art. On her first visit to his villa he observes to Isabel that '[Italy] made one idle and dilettantish and second-rate; it had no discipline for the character, didn't cultivate in you, otherwise expressed, the successful social and other "check" that flourished in Paris and London.' Osmond produces two effects by this statement. First he convinces Isabel that he takes a rather ironical or critical view of himself—a proof that he's 'not grossly conceited'. Simultaneously he hints strongly that a world which demands the cultivation of that 'social and other "check"' (note the irony) is vulgar. He manages to suggest that to lack that 'discipline of character' and to be idle, dilettantish and second-rate are in fact virtues. During the rest of Isabel's stay he insinuates that his idleness is enforced and due to 'undervalued merit', that he is not dilettantish but a man of profound taste, and not second-rate but an undiscovered first-rate. Thus without appearing to boast he demonstrates his superiority over the world.

Osmond's studied behaviour strikes every sensitive observer whose judgment is not clouded by fancy as artificial and lacking in all feeling. He has reduced social and personal relationships to mere form. When Warburton comes to Rome Osmond performs his duties as a host most conscientiously. 'Nothing could have been more adequate, more nicely measured, than his courtesy to his wife's old friend; it was punctilious, it was explicit, it was everything but natural.'

Osmond's addiction to art is not merely manifested in what he does to himself. It also takes the sinister form of using other people to gratify his aesthetic sensibility. Like Madame Merle

he uses other people as means to an end. The least dangerous form this attitude takes is his habit of imagining people as elements of an aesthetic design. When sending Pansy back to the convent he soliloquises in Isabel's presence: 'I like to think of her there, in the old garden, under the arcade, among those tranquil virtuous women. Many of them are gentlewomen born; several of them are noble....' James comments that Osmond's tone was that of a man 'not so much offering an explanation as putting a thing into words—almost into pictures—to see, himself how it would look.'

More dangerously and callously, he uses people as the medium and raw material of his art. Dorothy Van Ghent rightly points out that it is in his 'use of Pansy, his daughter, that he is most subtly and horribly effective. He has made her into a work of art, the modelling materials being the least artful of childish qualities—her innocence and gentleness.'<sup>1</sup>

The outcome of thus moulding a person is to deprive her of a will and individuality of her own. Herein lies the enormity of Osmond's crime. When Isabel makes her lone pilgrimage to Osmond's house to visit Pansy, the latter 'rose to the occasion as the small, winged fairy in the pantomime soars by the aid of the dissimulated wire.' Pansy is a mere puppet, Osmond being the puppet-master. Everything about her, including her innocence and good manners, is somewhat stilted and mechanical. Like her parents she is a performer, although unlike them she has not created her own role. When Madame Merle praises her for having learnt to obey, Pansy replies 'with soft eagerness, almost with boastfulness as if she had been speaking of her piano-playing: "Oh yes, I obey very well." And then she gave a faint, just audible sigh.' Pansy's whole life is a performance at the piano of obedience, in order to give pleasure to others, despite any pain ('a faint, just audible sigh') it might cost her. (Her mother's life, one recollects, is a performance at the piano of her social graces, but with no such altruistic motive in mind.) When Osmond marries Isabel, as Ralph wryly reflects, he has the opportunity of working 'with superior material; it's rich abundance compared with his former resources.' But Isabel is much less tractable than Pansy. In fact it is ironically through her disastrous marriage that she

forges and discovers her true identity. Nevertheless he does change her to some extent, even though this is only because 'she had done her best to be what he would like.' When we see Isabel for the first time after her marriage she stands 'framed in the gilded doorway', 'the picture of a gracious lady'. Osmond's portrait of a lady is very different from the portrait of the 'rustling, quickly-moving, clear-voiced' girl that had emerged from the first half of the book. Owing to Osmond's manipulation a certain deadness appears in Isabel's person (as in Pansy's). She wears a mask which covers her face completely, and 'there was something fixed and mechanical in the serenity fixed on it.'

Ironically this deadness appears in Osmond too because by making himself into a work of art, he has committed the cardinal sin against himself. It is manifested, for example, in his utter incapacity to feel, and in the description of his house-front (which represents his face) as a mask.

Having described the ways in which Osmond is established as an aesthetic and artist in living, and studied the moral consequences of such an attitude to life, we can now consider what kind of an aesthete and artist he is.

