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COMMONWEALTH
LITERATURE
AND THE MODERN WORLD

edited by
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FOREWORD

The papers published in this volume were delivered at a conference on Commonwealth literature held at the University of Liège from 2nd to 5th April 1974 on the theme "Commonwealth Literature and the Modern World." One of the purposes of the conference was to promote an exchange of views between members of the European branch of ACLALS (Association for Commonwealth Literature and Language Studies) and other European scholars who have begun to study and teach Commonwealth literature. It was not a purely European concern, however. The conference was attended by the Guyanese novelist Wilson Harris, the South African novelist Dan Jacobson and the Caribbean poet Wayne Brown, and critics came from Africa, Canada, the West Indies and the United States.

Commonwealth literature is *par excellence* a field of comparative studies. As Professor Jeffares suggested in the opening address, no culture exists in a vacuum, and the study of a particular literature or writer calls for comparison with what is being or has been written in other regions of the Commonwealth and with the English literary tradition itself. Professor Jeffares's argument centres on the reception given Commonwealth literature in the modern world and raises the essential and often debated question of critical standards within and outside the Commonwealth. His plea, taken up by Christopher Heywood in his discussion of the criticism of African novels, is for open, non-parochial critical assessments that would avoid both the traps of literary fashion and the partiality of much well-intentioned academic criticism. The unconscious prejudices inherent in the complacently "humanistic" approach of this kind of criticism are exposed by Wilson Harris, who warns against the danger of polarizing literatures into established or "complete" entities and their so-called "colonial" by-products. The task of the creative imagination, Mr Harris implies, is to unmask the self-deceptively "generous" postures in contemporary attitudes which may thwart the free development of truly original art whether in the metropolis or in its former dependencies.

The majority of papers deal with the other aspect of the theme, namely the individual writer's response to the modern world. Some are concerned with the "common ground" (alluded to by Professor Jeffares) that is present in the seemingly disparate experience of people in different ages and in the many parts of the Commonwealth. The three papers on Wilson Harris are all comparative studies and point to a potential dialogue between his creative imagination and that of earlier writers. From a somewhat similar dialogue between "old worlds and new," or old and new literatures that may

present opposite visions of the world but share in a community of language, Professor Robertson discovers the emergence of "the third alternative," a distinctive element in Commonwealth literature. The descriptions of a divided or cruel world found in the work of such writers as Hal Porter, Janet Frame, V. S. Naipaul and the Nigerian poets (on all of whom contributions were offered) seem to be far removed from any such possibility as that discussed by Professor Robertson, but it is quite plain that many writers in the Commonwealth are indeed working towards the creation of this "third alternative."

Apart from critical essays, this volume also contains poems by Wayne Brown, some of which have never been published before. Some of the materials analysed are not readily available: Professor Lindfors discusses talks given by Wole Soyinka on the Nigerian radio; Tim Couzens gives an account of works that he has only recently discovered by the South African writer H. I. E. Dhlomo, and Reinhard Sander contributes a complete bibliography of Wilson Harris's early, uncollected writings.

We regret the non-appearance of Dan Jacobson's contribution to the conference. Mr. Jacobson gave a reading of his fine short story "Beggar My Neighbour," which captures so fully the pitfalls and emotional tensions into which the white South African liberal is betrayed. Mr. Jacobson followed his reading with an informal account of "the story behind the story." After relating the anecdote (of an incident in his home town) that had given him the initial situation, he explained why he came to discard successive drafts (involving new episodes, more complex handling of character and implication and shifts of narrative viewpoint) until by trial and error he arrived at the form in which the story was published. Mr. Jacobson's modesty and geniality in laying bare his "craft"—his patient construction of a "house" that in its final form would *not* "collapse" as soon as its author turned his back—endeared him to the audience and gave a special pleasure to the morning.

* * *

Thanks for financial assistance are due to the Belgian Ministry of Education, the University of Liège, the Administration of International Cultural Relations in Belgium, the Australian Embassy, the British Council and several generous donors, who prefer to remain anonymous. I am grateful to Professor Welsch, Rector of the University of Liège, for graciously lending the Château de Colonster and to Professor Simon, Professor Gérard, my colleagues and students for the valuable help they gave to make the conference a success. My grateful thanks go to Eva Searl for the considerable help she has given me in editing the papers and to Anna Rutherford for much helpful advice and for her assistance in preparing the manuscripts.

Hena Maes-Jelinek

COMMONWEALTH LITERATURE IN THE MODERN WORLD

A. Norman Jeffares

A welcome decision was taken at the ACLALS conference in Uganda that future international conferences on Commonwealth literature will occupy no more than half of their time with discussion of the local literature of the country where the conference is being held. This is as important as is a continuing wish—so well exemplified here in Liège (as earlier in the regional conferences in Aarhus in 1971 and in Leeds in 1970 and 1972) to have present both writers and critics. Now one certainly gains a deeper understanding of a country's literature by visiting its locale—the reader can measure his imagination against the reality of sights, and sounds, and smells, as well as against the intellectual and social background. The imaginative experience and the actuality become complementary. For instance, I used to read as a child those stern and stirring tales of India penned by Flora Annie Steele, Maud Diver and I. A. R. Wylie—then I advanced to Kipling, with *Kim* and the short stories. My own subsequent experience of India—some intensely concentrated months in various regions in 1957—made sense of some of what had seemed not exactly non-sensical but non-apprehensible in these romances and novels. And then, I read Narayan's novels which suddenly united for me the lasting elements in earlier Victorian and Edwardian views of India, and the teeming reality of modern Indian life with all its mixtures of attitudes, of materialism as well as the spiritual qualities so often over-stressed by Indian writers. And Narayan's gentle irony is very attractive to the modern reader: not least to those who have had the good fortune to see something of the subcontinent and appreciate its contrarities: the pressures created by its teeming life and the enervation caused by its climate.

So a visit to a Commonwealth country means that the visitors see

something—even if only a little—of the particular country as well as meeting a variety of local writers and critics. There is a great advantage to both incomer and insider in such meetings. There is the obvious stimulus of meeting different attitudes, based on different experiences. But what is gained is, ultimately, a recognition of common ground, common experience. And this is the great literature of the past, its *status* proved over the years to be beyond the whimsies of literary fashion, or the remorselessly circling thesis machinery, ever seeking new material for processing or old for recycling. The dangers of specialization can be avoided by an awareness of scales of value, by a readiness to recognize limitations as well as achievement in the merely local.

The local has, of course, its powerful local impact. Not for nothing did Chinua Achebe tell us in Leeds in 1964 that he regarded himself in part as an educator. He and the other African writers show readers throughout the world, but especially young Africans, what it is to be an African in the modern world. And naturally there is a great pull upon a reader when he recognizes places he knows, or pressures he feels, or doubts he experiences, as he reads his fellow countrymen who hold up mirrors of different kinds, some reflective, some distorting, to this common experience. Because of the pleasure of simply receptive recognition, or of the more refined pleasure of assessing how far the writer has seemed to reflect life as the reader knows it, there can be two over-strong reactions: into over-praise because of the pleasure given by the presentation of material germane to the reader, or, into under-valuation of writing simply because it does deal with the known and the familiar. For instance, I found myself falling into the first error when I first read L.A.G. Strong's novels *The Garden* and *Sea Wall*. I was disposed in teenage enthusiasm to see more in them than later appeared on re-reading: and this, I suspect, was because they described the Dublin littoral I used to know so well as a child—the granite greys of Dunlaoghaire and Dalkey, the railway running dramatically through its cuttings, emerging in triumphant clouds of steam and smoke into the Neapolitan sweep of the blue bay stretching from Vico Hill to Bray, backed by the gentle slopes of the heather and gorse-covered Dublin mountains. It is a superb landscape and Strong responded finely to it, dwelling on its visual components affectionately in such a way that these physical details seemed to carry the weak story with sufficient skill to convince the reader of its reality. Lecturing on Strong later led me to, I think, a more balanced view when I realized that the insider's praise would seem exaggerated to the incomer, who could not share this particular reader's pleasure in having childhood's precious places, its images of delight, evoked with skill. I experienced undervaluation, too, when I read Sean O'Casey's autobiographical volumes. Discussing them, as a young lecturer, with Professor Peter Alexander of Glasgow, I was moved to protest against his enthusiastic praise of their prose style which approximated so closely to spoken speech by saying, out of over-familiarity, perhaps, with the lively idiom of Dublin's speech which O'Casey's

autobiographies contain in such over-exuberant vein, that one could hear just as good prose spoken in any Dublin pub any day. "Yes," said Professor Alexander, "but O'Casey has taken the trouble to write it down for us." Here was the incomer, very properly, telling the insider off for failing through familiarity to recognize the larger literary merits of what was to him over-local.

I have spoken of the recognition of common ground, implying thereby my belief that the basis of criticism or appreciation is comparison. We should all be very sorry if a new generation of writers arose who were unaware of the achievements of the past in English. There is a certain danger of this occurring if we offer too much emphasis on local literature in education without offsetting it by also offering the opportunity to read universally accepted writers. Not only do we want education to keep a sufficient degree of comprehensibility existing between different local varieties of the English language, but we want our critical standards to be nurtured on acquaintance with lasting literature: literature which has moved from the particular to the general, from the local to the universal. It is not always easy for the critic to recognize these qualities in contemporary writing—perhaps one could mention the reception given Charles Morgan in his day, and the changed estimate made now of his novels.

Once, however, the need for making comparisons out of a knowledge of great literature is recognized, we can see some virtues and dangers in some of the ways in which Commonwealth literature is treated today. At last there is a strong movement for the study of Commonwealth literature in general, in addition to study of the local literature in particular. In other words, readers are encouraged to compare their own literature written in English with that written in other Commonwealth countries. But both need to be referred constantly to the parent stock of English literature—and of course to whatever other literatures the readers know, French, Russian, German, Greek, Latin and indeed at times the vernacular oral tradition. To study a literature in isolation is not good. To understand tragedy, for instance, it is helpful to have a knowledge of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides—even if through translations—and some knowledge of the New Comedies of Athens, along with the plays of Plautus and Terence gives a richer enjoyment to Molière and to the Restoration writers of the comedy of manners. And so while English literature virtually compels us outward—this is one of its great virtues—as, for instance, we read Shaw with Ibsen in mind or Somerset Maugham with de Maupassant at our elbow—other literatures turn to English and to American writing for an assessment in terms of achievement. We need units of measurement. Literature is at best a free trading of the mind, and national boundaries should impose no duties to hinder its free movement. When Yeats was largely responsible for the creation of the Irish literary revival he insisted that Irish literature—and particularly criticism—should avoid provincialism, should range abroad and establish valid, universal standards of achievement by knowing

what others had done and were doing. Provincial standards of criticism can be in-turned, *clique-ish*, lacking in vision, ready to over-praise or under-praise.

There are dangers of provincial attitudes emerging among those who criticize and those who teach Commonwealth literature, when they concentrate upon one literature or another and subject it to modern methods of attack.