Although Osmond's art is reputed to be great it is essentially that of great pastiche. The scene in which we see him copying from a folio volume a drawing of an antique coin is symbolic of his art. Pansy, for example, is the equivalent of 'the delicate, finely-tinted disk' which has been transferred to 'the sheet of immaculate paper'. Her original is the *Infanta* of Velasquez or an ingenué from a French play.

For Isabel works of art have a life of their own. A response to them is an absorbing and fulfilling experience. Just after Warburton, bitterly realising the futility of pursuing Isabel any more, leaves her in the gallery of the Capitol, Isabel seats herself in the centre of the circle of 'shining antique marbles'—she feels them as 'presences'—immediately gets caught up in their stream of life, and is spellbound by their 'noble quietude'. Soon after Isabel has been 'drawn off by a deeper tide of life', Osmond saunters into this scene of classic grace, bringing with him his vulgarly acquisitive collector's attitude to art. 'He perceived a new attraction in the idea of taking to himself a young lady who had qualified herself to figure in his collection of

choice objects by declining so noble a hand.' That Isabel is not a collector's piece is subtly emphasised when James first transforms her into one of those antique marbles by making her sit completely immobile in their midst, and then brings her back to 'the deeper tide of life'.

Osmond has the connoisseur's expert knowledge and keen discrimination in the fine arts and in matters of taste, but art is not a human experience for him. He is most at home studying the underside of old plates or the corner of sixteenth-century drawings. The only emotion this study can generate is cold ecstasy. The connoisseur's attitude to art tends to degenerate into art for art's sake. He forgets the relationship between art and life, makes beauty the touchstone of art and in equating it with the good denies morality. In this connection it is interesting that Osmond displays little interest in literature. Literature naturally cannot be appreciated merely in terms of line, colour, shade and form. It always says something and is partly judged in James's own terms by 'the amount of felt life' it has.

The basic reason for Osmond's being a warped human being and a false aesthete and artist is simply that he lives solely by his taste. Appreciating only what is refined and exquisite, Osmond rejects the coarse with the vulgar, in fact confuses the two. In condemning Henrietta Stackpole, for example, who is loud and crude, he is condemning a certain kind of originality, and above all, vitality—the bright, the vivid and the striking. Hence his objection to Isabel's high-spiritedness. 'He thought Miss Archer sometimes of too precipitate a readiness', being himself superior to joy and enthusiasm—'he would never, in the concert of pleasure, touch the big drum by so much as a knuckle.' An exclusive love of the refined is tantamount to an addiction to things decadent, cold and lifeless. His rooms are frequently described as cold—'Mr. Osmond met her in the cold ante-chamber—it was cold even in the month of May.' Thus Osmond's much lauded taste turns out to be a very restricted and mechanical faculty. The over-ripening of sensibility in Osmond, by crushing his emotional (and hence moral) life, has deadened his sensibility, since a taste can only be kept alive and flexible if it is enriched by the emotions and if its use in turn nourishes the emotions. Here

again Isabel provides a contrast. We're told that the 'rich perfection of Gardencourt' was 'much to the taste of our young lady, whose taste played a considerable part in her emotions.'

The greatest irony about Osmond is that despite his immaculate taste, his dread of vulgarity and ugliness, his beautiful and intricate mind, his perfect urbanity, his spotless character and the dignified and romantic seclusion in which he lives, he is as vulgar and squalid, if not more so than the rabble he despises. Isabel reflects after her marriage that 'there had been an indefinable beauty about him—in his situation, in his mind, in his face.' But now she finds herself living in 'the house of darkness, the house of dumbness, the house of suffocation. Osmond's beautiful mind gave it neither light nor air.'

The governing force in Osmond's life is his vicious egotism. 'Under all his culture, his cleverness, his amenity, under his good-nature, his facility, his knowledge of life, his egotism lay hidden like a serpent in a bank of flowers.' This egotism takes two closely connected forms. One is his neurotic itch for worldly gains. This is partly why he is likened to a 'fine gold coin'. Underlying the suggestions about his personal beauty and his interest in art is the association with greed and gain. Isabel discovers that 'the man in the world whom she had supposed to be the least sordid had married her, like a vulgar adventurer for her money.' So ruthlessly does he pursue his ambitions that when Warburton, suffering under a delusion that he loves Pansy, appears as a prospective son-in-law, Osmond is willing to capitalise on this delusion and sacrifice his daughter's happiness for the sake of Warburton's wealth and position. And, as with Madame Merle, the prospect of gain is one of the few things that fires his imagination, and lets in some air and light into his mind. When Warburton invites the Osmonds to England 'Isabel . . . could see the great vista which had suddenly opened out in her husband's mind with Pansy's little figure marching up the middle of it.'

The second form that his egotism takes is an intense desire to extract from the world a recognition of his superiority. Ralph and Isabel discover that 'under the guise of caring only for intrinsic values Osmond lived exclusively for the world', that very world which he abhors. His great wish is to publicise his

'style' through all the works of art in his collection, both animate and inanimate, and thereby arouse the world's admiration. Like Madame Merle he doesn't live for his art but by it.

After his marriage to a wealthy woman Osmond has the opportunity to develop and gratify his long-cherished taste for the grand and even the grandiose. Instead of dwelling on stilts as it were (that is, in a house on a hill-top), he can now live in a huge, high palace with a 'nobly-arched loggia'. Instead of limiting himself to the study of coins, drawings and miniatures, he can now also turn his attention to the frescoes of Caravaggio, statues and urns, and fill one of his rooms with furniture of the First French Empire.

Osmond also advertises his style and skill by means of the human works of art in his collection. He models Pansy as innocent and gentle in order to express his contempt for the sordid and rough world. But at the same time he exhibits her to be admired by the world. There is an ironic discrepancy between the fineness of his art and the vulgarity of his motives, between the values he lives by and the values he lives for. How morally hideous his utilitarian designs are can be gauged from the contrast between the two following images. Isabel first appeals to Osmond as being 'smooth to his general need of her as handled ivory to the palm'. And at the end of the novel Isabel 'saw . . . the dry staring fact that she had been an applied hung-up tool, as senseless and convenient as mere shaped wood and iron.' The moral gulf between Osmond's refinement and his true degeneracy is equal to the aesthetic difference between ivory and wood and iron.

Osmond's urbanity and good nature after a certain acquaintance assume a sinister, even a diabolic cast. Isabel imagines herself living in hell, in a world that 'led downward and earthward, into realms of restriction and depression.' There is a menacing inscrutability about the front of his house ('it had heavy lids, but no eyes'), which is matched by the way he has of looking at Isabel 'through half-closed eyelids, as if he were thinking of her but scarcely saw her, which seemed to have a wonderfully cruel intention.'

Ralph provides a contrast to Osmond which is emphasised by the superficial similarity between them. Like Osmond Ralph

had 'the appearance of thinking that life was a matter of connoisseurship; but in Ralph it was an anomaly, a kind of humorous excrescence, whereas in Mr. Osmond it was the keynote, and everything was in harmony with it.' Reflecting on the entertainment provided by Isabel's stay in Garden-court, Ralph says to himself, 'Suddenly I receive a Titian by the post, to hang on my wall—a Greek bas-relief to stick over my chimney-piece.' This observation is clearly fanciful and humorous. Ralph is using a figure of speech, whereas Osmond's collector-similes are meant quite literally. To the extent that Ralph does consider Isabel as a work of art, his attitude is that of a detached admirer. 'It was very probably this sweet-tasting property of the observed thing in itself that was mainly concerned in Ralph's quickly-stirred interest in Isabel. For the true aesthete it is the work of art *in itself*, with its distinctive individual life that is important. He feels no desire to tamper with it, and convert it to his own use. But Isabel, as 'the observed thing in itself', is primarily a human being, not a work of art. Hence Ralph's reflection: 'A character like that, a real little passionate force to see at play is the finest thing in nature. It is finer than the finest work of art.' What appeals most to Ralph is the abundance of life in Isabel, her curiosity, her zest, her impulsiveness, all those things which Osmond objects to, and which wither in her at the touch of his art.

It only remains to consider what Isabel's relations are to Osmond. There are many reasons why Isabel falls in love with Osmond. Only two need concern us—her natural taste and her romantic imagination. We have already observed how living Isabel's response to art is. But when it comes to reality this very imagination and taste tend to warp her response to it. To some extent like Osmond, she is not interested in the observed thing in itself; instead she *uses* reality, (this includes other people) in a subtle way by colouring it and idealising it so that it appeals to her imagination and taste. The girl who when she was little, transformed the short and well-lighted arched passage in her house into a 'strange and lonely' 'tunnel', transforms Gilbert Osmond, the sterile dilettanté, into a romantic figure. Her imagination paints an idealising picture of him. She had carried away an image from her visit to the hill-top. . . the image of a quiet, clever, sensitive, distinguished

man, strolling on a moss-grown terrace above the sweet Val d'Arno and holding by the hand a little girl whose bell-like clearness gave a new grace to childhood. The picture had no flourishes, but she liked its lowness of tone and the atmosphere of summer twilight that pervaded it' (*italics mine*).