Let me digress for a moment at this stage to place this point in a larger setting. It is a phenomenon of our age that very many literary critics tend to be university teachers. Sidney, Dryden, Johnson, Burke, Coleridge, Arnold, Yeats, Eliot, we think of as distinguished critics as well as creative writers. But they held no teaching posts in universities and their criticism benefitted from what they learned in the process of writing, not, as in the case of an academic critic, from what he teaches in the process of educating. But now that the universities have expanded throughout the world—and rightly so—the criticism of literature has become part of their activity. And because the academic critic sometimes forgets his duty, to be clear and straightforward, he can fall into a trap, of becoming pretentious, of writing for fellow academics rather than general readers. Did Sidney or Dryden or Johnson or Burke or Coleridge or Arnold or Yeats or Eliot have merely an academic audience in mind? It is, to say the least, highly doubtful. They tested their ideas on a non-captive audience: they showed their thoughts on literature to those who were interested enough to hear or read them. And their criticism has about it the depth of thought and feeling which comes from anyone being concerned about who he is and how he lives and therefore, because he is a writer, he is particularly concerned about literature.

One of the great virtues of the criticism of these writers is that they *explore* for themselves. In universities throughout the world views tend to lessen. The lecturer often does not wish to teach outside a confined range (and his teaching becomes very often rather dull as a result). This has emerged from an American pattern of university teaching where we have 15th-/16th-/17th-/18th-/19th-/20th-century experts. In such conditions of specialization the academic often does not expand his teaching beyond a fairly narrow orthodoxy. I find the question often asked of me in the United States rather baffling, "What is your field?" It sounds pretentious or facetious to say Beowulf to Virginia Woolf, but that is what one is concerned with in university teaching of literature to undergraduates in the United Kingdom—or, rather, has been, for with the expansion in the staffs of English departments many young men and women want to deal with only one area of scholarship and teaching—and that, heaven bless us, is usually what they worked on for their thesis. And university posts are, alas, increasingly advertised for specialists in particular parts of the syllabus of an English Department. Along with this narrow approach goes a curious new orthodoxy imposed by the Leavises and other, strident critics. For instance, those who commendably try to get their pupils to read Scott seem inevitably to think only of *The Heart of Midlothian*—quite often

because it is the only novel they have read, and it is sound, and safely orthodox for a syllabus. And it is the one Scott novel which has been given "the treatment," so that there are a number of published articles in such journals as *Essays in Criticism* or in the now fashionable collections of critical essays on one writer around which the lecturer can circle like a tired horse in a pound. This is fashion at work, rather than original taste.

Now one of the virtues of reading Commonwealth literature is that, as yet, there is not too much tired professional thesis-style criticism around. There are signs of it coming, but the shortage of paper and the rising cost of printing may help to fend off a flood of mediocre academic comment. The creative writer's comments, on the other hand, may find an outlet because of his established position with his publisher and his audience—and just because he has his own interest and experience—as in the case of the writers from Dryden to Eliot—he may well be more interesting. D. H. Lawrence's views on classical American literature still read better than many a massive mollycoddled mole hill of academic mishmash. So, in the absence of the academic machinery, the good teacher and pupil make their own minds up about the value and merits of works of Commonwealth literature. And this means that the lecturer will have to read much bad as well as good literature. And this is something which gets left out of the orthodox English literature syllabus, concerned, as it inevitably is, with offering samples of the best all along the Anglo-Saxon-to-contemporary line. But this capacity to judge good and bad, again, brings us back to that need to have read a good deal of the best.

The need for criticism in Commonwealth literature will come when publishers reissue the work of the past. It is very difficult to obtain many 19th-century, and indeed 20th-century texts of Commonwealth writers. Which should be reprinted? Criticism may well sieve out those who are worth reprinting. Indeed it is a point worth including in conference discussions—for, as well as authors and critics, we are often fortunate to have scholarly publishers among us. We cannot, in the new and in some ways admirable austerity forced on us, waste paper and printers' time—and perhaps readers' time too, however much one would like everything to be available to everyman. So there is work to do—and Australia and Canada are beginning to reprint some of their writers, who have some classic quality: who have shown their writings survive beyond the here and now in which they wrote, beyond the local material of their time, to interest us with their characters and situations. But let us hope for Afterwords not Forewords, let us hope for an emphasis upon the text and any necessary explanations of difficulties caused by the passage of time or some other obscurities rather than some self-important *dictats* of the critic. I think we should read more by the writer we are considering rather than more about him. More is to be gained by reading *Red Gauntlet*, *Waverley*, *Guy Mannering* or *Rob Roy*, in addition to, I suppose, the presently inevitable *Heart of Midlothian*,

than by reading only it, and commentary upon it, so factually unhistorical in the approach of Professor Lucaks, or, in the criticism of many other worthy academic careerists so—dare we not confess it?—tedious. Like Professor James Sutherland, I vote for a two day week for criticism: we need a spell on the handlooms of the intellect, and even a momentary show of luddite zeal may benefit our ability to resist mass circulated criticism. Our study should rest upon the individual reader's individual response to the individual writer's achievement.

REFLECTION AND VISION

Wilson Harris

My talk at the Liege conference was a spontaneous address based on skeleton notes. I believe this is a necessary risk (I remember on one occasion addressing a group many years ago and my memory going absolutely blank for a moment or two in the middle of the address) an imaginative writer should take from time to time, a risk that runs contrary to the concentration and care with words at the heart of an imaginative fiction, yet is nevertheless consistent with a searching "thinking through" of certain immediate problems upon an intuitive scale, or deepseated legend of imagination, to which one pins one's faith in relating the hidden past to the living present.

I no longer have the few notes I used then and this paper, therefore, is an attempt to pick up some of the threads I hoped to trace when I gave the talk at Easter 1974.

I said something to this effect: *reflection* is built into a passive order of the imagination which possesses its own marvels of exactitude though to reify it absolutely is to submit to a straitjacket of tradition ultimately as code of sensibility.

Objects are reflected by history (and this is right and proper) as though history is part and parcel of the reflected nature of objects. As though history, in a sense, subsists upon the nature of reflection one sees in nature at large. A bridge is reflected in a stream as if that stream were the unconscious canvas a painter uses.

All this is obvious. What is controversial and difficult to establish is the reality of vision, as the imaginative writer or artist occupies a reflected object, not as an absolute formula, costume or investiture around each living moment of time but as a doorway into apparently eclipsed proportions one needs to unravel, in some degree, if the living body of the present is to

be capable of some measure of detachment from the past as well as relatedness to the past.

Let me put it in another way that may be simpler perhaps. Take an object. A bridge perhaps, a bone, a flute perhaps, a coat, a piece of sculpture, a fence, a tree, a river, a canal. Around it may lie deepseated reflections of a personal and/or historical nature.

Indeed those reflections may be the seed of institutions, the psychological texture, the proud, implacable scars a society wears on its back as institution, costume, ritual etc... And as that texture reinforces itself over generations and centuries into an imprint of sovereign earth, so to speak, built into the institutions of the nation-state, it is inevitable that a vulnerable centre, an original frailty (and all that that means as marvellous susceptibility to space and depth) is wholly masked or forgotten. The accent becomes more and more collectivist, if not totalitarian, and the notion of original essence or interior body/interior essence is apparently eclipsed.

That eclipse may effectively conceal not only the reality of the past but the inner, the naked terrifying reality of the present, and take away the burden of confrontation with unpleasant beginnings, indeed savaged gift of life. And yet without such a confrontation there can be no deepseated re-creative transformation of the problematic present into a future that is more consistent with a genuine response to the miracle of life, and one's society begins to consent more and more nihilistically to collectivist (as well as latent totalitarian) premises.

It is here, I believe, in the curious unravelling as well as ravelling textures of the imagination, that reflection (as passive order) turns—in some degree—into an activity of the light and dark imagination and the genesis of a dialogue between the past and the present may renew itself into the future...

That was the substance of the distinction I sought to make and to illustrate by certain concrete examples, one of which I would like to present in this paper.

In a new novel *Companions of the Day and Night*, which is to appear in 1975, I have attempted, on one level, to regain for myself a vision of sacrifice built into survival.

The novel moves into Mexico and touches upon the enigma of pre-Columbian sacrifices when the heart of the sacrificed victim was torn out and presented to the sun. One may rationalize this (as some areas of present-day anthropological opinion do) into ritual costume drama within which sacrificed victim becomes the honoured guest of the gods. (A marvellous myth in itself). Thus a pattern of consent binds sacrificer and sacrificed.

Nevertheless as one continues to contemplate these sacrifices and other rituals which are equally terrible, the effect of consent becomes barbarous and meaningless investiture, unrelieved fate, unrelieved tyranny of the affections. Unrelieved fate because a reinforcement of the implacable scars the society bore is established into passive order or reflection.

It is impossible to say how long that passive order may have endured

without foreign invasion but what is clear, in historical terms, is that beneath the consenting surface of the empire of the Aztecs, beneath an ingrained acceptance by victim peoples of themselves as ritual guests of the gods, a dormant seed of rebellion existed which expedited the Spanish Conquest when it came.

Not because of the Spanish Conquest *per se* which was to duplicate many of the tyrannies of the past. But because a seed of fear (upon which Cortez drew in making treaties with the subject peoples of the empire) already existed as essential human paradox to a heroic compact with fate and the stoic grandeur of pre-Columbian ritual man was in process of being undermined by a religious necessity for freedom.

At the heart of that necessity lay the arts of a new vision grounded in the long-suffering infinity of man as well as the savaged limits of man, grounded therefore in something infinitely vulnerable, infinitely marvellous as the texture of man, the inner shadow of man seeking a dimension of creativity and freedom that involved a partial and painful unravelling of investitures of fate by which he was so deeply conditioned that they were imprinted on every organ of the premises of existence.

The vision of sacrifice is other than a reflected code or implacable structure though it inevitably subsists upon these in its deepest specific confrontation with the abused fabric of life. Take areas of anxiety which lie at the heart of the twentieth century. This is a time when science itself points to "black holes of gravity" as an extinction of light drawn into paradoxical genesis of suns beyond imagined or imaginable models.

In some degree, therefore, an unravelling of the barbarous costume drama of pre-Columbian man provides us with an unsuspected glimpse into our own scientific if not ritual achievements that mask susceptibilities to fear and to marvel and an inimitable pressure may build within ourselves, as the native ground of creativity, to transform "community" within a deepened tone of echoic gravity, infinite frailty of man imprinted upon science, imprinted upon art, open to originality though one remains clothed in part (for our own protection, our own sanity perhaps) in implacable formula. Clothed and yet susceptible to space, to a new spiritual active body....

Finally in this paper I would like to take up the issue of "language" I attempted to raise at the Liège conference. I am not a scholar or a linguist and my concern was with the imaginative faces of a living language and how these at times may be eclipsed by moribund academic stasis in the name of humanism itself.

Mario Praz is a very distinguished European critic and in a remarkable book on Romantic excesses bound up with the Romantic movement he had this to say :

The essential is the thought and the poetic image, and these are rendered possible only in a passive state.

A far cry from this, and yet enormously consistent with it, is an article by Bobi Jones in *Planet*, February/March 1973. It is called "Anglo-Welsh, More Definition."

It is an article which arouses one's sympathies because it appears at first to be making a plea on behalf of a liberal humanism until one examines closely its inherent scale.

Like French, English has developed an interesting literature in many former colonies, a literature possessing a special flavour and power. By our own day, some of the work in English produced by Nigerian, West Indian and Indian writers deserves the closest study. It has grown out of a particular predicament ... Anglo-Welsh writing finds its source and inspiration in the same colonialist predicament...