Taste and imagination play a large part in Isabel's life in Europe. They are prized especially highly, probably because they have been starved in American society among philistines such as her paternal aunt Mrs Varian 'who was determined to bring [her daughters] up properly' and consequently 'they read nothing'. The girl who always dreams about 'beauty, bravery and magnanimity' comes to Europe greedy for beautiful things. The most fascinating work of art and the finest aesthete that she comes across is Osmond. She is struck on her first meeting with him by his being 'as fine as one of the drawings in the long gallery above the bridge of the Uffizi'. On her second meeting she notices among other things the 'retouched features' of his face. And she is moved by the impression he creates of living 'in a sorted, sifted, arranged world, thinking about art and beauty and history'. She becomes increasingly spellbound by Osmond's world of beauty. At first she is shocked when Osmond tells her that one ought to make one's life into a work of art. But just before her engagement we see her being impressed by Osmond's artistic or plastic view of Pansy. Nor does she spot anything wrong in a man living solely by his taste. Mrs. Touchett isn't far wrong when she says that Isabel is 'capable of marrying Mr. Osmond for the beauty of his opinions or for his autograph of Michelangelo.' Osmond's influence on her is so hypnotic that on her return to Italy, 'she only felt older—ever so much, and as if she were "worth more" for it, like some curious piece in an antiquary's collection.' She is forced to sacrifice part of her individuality: to become a portrait of a lady, and a weary actor in a blank comedy. Only when she has to consciously face the prospect of becoming a part of the collection does she wake up to the danger of losing her individuality. In fact as a result of her European experience Isabel's moral sense is enriched and even strengthened, but at what tragic cost! The girl who had begun to see herself as an antiquary's piece, by the end of the novel is only acutely and sadly conscious of the difference between life and art: 'She

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↓  
envied the security of valuable "pieces" which change by no hair's breadth, only grow in value, while their owners lose inch by inch youth, happiness, beauty.' ✓

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. In *Perspectives on James's 'Portrait of a Lady'*, ed. William T. Stafford, page 125.

## BOOK REVIEW

*The World of Books*, by P. E. Dustoor, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1968. Pages viii+291. Rs. 25/-

It is seldom that we come across a book by an Indian scholar on English so comprehensive in its approach and rich in its practical applicability as the present volume. The study of English as a language has so far received little attention in this country. Dr. Dustoor's book is therefore most welcome. He studies English both diachronically and synchronically and talks at length about the language as it is today and as it has been in the time of Shakespeare, for instance, and also shows how it has changed through the centuries. What makes this study all the more valuable for us is his keen awareness of the obstacles in the way both of teaching and learning English in this country, and he brings to bear upon these problems the wisdom and insight of a whole lifetime devoted to the study and teaching of English.

The book consists of seven papers written on different occasions between 1933 and 1958. But this fact in no way impairs the unity of a volume which is dominated by a strong sense of structure and purpose. It only serves to reveal a rich and sensitive mind brooding lovingly and long over a subject which it considers to be of enduring interest. The first chapter 'The World of Words' begins, naturally, with the origin of speech and deals in detail with the changes words have undergone in meaning from the Old English period to the present. Dr. Dustoor significantly gears at the very outset this seemingly abstract discussion to practical human needs. 'The World of Words', he observes, 'is peopled with the ghosts of man's dead usages and beliefs no less than the children of his living experience.' He classifies words with reference to their origin in physiology, pseudo-scientific theories and philosophical speculation (pp. 11-13) and then shows with ample examples how they develop different shades of meaning under human and social pressures. The second paper 'New Words For Old', which is in a way a continuation of the first, discusses the causes of changes in meaning. 'In a very literal sense', Dr. Dustoor

observes, 'man is, one might say, condemned out of his own mouth. . . . He must needs utter sounds and give ear to them, but he is not always particular about exact aural impressions or correct phonetic reproductions. His tendency has been to adapt his vocables to his speech habits—in other words, to his phonetic convenience—rather than to adopt them with meticulous precision.' He shows different types of assimilations and epithesis at work, but wisely declares that not everything can be explained on the principle of phonetic convenience; there is, no doubt, some margin left to human instinct of waywardness. Words and phrases may sometimes undergo changes of meaning without undergoing any change of form or sound.