Actually, the point is very simple: Welsh literature, parallel to Hausa, or Basque, or Russian, or Ukrainian, or English literature, is a *complete* literature: Anglo-Welsh literature, corresponding to Nigerian English literature, or Patagonian literature in Welsh, or Haitian literature in French is (so long as it exists and has a meaning as a distinct entity) an enthrallingly interesting colonial product, and therefore part of another literature.

This is a remarkably athletic statement. However one twists or turns it, it is abundantly clear that certain existing literatures remain for Bobi Jones—in any and every imaginable vital circumstance—"enthrallingly interesting colonial products" reflected against or upon *complete* literatures which they cannot themselves invigorate, breach or deepen. Does this mean that the "complete" literatures which reflect them are immaculately closed/passive orders of the imagination?

Little distinction would seem to reside in this connection between a living language and a dead language. Both are apparently equally closed and a formula of ascendancy or deprivation (depending on how one views it) is imposed upon all "colonial imaginations" around the globe who may work in English or French or Welsh or Russian as the case may be since their work is pre-judged by the language itself as devoid of all interior content, or original density, springing out of heterogeneous landscapes and cultures.

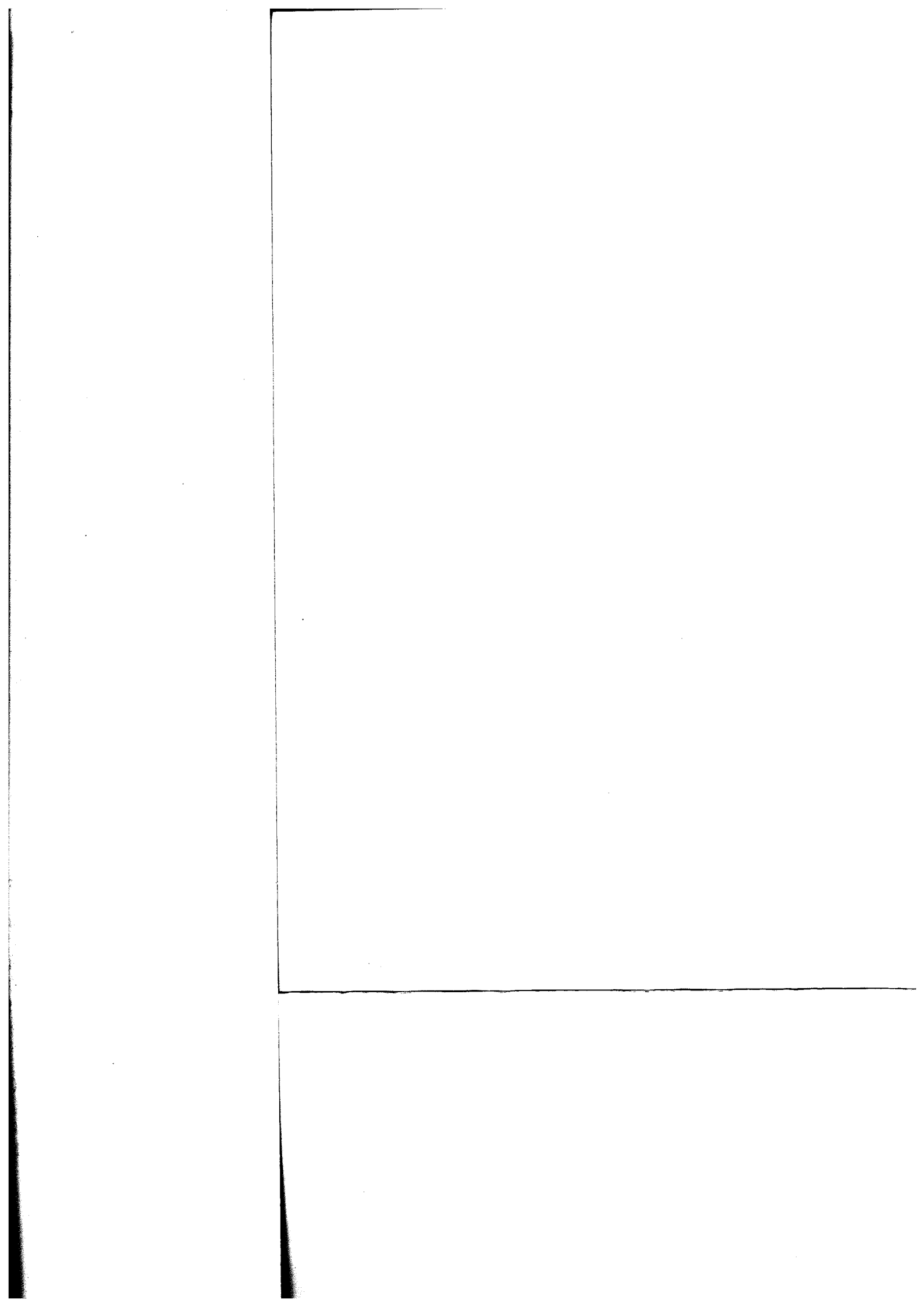
It is to the ironic credit of Bobi Jones that, in the name of humanist protest, he raises to our attention a very formidable bias; and at a time when every metropolitan rag is flooded by protests on behalf of the freedom of the black man in South Africa, the down-trodden in South America, Vietnam and elsewhere. Fascism (and all that that has come to imply in rigged elections etc.) is a disaster in the Third World, as anywhere else, and makes all the more imperative the growth of a body of criticism in dialogue with the nature of freedom. But can "freedom," which is already devoid of original vision, in Bobi Jones's terms, signify anything other than incessant political protest, political ornament, nationalist and collectivist propaganda as the given code, given costume of colonial societies?

The complex task of unravelling those codes is a major exercise of the

creative imagination that is central to our age in the continuing development of literature whether that development arises "at home" or "abroad."

This is a difficult impasse for zealous students to overcome since it may serve their own "humanist" purposes to insist on protest as realism, to institutionalize a species of reportage as the total function of colonial or post-colonial literatures. And one wonders in what degree such humanism is in itself subconsciously aligned to the very colonial prejudices it claims to deride which give it a new narcissistic density of "complete" literatures and "enthralingly interesting colonial products."

Perhaps it is of considerable interest—as one reads between the lines of this new humanism—that an element of involuntary self-exposure comes into view that speaks volumes without actually saying a word. An unconscious political irony is in process of being born within the telling silences of the family of the Word and this is one of the first steps (who knows?) towards a radical change of tone in the dialogue of vested interests between old worlds and new.



POEMS

Wayne Brown

FOR ERIC ROACH, DROWNED

(and after reading the eulogies)

I

Roach gone, the carrion
who drove him, hurt hawk, from the echoing air
with their hunger for bloodbath, their shrill caws
of treachery,
shriek with excitement.
Dead, and to them he is Hero.
Carrion like them dead.

But if, or for how long, he tread
that narrowing haven, observing
the sheer light of those first words fail
in their fustian heaven,

nobody knows,
or will, now.
Love overgrows a rock,
but not a raftload of schisms.

II

At Quinan Bay, when the tide goes,
the ocean's upholds itself
stilly, without contradiction,
and it is the sky that shatters.

Diarist, there are matters
best left to these birds and the sand's blowing.
Walk softly here.

And do not talk of the hawk on the air,
or of the plankton's release from its drifting.
Spare him the folk he could not save.
Leave out the landscape he loved.

However green the shoreline,
however blue the sky,
face down he came to the beach.

But rest him, in language unadorned
as bread, there where the ocean fed
him back to the shore he turned from,

not free, free at last, Carrion,
but locked
in his tiring dream of destruction,

with his head full of salt,
his lost craft,
nothing, his destination.

(Previously published in the journal *Tapia* in 1974.)

CRITIC

Takes rain, the racket
in a madman's head
and strains
it into sonata.

Takes sea, the dumb cry
in a madman's throat
and whips up
white horses of words.

Through virgin forests
he pounds a clear path
the ignoble savage
might follow. Always, who followed

Came to this camp :
raw tree trunks, black
 smoking coals.
Some camped, those wiser turned back.

Till one who went further,
past the path's end,
 made one last bend
uphill and came

Out of the rained-out dark upon
this stalled station wagon,
 its headlamps still
silently shafting the silent pines.

RAMPANALGAS

Rust stiffens the louvres, but we hook
them open a crack for one more look
at the ocean. Overhead, palm-trees, like hefted squid
lean seaward, trailing their tentacles,
useless in air. We are born here
once only, then like the octopus left
to darken white seas, ink rising through foam,
to print near this beach-house the one word, Home.
Now, years later, I watch this shack,
the heart's first effort, rusting shut,
and turn from the glass. At my back
the ocean tries
the first steps up to this house, and falls back.

THE LAST GAUCHO

Time's passed no sentence on his head
crueller than this one : that for him,
being the last, it would never end.
So to pretend, to wake again
those moon-confusing stories told
of cattle and hard-riding men
by the old man with eloquent hands,
how cities sprang up at the train's
coming, or Zapata sank by the wall,
seems to him profitless. Such tales recall
more than an epoch or place, their loss.
So muses the gaucho. How should he know
his time and theirs are an old fiction,
that in the dusk-haze they return,
since, centuries ago, in Spain,
Cervantes dreamed the dreamer?
With the night in his hair and his steed's mane,
sadly the gaucho crosses the plain.

THE IMPACT OF LITERARY PERIODICALS
ON THE DEVELOPMENT
OF WEST INDIAN LITERATURE
AND CULTURAL INDEPENDENCE

Reinhard W. Sander

It seems to me rather curious that the beginning of the literature in the English-speaking Caribbean—that is to say the literature written by writers born in and dealing with Jamaica, some of the smaller Leeward and Windward Islands, Barbados, Trinidad and Guyana—has been arbitrarily fixed in the year 1950 or thereabouts by some of the more renowned metropolitan critics of West Indian literature. This is no surprise, however, when one considers the implications of the colonial syndrome from which the West Indies have been suffering for four hundred years and are perhaps still suffering. 1950 or thereabouts is the time when the “big boys” in West Indian literature, such as Edgar Mittelholzer, George Lamming, Samuel Selvon and Roger Mais, decided to leave the islands and soon had their first works published in London. The metropolitan critical establishment, after some hesitation and surprise, took notice of this fact and in a more or less paternalistic way decided to consider 1950 or thereabouts as the date West Indian literature suddenly emerged out of nowhere, out of the far-removed chain of islands, once the pearl of the British Empire, since the beginning of the 19th century however, forgotten and neglected. The West Indian soil had been exhausted, the slaves had been freed, and thus sugar could be produced more cheaply elsewhere. Now, in 1950, there was again something precious coming out of the islands to be exploited, this time in publishing ventures and critical undertakings. The works of the “big boys” were presented to the British audience as interesting exotic specimens, whose language was curious but also musical compared to the tongue of the mother country, and V. S. Naipaul was declared “the biggest of the big boys” for reasons which I do not want to speculate about in this talk.

I do not intend to belittle the success of the writers who went to London

—far from it, since I share the opinion of the West Indian critic C. L. R. James who recently said :

There [were] born a body of writers, three of whom—Wilson Harris, George Lamming and Vibia Naipaul—I do not believe can be exceeded by any set of writers in the English language at the present time.¹

What I deplore is the pattern and the direction the first metropolitan critics have set. 1) There is an absolute concentration on the London-based West Indian writers. 2) These writers are made part and parcel of British literature and/or Commonwealth literature and are compared or contrasted with any number of British, Canadian, or Australian writers in a search for possible influences of the latter on the former. To a certain degree these approaches are valid and necessary, and contribute to the enjoyment of the literary critic who likes to speculate. But what has happened on the other hand is an almost total absence of critical attention on West Indian literature as a genuine national literature. The works of individual writers are discussed without looking at the roots of the creative imagination, without looking at a tradition of writing which is at least forty years old—in other words predates the year 1950 or thereabouts by almost twenty years—and without looking at the peculiar society which, in spite of recent social and racial unrest, is still unique in its relative harmony of people who have come from Europe, Africa, India and the Americas. This is probably the first society in which, to use Wilson Harris's terminology, "a digestion and liberation of contrasting spaces and cultures" is possible, has in fact made more progress than anywhere else in the world. What is even worse, apart from Kenneth Ramchand and G. R. Coulthard, nobody in England or the Caribbean has even made an attempt to write a history of Caribbean literature, which, to be sure, would involve a critic in the rather difficult task of learning French, Spanish and Dutch. But I would think the time is ripe for such an undertaking.

A trip to the West Indies is quite a surprise to the critic who has been brainwashed with the idea of a "cultural void" in the West Indies, an idea put forward by at least one renowned London-based West Indian writer. There is a mass of regional publications (not quite comparable to the Nigerian phenomenon of the Onitsha market literature), which have been put out for the past forty years. Only when one wades through the numerous privately published pamphlets and booklets, the local newspapers, and especially through the pages of the little magazines, does it become obvious that the year 1950 or thereabouts and the "cultural void" of the West Indies are nothing more than a myth. It is my contention that a study of the little magazines—the regional literary magazines—is the first step in the writing of a history of West Indian literature. At the moment, however, it is extremely difficult to find complete runs of these magazines. Kraus Reprint in Liechtenstein has done a marvellous job in making available to a larger

audience collections of magazines, such as *Pepperpot* from Jamaica, *Voices* from Trinidad, and *Caribbean Quarterly* from the University of the West Indies in Mona, Jamaica. Unfortunately, the reprint of the three most important and oldest literary magazines has so far not been carried out—I am speaking of Albert Gomes's *The Beacon*, which was published in Trinidad from 1931 to 1933 and again in 1939, Frank Collymore's *Bim*, which has been published in Barbados since 1942, and A. J. Seymour's *Kyk-over-al*, which was published in Guyana from 1945 to 1961.

The Beacon, *Bim*, and *Kyk-over-al* are the three literary magazines I will focus my discussion on in the evaluation of the contribution of literary magazines to the development of West Indian literature and cultural independence. There have been moments when the usually better equipped Caribbean critics—I mean those critics of West Indian literature who live in the West Indies—have spent a few pages evaluating these cradles of West Indian literature. When Barbados and Guyana became independent in 1966, the Jamaica-based *New World Quarterly* put out two special Independence Issues, in which Edward Brathwaite wrote an article entitled "Kyk-over-al and the Radicals,"² and Edward Baugh an article entitled "Frank Collymore and the Miracle of *Bim*."³ More recently, last year when Frank Collymore celebrated his eightieth birthday and the thirty years' existence of *Bim*, the other Jamaica-based magazine, *Savacou*, devoted a whole issue⁴ to the long-time editor of *Bim*, who unfortunately also resigned from his editorship in the same year. (Collymore's successor, John Wickham of Barbados, has however been able to keep *Bim* alive.) The pity is that these articles have again been published in little magazines which are not easily available to the reader outside the Caribbean. Kenneth Ramchand's brief discussion⁵ in his *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* still remains the most comprehensive essay on this topic.

He is also the first critic to point out that genuine West Indian literature begins at the end of the twenties or the very beginning of the thirties, if not earlier. It was in Trinidad that things started happening, and what is important to notice is the almost parallel struggle for political independence and genuine forms of West Indian literature. While Captain Cipriani was organizing a strong labour movement and the seeds for political parties—later followed by figures like Uriah Butler, Albert Gomes and Eric Williams—a group of intellectuals got together to publish first a magazine called *Trinidad* (1929-30), then a magazine called *The Beacon*, which ran from 1931 to 1933. The most important figures in the group were C. L. R. James, Alfred Mendes, Albert Gomes (who combined literary and political interests and probably used *The Beacon* as the first battleground in his political career), and R. A. C. de Boissière. Alfred Mendes in a recent interview, looking back at the thirties and speculating about the emergence of West Indian literature, said :

[The] experience [of World War I] placed against the background of Imperialism, The Crown Colony form of government that we were working under

here in Trinidad *and* the Bolshevik Revolution, completely opened our eyes to the evils inherent in the imperialist concept of domination. The people who were thinking for themselves in Trinidad at the time were obviously inspired by the people who had struggled and had won through to a certain point of success in the Soviet Union. We as a group were considerably influenced in Trinidad. It was really the awakening of the revolutionary approach towards the resolution of problems. Looking back upon it all, I can see clearly that these things were largely responsible for the upsurge of the literary movement in Trinidad and Jamaica.⁶

The pages of *The Beacon* are filled with articles expressing the group's political views, information about the Russian experiment in socialism, and reports of the events taking place in India under Gandhi's leadership, but what is more important in the context of this talk, the magazine also presents us with the first West Indian short fiction. Both C. L. R. James and Alfred Mendes were writing the indigenous realistic fiction much later practised by Roger Mais, focusing their stories on the barrack-yard life in Port-of-Spain. In the interview mentioned above Mendes explained :

James and I departed from the convention in the selection of our material, in the choice of a strange way of life, in the use of a new dialect. And these departures are still with our Caribbean successors. We created the pattern that is still in use. And these are the postulates that brought West Indian novelists into being.⁷

Both James and Mendes carried their theory and practice of the short story into the realm of the novel. In 1934 Alfred Mendes published *Pitch Lake*, which has just recently been reprinted by Heinemann's Caribbean Writers Series (a long overdue reprint) and *Black Fauns* in 1935; C. L. R. James in 1936 published *Minty Alley*, which has also been reprinted in London by New Beacon Books Ltd. James is probably the most unique figure in the group around *The Beacon*: besides being involved in the first West Indian magazine, besides writing one of the first genuine West Indian novels, he also wrote the first genuine Caribbean history entitled *The Black Jacobins* (1938), in which he analysed the Haitian Revolution. Later he published books on the theory of socialism, on cricket, and a first-class critical work on Herman Melville. *The Beacon* period in West Indian literature in general exhibits the closest relationship between politics and literature. The editors of *Bim* and *Kyk-over-al* have avoided direct political comments, although the launching of any magazine naturally has a political effect in a very general way. One last word about *The Beacon* group. It should be noted that Alfred Mendes and C. L. R. James were also the first writers to leave the West Indies for the United States of America and England respectively. With their departure the first magazine in the West Indies collapsed in 1933, and was only briefly revived by Albert Gomes in 1939. In 1937 Albert Gomes also brought out a collection⁸ of the best material

produced by some members of the *Beacon* group, and this collection can serve as a good introduction to that period of West Indian literature for the reader who has no time to go through all the issues of *The Beacon*.

Now I want to move to the Barbadian magazine *Bim*, which has been edited by Frank Collymore since 1942. There is no direct link to the drama of West Indian politics which by that time is well on its way to reach the stage of pre-independence dimensions. Referring to the labour unrest at the very end of the thirties C. L. R. James has observed :

It was a new world of the Caribbean, entirely new, because the old feudalistic crown colony government was hit a tremendous blow. Maybe that wasn't always translated into literary forms, but it was hit a blow from Guyana right up to Jamaica, and it was in this atmosphere that you have this surprising body of novelists.⁹

Here James is again referring to the trio of West Indian novelists—Wilson Harris, George Lamming, and V. S. Naipaul—whom he regards as the best writers in the English language at the present time. But the atmosphere was also ripe for the creation of a magazine which would last much longer than *The Beacon*. *Bim*, in fact, is a miniature history of primary sources in West Indian literature. If one looks at *An Index to Bim* which was published last year, one finds that almost every West Indian writer, including the “big boys” now writing in London, contributed their first poems or short stories to *Bim*. In the pages of *Bim* they got their first encouragement; through *Bim* some of their work was broadcast over BBC's “Caribbean Voices” program, since *Bim* served as a pool for the editors of that programme. In other words, quite a number of years before 1950 we have George Lamming, for example, writing poetry and short fiction for *Bim*. Now, how can anybody write about George Lamming without taking account of his early work? Not as outspoken as the editors of *The Beacon*, the editor of *Bim* also admonished the budding writers to create genuine West Indian writing. In 1944 he wrote in his editorial :

Above all, in writing, regard things from your own viewpoint and experience. Why worry to write about the rigours of the Alaskan winter when you can spend the month of February in St. Joseph's parish? And you don't have to travel all the way to Chicago to find crooks.¹⁰

It is perhaps interesting to let two West Indian writers voice their opinion about what *Bim* has meant and still means to them. First, Michael Anthony, a writer of the younger generation who has so far published three novels, *The Year in San Fernando*, *The Games Were Coming*, and *Green Days by the River*.

Bim has indeed been for me and for many other West Indian writers the finest magazine in the world. Quite apart from publishing us, the Editor, Frank Collymore, has been wonderful to all of us. *Bim* could not afford to pay much but it was an honour appearing in *Bim* and none of its contribu-

tors minded. Not only that but, as you know, *Bim* is the only true West Indian literary magazine, and for me it was the only means of finding out about West Indian writers and about what was happening in the West Indies, when I was living in London. But even for those living in Trinidad and Jamaica and other islands there was no other way of knowing what was going on in writing in various parts of the West Indies had you not been reading *Bim*.¹¹

Frank Collymore started off with a small Barbadian magazine, but quickly received and published material from all over the West Indies. Even during the sixties and now in the seventies, *Bim* has remained the most important regional outlet for the young West Indian poet or short story writer. It might be interesting to mention that it was Frank Collymore who discovered the talent of Derek Walcott when he was nineteen years old and helped him publish his poetry. Besides being editor of *Bim*, Collymore was a teacher in one of the high schools in Barbados, and even in that function he was at least partly responsible for the interest in creative writing with his students George Lamming, Austin C. Clarke and Timothy Callender, who are now well-known writers. Let me give you the second comment on Frank Collymore by a West Indian writer. In his novel, *In the Castle of My Skin*, George Lamming has set a lasting monument to his teacher, Frank Collymore :

It is true I had learnt something of two foreign languages which I liked, but they didn't seem to apply until I met the first assistant.

This personal attachment to the first assistant was the only concrete thing for which I could be grateful to the High School. Had I not gone to the High School we would never have met. I didn't remember how we met, but it might have had something to do with a poetry lesson which he was asked to supervise. He returned three or four times and we had talked. The first assistant was a poet and actor who could scarcely have been a finer actor, but who might have been a better poet if he weren't an actor. He was a man of medium height, robust, alert and energetic. He walked like an ex-football player who couldn't forget the athletic stride. He had a large head with a receding forehead that had got lost in a shock of thin brown hair. The hair was always flying wild, dishevelled and resistant. His skin was heavily tanned and his eyes small and brown looked down at the nose that came out from beside them like a pleasant surprise. He was over fifty with the look of a man in his early forties, and his face which was capable of many expressions sometimes gave you a feeling of unease. He was versatile, sensitive and cultured. He had a large and carefully chosen library which he had invited me to use. He was always making suggestions for my reading, and he talked about the way people painted and what had to happen before he could write a poem. When visitors called who didn't know me and who might have made me feel uneasy he gave me a large album which I fingered till they had gone.