In his third paper entitled 'The Tongue that Shakespeare Spake', the author shows how Shakespeare and other Elizabethans 'treated language as a wet clay to be moulded according to their needs.' They not only coined new words and phrases, but enriched the existing ones with new shades of meaning and suggestiveness. In fact, our debt to Shakespeare and his contemporaries is so great that we nearly speak the same tongue as they spoke. Our language could not have been what it is had there been no Shakespeare.

With the fourth chapter 'American English' we move on to our own times. The learned author discusses at length differences between British and American usages, and pronunciation and stress patterns. It reminds us of, and largely anticipates, the famous discussion on the British and American varieties of English between Professor Quirk and Professor Marckwardt. Dr. Dustoor rightly traces these differences to the history of the American people and their exposure to many non-English influences—French, Dutch, German and Spanish. The differences are more evident in vocabulary relating to home, apparel, school and college life, shopping and travel. As could be expected, in the matter of slang and common colloquial speech they are most pronounced. However, he rightly asserts that in spite of all these differences American English is not a different language but a significant development of British English itself.

The subsequent chapters on 'Indian English', 'The Problem of Pronunciation' and 'English in Independent India' are of special interest to Indian readers, and directly bear upon the

present state of English studies in the country. Dr. Dustoor not only touches upon all the major problems of English teaching in India but also offers much illuminating comment and wise guidance. Unlike the early studies of Indian English by such writers as G. C. Whitworth, R. C. Goffin and T. L. H. Smith, Dr. Dustoor goes straight to the heart of the problem when he observes:

...the trouble with him [an Indian user of English] is that he has acquired the language almost entirely from literature and the written word and hardly at all from life and the spoken word. He has acquired it, moreover, against an uncertain background of the necessary history and tradition. Naturally then he fails to perceive that there is an atmosphere about words, a faint, not easily-defined, aroma about them, which makes them appropriate in certain settings and inappropriate in others. (p. 106)

He is equally pertinent when he observes that an Indian user of English 'can be learned or literary, but he cannot, as a rule, be colloquial or light,' or that pronunciation is 'a minor part of the whole question of linguistic usage' and that more important is the 'phrasal idiom'. It is important that he is not at all pessimistic about the future of English in India; he lauds the efforts made by organizations like the C.I.E. Hyderabad, and rightly advocates the adoption of new methods of teaching English to meet the present challenge. A very special mention should be made of a valuable Appendix of 51 pages on 'Some Indian Divergences From Accepted English Usage' (pp. 128-79).

His approach to the problem of pronunciation is both practical and characterized by deep understanding. Whereas we should not make a fetish of received pronunciation we cannot afford to be altogether slovenly or indifferent to it. He wisely cautions us that liberalism should not reach a point of unintelligibility among ourselves. Not only this, a certain level of international intelligibility is also needed. We will have to pay more attention to pronunciation to achieve these desired levels. He then proceeds to offer some valuable hints to the teachers,

e.g. preparing lists of commonly mispronounced words, vowel divergences, syllable and stress divergences to warn our students of some of the common obstacles over which they are likely to stumble. Another valuable Appendix of 46 pages containing 'Indian Divergences from Received Pronunciation' (pp. 217-63), greatly adds to the usefulness of this volume.

The last chapter 'English in Independent India' contains the text of the Presidential Address by the author at the Dharwar Conference of English Teachers in 1958. Though a decade has passed since, it has equal validity and relevance even today. Dr. Dustoor emphasizes the need to refashion the post-graduate Course in English in our universities and recommends a functional approach to the teaching of English language. He quotes with approval Mr. A. H. King that:

priorities of correctness and correction in pronunciation and syntax should be determined by comprehensibility and that language and literature should be taught together as interpretation of culture. . . . If your pupil's English is comprehensible, why change it? If you or he can communicate something new by giving 'standard' English a twist, why should you not? That is what has vitalized English in the past.

These are some of the minimum practical goals which we should set before ourselves and strive to achieve.

In conclusion, it must be said that to read Dr. Dustoor's book is a rich and rewarding experience. Intricate and controversial problems are here discussed with bewitching urbanity, wit and wisdom. Though the book fills a long-felt vacuum in a particularly neglected field of Indian scholarship, it can be read with equal pleasure and profit both by the common reader and the specialist. It is a book which one should be delighted to have.

R. C. SHARMA