I couldn't understand what part he played at the High School for the world of his immediate interests was quite different from what the school knew. He must have been capable of living on different levels and this must have been responsible for the reputation he had of being genteel and accessible. He was a kind of legend in the High School. But the legend had nothing to do with his interests. It related to his gifts of social intercourse. Few

had ever seen him angry although it was said that he could be violently angry. From the malaise of the High School I had drifted into the despair of the first assistant's world. Soon I found it difficult to cope with what I wanted. The High School had dissolved into one man who represented for me what the school might have been. It was two years since I had known him well and the keenest result of that attachment was the feeling that somewhere deep within myself or far beyond the limits of this land was a world whose features I did not know and might never grow to understand. He was the High School without the world which it prepared me for. Now I started to feel that I was going to see him for the last time.¹²

George Lamming left the island—first for Trinidad, then for London, but Frank Collymore stayed behind in Barbados to guard and keep alive the most important West Indian literary institution. Just recently I have read a brief comment on *Bim* and the last magazine I will talk about *Kyk-over-al*, which has annoyed me immensely because it shows a complete lack of understanding of the West Indian literary scene. In his book *The Growth of the Modern West Indies*, an otherwise excellent history of the social and political life of the West Indies, Gordon K. Lewis, when talking about Barbados, writes :

The literary culture has also been deficient, for Frank Collymore's remarkable editorship of the pioneer journal *Bim* has been a personal odyssey rather than a national achievement, as can also be said of A. J. Seymour's editorship of the journal *Kyk-over-al* in the Guianese case.¹³

This is pure nonsense.

Now, to come to the end of this talk, to come to *Kyk-over-al*, edited by A. J. Seymour from 1945 to 1961 in Georgetown, Guyana. Much that I have said about *Bim*, can be repeated about *Kyk-over-al*. There are a few important differences though: 1) The birth and existence of *Kyk-over-al* is more intimately related to the political struggle for Independence in Guyana. To discuss Grantley Adams and Frank Collymore in one and the same paper would not make much sense, but to relate Cheddi Jagan and Forbes Burnham to A. J. Seymour could bring some surprising results, in the same way as the literary venture of the four issues of *Focus* (1943, 1948, 1956 and 1960) in Jamaica leads from Edna Manley to Norman Manley and Alexander Bustamante. In both cases, the announcement of and preparation for political independence is accompanied by a declaration and practice of cultural independence. 2) Whereas *Bim* remained within the West Indian context, in *Kyk-over-al* we can notice the first attempt to include and pay attention to literary products from the Spanish- and French-speaking Caribbean. Perhaps this has something to do with the peculiar geographical position of Guyana. In any case, the most recent manifestation of an all-embracing Caribbean cultural community was exhibited at CARIFESTA which took place in Georgetown, Guyana in 1972 and brought together people speaking English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and Dutch.

Regular contributors to *Kyk-over-al* were Ivan van Sertima, Edgar Mittelholzer, Jan Carew, Martin Carter, and Wilson Harris. I know Wilson Harris does not like to be reminded of his early poetry, but it is extremely interesting to see some of his concepts in germinal form in the early issues of *Kyk-over-al*. Unfortunately, *Kyk-over-al* came to a sudden death in 1961 and I fully agree with the observation Wilson Harris made about this in a recent interview :

The Editor [A. J. Seymour] was deeply committed to promoting through an organ like *Kyk-over-al* an estimate of the advantages of the West Indian Federation looming at that time on the horizon. It always seems to me that the end of this publishing venture may in fact have been triggered off by the death of the Federation, something may have gone out of the editorial conviction.¹⁴

May I just add one concluding sentence and point out that any serious and comprehensive study of Caribbean literature has to go back to the regional cradles and should not simply focus on the careers of London-based writers.

¹ *Kas-Kas : Interviews with Three Caribbean Writers in Texas*, ed. Ian Munro and Reinhard Sander, fifth Occasional Publication of the African and Afro-American Research Institute of the University of Texas (Austin, Texas, 1972), p. 24.

² Edward Brathwaite, "Kyk-over-al and the Radicals," in *New World : Guyana Independence Issue*, ed. George Lamming and Martin Carter (Georgetown, Guyana : New World Group, 1966), pp. 55-57.

³ Edward Baugh, "Frank Collymore and the Miracle of *Bim*," in *New World : Barbados Independence Issue*, ed. George Lamming and Edward Baugh (Kingston, Jamaica : New World Group, 1966-67), pp. 129-133. A revised and updated version of this essay has been published as "Introduction" to *An Index to Bim*, compiled by Reinhard Sander (St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago : University of the West Indies, Extra-Mural Studies Unit, 1973), pp. 7-17.

⁴ *Savacou*, Nos. 7 and 8 (Jan.-June 1973).

⁵ "The Drift Towards the Audience," chapter V in Kenneth Ramchand, *The West Indian Novel and Its Background* (London : Faber and Faber, 1970), pp. 63-74.

⁶ "The Turbulent Thirties in Trinidad : An Interview with Alfred H. Mendes," ed. Reinhard Sander, *World Literature Written in English*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (April 1973), p. 68.

⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 71-72.

⁸ *From Trinidad : A Selection from the Fiction and Verse of the Island of Trinidad, British West Indies*, ed. Albert Gomes (Port-of-Spain, Trinidad : Frasers' Printerie, 1937).

⁹ *Kas-Kas*, p. 24.

¹⁰ *Bim*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (April 1944), p. 1.

¹¹ "The Return of a West Indian Writer : An Interview with Michael Anthony," ed. Ian Munro and Reinhard Sander, *Bim*, Vol. 14, No. 56 (Jan.-June 1973), pp. 213-214.

¹² George Lamming, *In the Castle of My Skin* (New York : Collier Books, 1970), pp. 251-252.

¹³ Gordon K. Lewis, *The Growth of the Modern West Indies* (New York : Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1968), p. 254.

¹⁴ *Kas-Kas*, p. 49.

MELVILLE AND HARRIS :
POETIC IMAGINATIONS RELATED
IN THEIR RESPONSE TO THE MODERN WORLD

Joyce Sparer Adler

The juxtaposition of Herman Melville and Wilson Harris seems fated; ultimately an exploration of the correspondences and differences in their art had to begin, for between the two a profound kinship exists. I am not alone in sensing this. In his study of *Tumatumari*, Ivan van Sertima, Guyanese poet and critic, says that "no configuration in modern literature, outside of the crew of the Pequod in Melville's *Moby Dick*, can rival the organic cosmopolis of races, bloods and cultural complexes invoked in the crew of *Donne* in Harris's first novel *Palace of the Peacock*."¹ The distinguished student of West Indian social, cultural and intellectual history, C. L. R. James, who is also the author of a book (*Mariners, Renegades and Castaways*) on the significance of *Moby-Dick* for modern civilization, values both Melville and Harris for closely-related reasons involving insight into the interrelationship of our age, its past and future. And Harris as literary critic and theoretician is deeply interested in Melville, whom he lists first among his examples of native/universal artists. He sees Melville, as having been engaged in the re-creation of the epic, which in his mind deals with the "soul" of man. The "Author's Note" to the combined edition of *The Whole Armour* and *The Secret Ladder* begins with a reference to Melville's art in *Benito Cereno* in which short novel, Harris says elsewhere, its author "intuitively caught a tide of events that would loom into the twentieth century."² And speaking of the need for a new kind of "heterogeneous" novel to focus on man rather than on supposedly sovereign individual men and women, he finds: "One would have to turn to Melville to sense the beginnings of this kind of thing in the novel."³

There is even an omen to betoken the bond between the American/universal novelist and the Guyanese/universal one. If we invert the initials of Herman Melville (HM) or of Wilson Harris (WH) what do we see?

The initials of the other! Clearly the juxtaposition *is* ordained. This omen augurs well for a full-scale, continuing exploration of Melville and Harris by a community of critical imaginations. The light from one should throw light on the other; the light from both will, I think, show them together in a new kind of literary and historical perspective.

A few facts, mainly biographical, form the background of my reconnaissance report. Melville was born in 1819 in New York City, once called New Amsterdam; Harris was born in 1921 in another New Amsterdam, this one on the coast of Guyana, then a colony of Britain, a country inhabited by people of many racial, national and religious origins, several of which were often incorporated in the same person, as in the case of Wilson Harris. The striking parallel in personal experience is that both lived for a number of imagination-forming years outside modern civilization and in contact with nature as it had been for millenia—Melville as a sailor on whalers and a man-of-war and living for a short time with native peoples in the South Pacific, and Harris as a surveyor in the interior of Guyana, a territory of jungles, waterfalls, rivers and savannahs. Both, then, had the possibility of seeing the dominant civilization in a fresh perspective. They lived and worked in small, close groups of people of many origins and ways of interpreting life. Both came in contact with so-called primitive people and learned from them. But neither is a primitivist: the native peoples in the South Pacific became for Melville a point of reference from which to see the savagery of the nineteenth-century imperialist world, and the Amerindians who remained outside organized Guyanese society became for Harris a symbol of all those who have been ignored in life, wiped out in recorded history, and dimmed in our imaginations—symbol of the obscure person through whose eye we should strive to see, symbol of a past with which we must enter into a new relationship for a necessary renewal of forgotten sympathies and a new conception of man and community. Each poet's experience—at sea or in the Guyana interior—provided symbols which were to be essential elements of his unique vision of the world.

After this earlier period, each turned to writing with all his creative energy. Melville, in a period of over forty-five years, wrote ten novels, one novella, a good number of short stories, and much poetry including the five-hundred-page-long *Clarel*. Wilson Harris has published ten novels with two others on the way, two books of short fiction, the poems in *Eternity to Season*, and essays clarifying his revolutionary literary theory and methods, his interrelated social and literary values and aims.

If Melville's narratives of the South Pacific, *Typee* and *Omoo*, are viewed as two parts of one work, each of his novels is unique in central artistic conception, form and spirit, but his work as a whole expresses a unified philosophy and social outlook. This is true of Harris, too. But more than that, the Harris novels interpenetrate each other; though no story line connects them, they are one ever-evolving work of fiction; ideas spiral outward, and inventions of phrase and image spring up again and

again. The art of both novelists has often been taken to be too difficult, their language, associations and symbols too private. Convinced of the depth and complexity of life and the universe, they have worked to convey some of that complexity rather than try to reduce it to simple, less authentic, terms. Nevertheless, when we read their work through its imagery above all, more of its complex meaning comes through with each reading, especially if we refrain from imposing our own conventional ideas of what certain symbols mean; *darkness*, for example, so often presumed to have a pejorative implication, is time after time conceived as the source or symbol of light by both Melville and Harris.

Because each has the kind of imagination which continually reaches out into the universe and the unknown—and in Harris's case far down into the depths of "primordial" memory—and because he regularly occupies himself with philosophical questions, each writer has frequently been misinterpreted in that his main concern is often thought to be an "eternal essence," separate and apart from the world of men and from the concrete problems of an age. Many readers, for instance, have the illusion that *Palace of the Peacock* and *Billy Budd* arrive at transcendent visions of eternal, changeless radiance. But both Melville and Harris everywhere say, either directly or indirectly, that nothing is ever complete or perfect or of the spirit alone. For both authors the "visible world of experience," to use Melville's words, is the "procreative thing that impregnates the muses."⁴ Neither aspires to transcend life; what he seeks is *relation*: between abstract and concrete, death and life, permanence and change, "eternity and season." What *The Waiting Room* calls "the indestructible evanescence of life" interests Harris in his ever-disintegrating and reintegrating universe; the endless, continuous fabric of life in his universe is what Melville pictures in *Moby-Dick*. And at the very centre of each of these universes is man. Ishmael alone on the ocean, surrounded by unbroken sea and sky gives pictorial expression to Melville's feeling about man's centrality. And Harris says of the universe that "within that immense and alien power, the frail heart-beat of man is the never-ending fact of creation."⁵ The "complexity of value," he says, "is flesh and blood, not spirit and stone."⁶ The motive force in the far-reaching imagination of both Melville and Harris is the desire to find what can illuminate the contemporary world and its need for harmony among men.

Moby-Dick is the most powerful and memorable single expression of that desire for unity in literature, the great symbolic poem of the spirit of war and of peace. Rigid, split, exploiting and self-crucifying Ahab, incapable of seeing himself as only part of man, strips himself of all his humanities and stakes the lives of all in his private war against life, as incarnated in the white whale, in which he can see nothing but evil. He is one potentiality in man, the destructive and self-destructive one. In artistic opposition to him is Queequeg, who embodies all colors of man, all times, all that has ever been valid and has survived uncorrupted by modern civilization, the

creative potentiality buried but latent in each of the "mariners, renegades and castaways" of the crew. He stands in creative relation to man, to nature, to his god whom he is forever whittling, and to the unbroken universe into which he will sail after death. He is a breathing image of the spirit Wilson Harris, too, values most in man, and if we did not already know this fantastic creation, a multi-coloured figure with hieroglyphics and nature markings on his body, we would not be surprised to find him in a Harris novel. Ahab takes the crew of the Pequod to annihilation in a scene prophetic of the almost utter destruction possible in our age: "And now concentric circles seized the lone boat itself, and all its crew, and each floating oar, and every lance-pole, and spinning, animate and inanimate, all round and round in one vortex, carried the smallest chip of the Pequod out of sight."⁷ But Ishmael, who has been pulled by both Ahab and Queequeg, by both potentialities within him, has been saved by Queequeg's coffin-canoe which shoots up from the center of the vortex in the sea. He is man's representative reborn to have another chance to conceive a better design of life. At this moment Melville, like Harris at all times, sees with intense poetic conviction that the world may be transformed. His symbols of war are metamorphosed into symbols of peace. Ishmael is held afloat by Queequeg's coffin-canoe—an image related to the Harris funeral/cradle conception—and the world, at least for the symbolic moment, is stunningly transformed: "The unharmed sharks they glided by as if with padlocks on their mouths; the savage sea-hawks sailed with sheathed beaks."⁸

Not many scenes in literature can stand beside the ending of *Moby-Dick* as visualization of the idea of transformation to a world at peace, but the climax of *Palace of the Peacock* can. The crew of Donne—the crew in Donne, but also another generation in the so far "repetitive boat" of history—has discovered at the moment of death that only in harmony among them can there be fulfilment of their deepest needs. Donne has been a kind of Ahab, a ruler-destroyer driven by pride, who would take all to destruction in his ambition to rule. But to Harris he is, unlike Ahab to Melville, capable of change. For in Harris the "soul," the creative imagination and desire, can be awakened to act in all. In the final movement of *Palace of the Peacock* there unfolds, to reveal the possible metamorphosis of life, a whole sequence of sparkling transformations, each new image pulsating out of the one before:

I saw the tree in the distance wave its arms and walk when I looked at it through the spiritual eye of the soul. First it shed its leaves sudden and swift as if the gust of wind that blew had ripped it almost bare. The bark and wood turned to lightning flesh and the sun which had been suspended from its head rippled and broke into stars that stood where the shattered leaves had been in the living wake of the storm. The enormous starry dress it now wore spread itself all around into a full majestic gown from which emerged the intimate column of a musing neck, face and hands, and twinkling feet. The stars became peacocks' eyes, and the great tree of flesh and blood swirled into another stream that sparkled with divine feathers where the neck and the hands and feet had been nailed.

This was the palace of the universe and the windows of the soul looked out and in. The living eyes of the crested head were free to observe the twinkling stars and eyes and windows on the rest of the body and wings. Every cruel mark and stripe had vanished.⁹

A progression of aural transformations follows, beginning with Carroll's whistling and ending with music that circumnavigates the globe and yet comes from a source far within every one. The music of the novel ends with the introduction of a theme leading back to life: "Each of us now held at last in his arms what he had been forever seeking and what he had eternally possessed."¹⁰ The spirit at the end of *Palace of the Peacock* and the spirit at the end of *Moby-Dick*, as indeed the spirit of both novels in almost every particular, are in harmony: man has within him the great potentiality for a creative life; he continues to be reborn with yet another chance to realize it; it is conceivable that one day he will transform the design of his life.

Not all of Melville's novels express the belief that change in the pattern of modern civilization will come in the imaginable future. That bitter novel, *The Confidence-Man*, voices near-despair, salvaging only the merest grain of hope, and no Melville novel besides *Moby-Dick* imagines such spectacular change. In contrast, each and every novel by Harris breathes his belief that we live in what could be a gateway age. We could move through it—through an understanding of it—to an era never before conceived of by man. This difference in their outlook reflects a basic difference between the nineteenth and the twentieth century.

It must have seemed to Melville in his period of rising imperialism, industrialization and the growing worship of money that the power of wealth and Authority, of institutions and precedents, was—to use a recurrent Harris word—implacable. His art rejects contemporary civilization almost in its entirety, presenting with immense power the realities of war, imperialism, slavery, the extermination by the white man of the American Indian, and the corruption of values in America and everywhere else in modern civilization. Each individual work is a challenge to the reader to seek a way out of the maze. But he himself points no direction.

The twentieth century has seen the horrors accumulate almost to the breaking point of civilization. But it has also witnessed changes—political, economic, social, artistic, and intellectual—at a rate so unprecedented that it is now apparent that change *is* the nature of our world. Previously-unimagined perspectives have opened up. Science has introduced new ways of looking at phenomena that would once have outraged one's idea of reality. But, above all, the century has presented the ultimatum that civilization *must* change or be destroyed. Harris's art reflects both faces of our age, both its horrors and its possibility of change. He accepts as the present-day novelist's responsibility "the formidable and creative task of digesting and translating our age." Instead of rejecting contemporary civilization, as Melville does, he seeks to look through it to see how its contradictions

can be made fertile, how our time can be transformed from a prison into a womb of creative change. What he sees is that the continuation of conceptions of polarized extremes can lead nowhere but to catastrophe, that only in the bringing together of so-called contraries can a new age be conceived. Only then will the schizophrenic gap within man, and within each individual, be bridged. But this can happen only through the sacrifice of "embedded and cherished" habits of thought and feeling perpetuated by frozen tradition, what to Melville are the "marble" forms and precedents.

The imposition by the past of patterns and obsessions which have enslaved, imprisoned, split, and victimized everyone is a major theme in all of Melville and Harris. But Harris's main attention is focused on how the consolidation of the past can be broken down. Like that "half-frozen spectre" which is Black Marsden when Goodrich first comes upon him, the past, a sorcerer with two faces, can be unfrozen to work within the imagination but only if one relates to it in a new way, refusing to be its pawn or to sleepwalk under its hypnotic influence. If Goodrich, who represents twentieth-century civilization in *Black Marsden*, does not resist being fitted into preconceived patterns, he will be led to destruction, something he finally realizes and decides against.

Harris's faith is limitless that a great change in human consciousness can take place, that even the shape of things in the domain of the Jungian "archetype of the collective unconscious" can be altered or broken. In fact Christo's flight in *The Whole Armour* seems an "archetypal dream" of desperate flight and fear whose shape is broken when Christo stops running and returns to face those he was running from.

There is another aspect of the past in Harris's view, the past which has been buried but which man could bring back to life in his imagination. Always present in Harris's art, the idea is suggested most memorably by Poseidon in *The Secret Ladder*, the ancient leader of the Canje River descendants of freed and runaway slaves who live outside the main stream of Guyanese life. Poseidon is the dynamic which enters into Fenwick's life, awakens his conscience, and helps him to begin to conceive human value in a new way.

Harris's view of the two aspects of the past, one sterile and self-perpetuating, the other buried but still potent, leads him to the belief that man needs a new philosophy of history and along with this a new philosophy of revolution to break the pattern of the "rat-race of history," repression followed by uprising, uprising followed by repression, and to bring to a halt the endless rounds of static protest, blind action, and self-isolation by those who feel they are the sole victims of the world and who unconsciously cling to that role. On this question the art of both Harris and Melville sets forth these ideas: that *all* are victims of the patterns set by the past; that all have needs not met by the world as it is, and do, even without knowing it, desire to change it; that each consents to his own destruction by letting himself be pushed into an extreme role. Harris alone, however, believes that rigid

attitudes can be pierced and new light from the other side enter. It is not my impression that Harris believes that this could have been possible at the time of the slave uprising in *Benito Cereno*, for example, or even in Melville's time, but he does believe that it is possible in our age of crisis for all mankind. He does believe that revolution *can come out of a whole people*, and that this is the only really revolutionary possibility. Revolution in his sense implies the achievement of the kind of relationship which will lead to the unity of man. Related to this is his belief that only in man as a whole can any person find his true, fulfilling identity. Also related is his belief in a "marriage of cultures"—Melville's "marriage" of Ishmael and Queequeg.

Harris's dramas are not dramas of individual consciousness alone but also of social consciousness. As he explains, the imagination of Donne in *Palace of the Peacock*, Fenwick in *The Secret Ladder*, and Stevenson in *Heartland* are all agents of one imagination, by which I understand him to mean man's imagination, like the original, still-latent, creative spirit of man Melville envisioned in Queequeg. Drawing on it, and developing it, each individual can share in the revolutionary transformation of society, and the artist and historian can make more creative the interchange between culture and civilization. Harris, in a more critical and rapidly-changing time than Melville's, sees the possibility of a qualitative leap in social development, which had not yet ripened in the earlier time. But there is no difference between these writers about what major, specific aspects of the modern world need to be changed, except that Harris confronts and probes conditions which did not exist, or did not exist to the same extent, in nineteenth-century civilization: intense racial conflicts, widespread realization by women of their limiting lives, mass starvation and the actuality of atomic war.

There is much in common in the ways in which Melville and Harris realize ideas and feelings in their art. Both create new visions of the world through which others can then see. Both have a sense of primordial things. Each uses mythic, Christian and literary material of the past for his own original meanings. They are alike in the daring of their art and in its vast range and variety. How often is a Melville or Harris reader spellbound at the beauty of a passage—like the exquisite crystallization of meaning at the end of *Billy Budd* or *The Age of the Rainmakers*—or amazed at the audacity of some grotesque conception—like the Indian-killer *par excellence* in *The Confidence-Man* or Jack History's unrelieved erection in *Tumatumari!* Both use language as the art of exploring values. They create what Harris calls "potent, explosive images" to explode old preconceptions; they bring about bizarre juxtapositions to open up a new vision of things, Harris doing this as a fundamental part of his merged philosophy and art. Both believe in what Harris terms "the authenticity of narrative as the active medium of ideas." None of their novels lends itself to final interpretation any more than the complex life they probe. As Marsden says, "Lots of intriguing complications here, so be on your guard." Neither ever seems to feel he has ultimate answers. Melville continued to the end of his life to probe the

sub-surface realities of his world; Harris continues to seek deeper understanding of the relations between consciousness and history, thought and act, *Tumatumari* being an outstanding example of this.

Many of the *differences* in the art of Melville and Harris seem related to the differences in their feelings about change. Each Melville novel takes its shape from its content and unique conception; with Harris it is the other way around—form is primary and the content of each novel develops in accordance with the process of dynamic change which gives the novel its form. Melville's characters, with few exceptions, unchangingly *stand* for what they signify; they have unflickering essences. He sees his opposites as irreconcilable, with disastrous results for all, as in *Benito Cereno*. Harris's men and women are not "polarized identities." No one ever stands for an unchanging quality in Harris's imagination. In his hands even rigid Ahab would be transformable. Melville's art presents vivid, indelible *pictures* symbolizing aspects of the world. In Harris's novels *movement* is memorable: each unforgettable scene is a dissolving part of a "web of processes," in which all is crumbling and reintegrating in each impossible-to-isolate moment. Most of Melville's symbols and images have permanent implications; a single Harris image, like a symphonic theme, is likely to go through an evolutionary process; its implications change from context to context in a continual variation and development until in the end it may be entirely different from what it started out to be. In *Tumatumari* an eye eventually appears and opens in the face of the rock; the gorgon of history begins to smile. Then we see that all along the original image, like the early musical theme, had these possibilities of transformation within it.

Herman Melville and Wilson Harris give us an idea of how the imagination of man can stretch within the possibilities of a time. They are part of a great world literary tradition concerned with all of man in the whole known world. Like Donne, Fenwick and Stevenson, they are both agents of one creative imagination which runs through man and which may help him decide to renounce the destruction and self-destruction which Melville's art as a whole makes so visible and to opt for what Wilson Harris holds out as a dazzling and almost tangible possibility, a new Creation of the world and man by man himself.

¹ From "The Sleeping Rocks," a talk delivered June 21, 1973 to the two-week "Institute of African and Caribbean Writing," sponsored by the English Department of the University of Missouri-Kansas City and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

² "Interviews with Three Caribbean Writers in Texas," *Kas-kas*, an occasional publication of the Afro-American Research Institute, The University of Texas at Austin, p. 54.

³ "A Talk on the Subjective Imagination," *New Letters* (University of Missouri-Kansas City), Vol. XL, No. 1 (Autumn 1973), p. 42.

⁴ *Pierre*, XVIII, Section I.

⁵ *Tradition, the Writer and Society* (London, Port of Spain: New Beacon, 1967), p. 20.

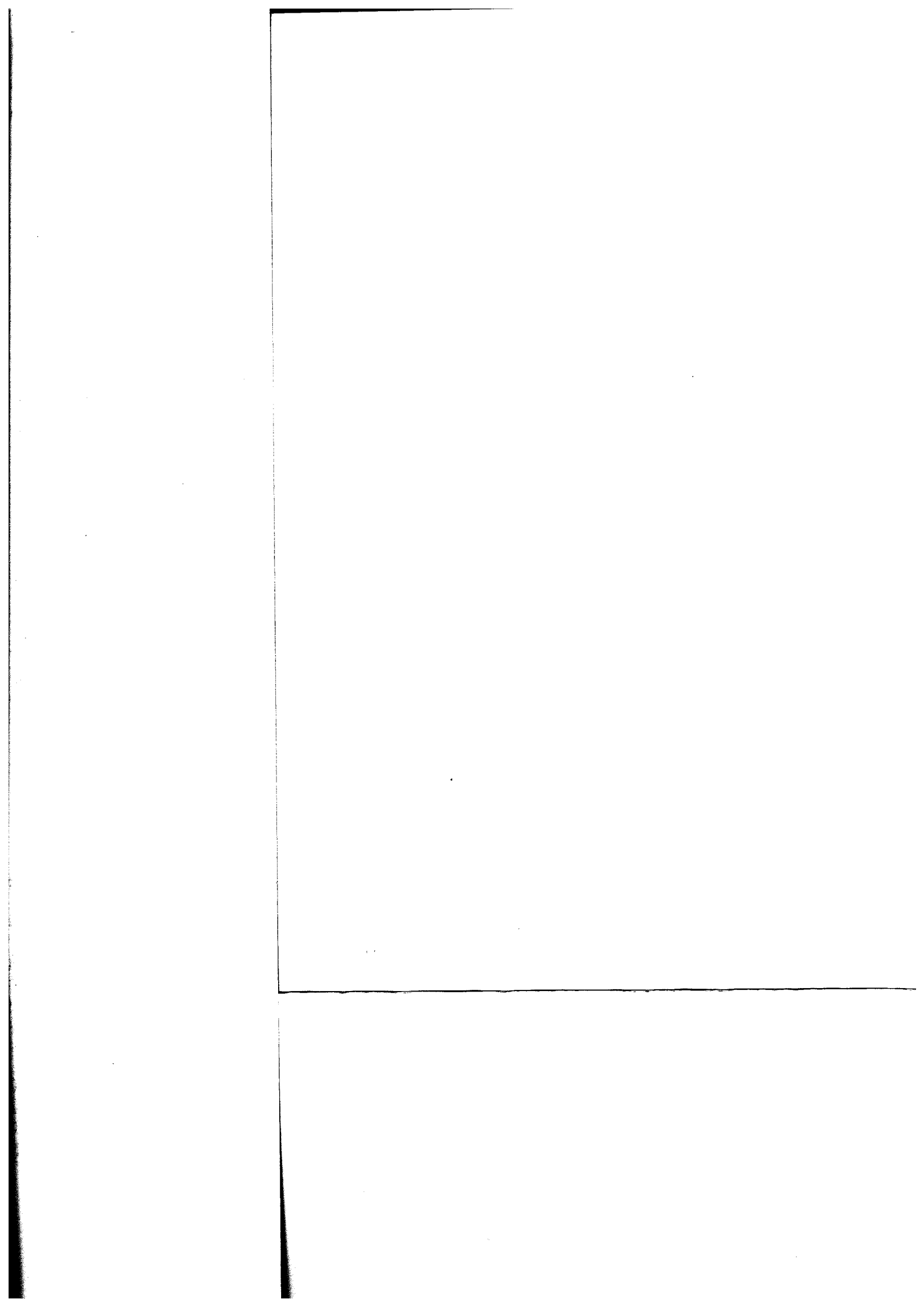
⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17. — ⁷ *Moby-Dick*, Chap. 135, "The Chase—Third Day."

⁸ *Ibid.*, "Epilogue."

⁹ *Palace of the Peacock* (London: Faber, 1960), pp. 146-147. — ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

POSTSCRIPT (February 1975)

Since the University of Liège conference a more profound exploration of *Billy Budd*, which I have just completed for the last chapter of my book on Melville and war, has led me to modify in the following respect my view of the similarities and differences between Melville and Harris : In his last work Melville came much closer than I had previously realized to Harris's philosophical and poetic vision of how humanity's original, latent, creative imagination may be awakened to the need for a transformation of the "classical architecture of the world" (*Tradition, the Writer and Society*, p. 8).



THE "INTIMACY OF A HORROR":
THE TRADITION OF WILSON HARRIS'S
PALACE OF THE PEACOCK

John Fletcher

'derrière la nuit, toutes les complicités
du silence' (L.-F. CELINE).

For Victor Dupont

Any reader of Wilson Harris's brilliant first novel, *Palace of the Peacock*, cannot fail to be struck by the fact that original as it obviously is, it fits in well with a noble tradition of symbolist novels which take us on a mythical journey, a "journey to the end of the night"—and even beyond it, into the unfathomable mystery of silence. Such books are Céline's own great novel, of this title, *Journey to the End of the Night*, which has an extended section set in "darkest" Africa; and Malcolm Lowry's *Under the Volcano*, which celebrates in mock-epic vein the degeneracy of an alcoholic during the painful progress of his last and indeed "longest" day on earth; and Patrick White's evocation in *Voss* of a doomed expedition into the Australian interior which leads the explorers only "into the immense fields of silence"¹; and, above all, Conrad's finest story, *Heart of Darkness*. (I am of course not the first critic to have noticed a parallel between *Palace of the Peacock* and Conrad's masterpiece; Kenneth Ramchand has kindly informed me that a former pupil of his, Richard Roy, has written an article on the subject, but it is not (at the time of writing) yet in print, and its approach differs from my own. It is of note that Wilson Harris himself refers extensively and perceptively to *Heart of Darkness* in his essay "Fossil and Psyche."

Novels in this tradition—novels I describe as "symbolist" with a small 's'—make a significant contribution to the means mankind has at its disposal, confronted as it is with the need to come to terms with its destiny and the anxieties which that provokes. Both *Heart of Darkness* and *Palace of the Peacock* refer explicitly to what Conrad calls "The Horror! The Horror!": the terrifying vision of dereliction and misery which overwhelms Kurtz in his savage fastness in the inner Congo, or Lowry's Consul for whom an empty bottle represents the tortures of the damned, or Bardamu pursuing

his doomed *voyage imaginaire* through fever and destitution in the tropical jungle, or Voss perishing (if only in body) in the desert in which he had striven and suffered so long, or Harris's Donne recalling the house he had built in the savannahs, the memory of it returning "with the closeness and intimacy of a horror and a hell, that horror and that hell," Harris writes, that "he had himself elaborately constructed from which to rule his earth."²

The mythic dimension of *Palace of the Peacock* is underscored by the epigraphs chosen from Blake and Hopkins, particularly from "The Wreck of the Deutschland," and by the unselfconscious manner the novel alludes to its archetypes, especially *Heart of Darkness*. Donne, like Kurtz, is equated with a devil, the personification of evil and death :

The only course was to fight, glued to the struggle, keeping our bow silent and straight in the heart of an unforgiving and unforgivable incestuous love. This fantasy had descended upon us like a cloud out of the sun. Everyone blamed everyone else for being the Jonah and for having had an evil intercourse with fate. Donne had arrested the witch of a woman and we had aided and abetted him. A murderous rape and fury filled our heart to an overburden, it seemed, nevertheless balanced and held in check by our voiceless impossible wrestle and struggle in the silent passage in the lava of water. We were screwed to boat and paddle in sending the vessel forward inch by inch. The spinning propeller spun in Jennings's head and beneath our graven feet. (p. 74)

Like Kurtz, too, Donne is lucid about his weaknesses, and speaks of them in almost Conradian accents :

"Do you know"—he was in a better mood than I could ever remember—"there's something in what you've been telling me, old chap." He tapped me on the chest significantly, "You do see the situation sensibly and constructively. I grant I have been cruel and harsh..." he paused reflectively.

"Yes," I prompted him.

"I have treated the folk badly," he admitted.

"But you do know what this nightmare burden of responsibility adds up to, don't you? how gruesome it can be? I do wish," he spoke musingly, "someone would lift it from my shoulders. Maybe who knows"—he was joking—"you can. Your faith and intuition may be better than mine. I am beginning to lose all my imagination save that sometimes I feel I'm involved in the most frightful material slavery. I hate myself sometimes, hate myself for being the most violent taskmaster—I drive myself with no hope of redemption whatsoever and I lash the folk. If they do murder me I've earned it I suppose, and I don't see sometimes how I can escape it unless a different person steps into my shoes and accepts my confounded shadow. Some weight and burden I confess frankly," he laughed as at an image—alien to himself—he was painting. "Still I suppose," he had grown thoughtful, "there's a ghost of a chance..."

"Ghost of a chance of what?" I demanded, swept away by his curious rhetoric.

"Changing my ways," he spoke mildly and indifferently. "Not being so beastly and involved in my own devil's schemes any more. Perhaps there's a ghost of a chance that I can find a different relationship with the folk,

who knows? Nothing to lose anyway by trying. I suppose it's what I've always really wanted." (pp. 56-57)

Like Kurtz again, Harris's travellers have penetrated into the "heart of darkness," both actually and metaphorically: the darkness of regions beyond the reach of civilization, and the darkness inhabiting the human heart. In Céline's novel, too, the hero makes an incursion into the land of darkness, where white men live wretchedly at the expense of the native populations; but in that book it is merely an episode in a longer and largely metaphorical journey, a voyage to the limit of suffering and human degradation. Significantly, all these novels centre around a trip up a river. Rivers are powerful symbols of the flow of human processes, from Lawrence's "river of dissolution" with its excremental connotations, to T. S. Eliot's hurrying Thames washing away the squalid sins of the "unreal city." Conrad, of course, makes potent use of two rivers which in a real sense flow into each other, the Thames where Marlow spins his yarn, and the Congo, where it is played out. "The tranquil waterway leading to the uttermost ends of the earth," Conrad writes, "flowed sombre under an overcast sky—seemed to lead into the heart of an immense darkness."³ Parallels are continually established by Conrad between the now peaceful Thames, whose well-charted roads are ridden by the yawl *Nellie*, and the treacherous Congo, the "infernal stream, the stream of darkness," which it resembled once, before men tamed it; but also between the "brown current" running swiftly out of the dark heart of a continent into the ocean, and Kurtz's life flowing equally swiftly away, "ebbing, ebbing out of his heart into the sea of inexorable time."⁴ The river metaphor is further developed in the description Marlow gives—or rather the analogies he finds for—Kurtz's remarkable power of eloquence; this, he says, could be seen either as "the pulsating stream of light," or as "the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness."⁵ Which it truly is, Marlow never quite resolves: it is characteristic of Kurtz that his noble peroration on "the Suppression of Savage Customs," which gave its reader "the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an august Benevolence," should be accompanied by a postscript "in an unsteady hand" which "blazed at you . . . like a flash of lightning in a serene sky," the blood-curdling words "Exterminate all the brutes!" For Kurtz is ultimately an enigma: "whatever he was," Marlow in his bafflement concludes rather lamely, "he was not common"; a man capable of gratifying boundless lusts, even of presiding over "unspeakable rites."⁶

But the river is active in its own right, "fascinating—deadly—like a snake," a "stream of death in life," and Marlow's voyage up it takes him to "the farthest point of navigation"; that point represents additionally, as he tells us in the next breath, "the culmination point of my experience."⁷ As Albert J. G  rard writes, *Heart of Darkness* is "the story of an essentially solitary journey involving profound spiritual change in the voyager," of a "night journey into the unconscious";⁸ this Conrad underlines by his

allusions to ancient legend (the women in the Brussels headquarters "knitting black wool" are like the Fates) and to medieval iconology (the Company's station is compared to Dante's *Inferno*, and the moribund blacks to the phantoms of the damned). Much the same is true of Bardamu's odyssey: he continually meets up with a man called Robinson, who gradually assumes the relationship of a *Doppelgänger* to him, and thereby lifts the story out of the realm of conventional realism into myth. Likewise with *Voss*: the explorer who has died in the flesh lives on in spirit in the place where he suffered so proudly; and also (more mystically) he survives by virtue of the existence of the woman he loves. Laura Trevelyan rides through the desert by his side, "although there was barely room for two horses abreast on the narrow path"; it is she who "lays upon his sores ointment of words"; and she who stands firm beside him, "admirable in her thick, man's boots beneath the muddied habit."⁹ And yet, as far as the life of the body is concerned, she does not leave Sydney; but her flesh is tortured by sickness in harmony with her lover's privations, and she is brushed by the same Death which claims him, far away in the bush. As her fever reaches its climax and breaks, Voss's spirit is severed from his body, and her scream ("Oh God . . . it is over. It is over"¹⁰) is uttered on behalf of them both. ("How alike," Lowry pertinently writes, "are the groans of love to those of the dying"¹¹). She survives to honour his memory; she endures in order to render homage to the legend which Voss and his men have written for ever in the dust of the arid Australian plains. "Voss will not die," she says as the novel closes: "he is there still, it is said, in the country, and always will be. His legend will be written down, eventually, by those who have been troubled by it."¹² To the sceptic who asks how it is possible to ascertain the facts about the disaster she proudly replies "The air will tell us."¹³ That tone of voice can also incidentally be heard in May's defiant thrust at fate in the epilogue of Malraux's novel *Man's Estate*: "I hardly ever weep now, any more," she says with "bitter pride."¹⁴

The end of Malcolm Lowry's masterpiece is equally resonant with myth. The Consul, in his last moments on earth, feels strong hands lifting him up: "Opening his eyes, he looked down, expecting to see, below him, the magnificent jungle, the heights, Pico de Orizabe, Malinche, Cofre de Perote, like those peaks of his life conquered one after another before this greatest ascent of all had been successfully, if unconventionally, completed."¹⁵ The reality is more sordid—strongly reminiscent, indeed, of the end of Joseph K. in *The Trial*, who tells himself he is dying like a dog, "as if he meant the shame of it to outlive him."¹⁶ This is in line with the mock-epic quality of *Under the Volcano* which, like Céline's book, or even Joyce's *Ulysses*, derides myth as it adjusts and develops it. The Consul is grotesque, a parodic Jesus: the sneers of the Lord's crucifiers are reduced here to the idle gesture of a passer-by tossing a dead dog after Firmin down the ravine into which his body has fallen. And Bardamu, like Leopold Bloom, is a pathetic Odysseus, and Kurtz a ghastly, corrupted Messiah. Only the comic

German, Voss, and his schoolmistress betrothed Laura Trevelyan attain through their suffering to the stature of a latter-day Tristan and Isolde: they alone emerge enobled and transformed by the myth that enshrines them.

"Every boundary line," Donne says in *Palace of the Peacock*, "is a myth" (p. 17). In Wilson Harris's novel this applies particularly to the borderline between past and present. Confusions are introduced into the chronology by the fragmentation of the narrative, by abrupt and often unsignalled shifts of point of view, and above all by the exploitation of anachronisms. Donne (the literary associations of the name are intended) leads his expedition into the interior in the guise both of a golden age conquistador and of a modern traveller using sophisticated equipment like an outboard motor. In the following remarkable passage, which has to be quoted *in extenso* to capture its unique flavour, Donne is looking in on a simple room and sees the baby Jesus and his mother Mary, who gradually is transformed into an earth goddess, the Virgin's own archetype:

Bare, unfurnished, save for a crib in a stall that might have been an animal's trough. Yet it all looked so remarkable—every thread and straw on the ground, the merest touch in the woman's smile and dress—that the light of the room turned into the wealth of dreams.

The woman was dressed in a long sweeping garment belonging to a far and distant age. She wore it so absent-mindedly and naturally however that one could not help being a little puzzled by it. The truth was it was threadbare. One felt that a false move from her would bring it tumbling to the ground. When she walked however it still remained on her back as if it was made of the lightest shrug of her shoulders—all threads of light and fabric from the thinnest strongest source of all beginning and undying end.

The whole room reflected this threadbare glistening garment. The insubstantial straw in the cradle, the skeleton line of boards made into an animal's trough, the gleaming outline of the floor and the wall, and the shift the child wore standing against the woman's knee—all were drawn with such slenderness and everlasting impulse one knew it was richer than all the images of seduction combined to the treasures of the east. Nothing could match this spirit of warmth and existence. Staring into the room—willing to be blinded—he suddenly saw what he had missed before. The light in the room came from a solitary candle with a star upon it, steady and unflinching, and the candle stood tall and rooted in the floor as the woman was. She moved at last and her garment brushed against it like hair that neither sparked nor flew. He stared and saw her astonishing face. Not a grain of her dress but shone with her hair, clothing her threadbare limbs in the melting plaits of herself. Her ancient dress was her hair after all, falling to the ground and glistening and waving until it grew so frail and loose and endless, the straw in the cradle entered and joined it and the whole room was enveloped in it as a melting essence yields itself and spreads itself from the topmost pinnacle and star into the roots of self and space. (pp. 138-139)

In a similar passage a few pages further on the I-narrator tells how he sees a tree in the distance "through the spiritual eye of the soul"; and the reader is barely surprised when this tree also reverts to its archetype, the legendary Tree on which "the neck and the hands and the feet had been nailed" (p. 146).

For, as in *Voss*, death has no dominion in Harris's world; it is interesting that in his Texas essay Harris argues that the death-wish of Voss is, as it were, cancelled by the birth-wish of Laura, who experiences a "psychical" pregnancy by Voss to balance the real pregnancy of her maidservant by a thief. "His victims had never perished," we are told in *Palace of the Peacock*, constantly moving before him, living and never dying in the eternal folk" (p. 68). They are subject to what Cocteau termed *l'éternel retour*: there is no mystery about it; everyone embraces the "odd fact" that "not so long ago this self-same crew had been drowned to a man in the rapids below the Mission . . . leaving their names inscribed on Sorrow Hill which stood at the foot of the falls" (p. 23). So that to contemplate the event is simultaneously an act of "memory and apprehension," of looking back, like the Tragic Muse, and forward also, like Tiresias who (in Eliot's exact phrase) "fore-suffers all."

In his classic study *Linguistics and Literary History* Leo Spitzer writes that Rabelais "creates word-families, representative of gruesome fantasy-beings, copulating and engendering before our eyes, which are established in an intermediate world between reality and irreality, between the nowhere that frightens and the here that reassures."¹⁷ Wilson Harris is almost as devoted a word-fancier as Rabelais, as the following passage shows:

The solid wall of trees was filled with ancient blocks of shadow and with gleaming hinges of light. Wind rustled the leafy curtains through which masks of living beard dangled as low as the water and the sun. My living eye was stunned by inversions of the brilliancy and the gloom of the forest in a deception and hollow and socket. We had armed ourselves with prospecting knives and were clearing a line as near to the river as we could. (p. 26)

This paragraph can be taken as exemplary of Harris's style. Only the last sentence is concrete and clear in meaning: it could figure naturally in any adventure story. The rest is poetic, evocative, non-referential. And, as with Flaubert, each phrase is carefully weighed for its rhythmic balance and effect. Occasionally this may even involve doing violence to standard syntax, as in: "The trees rose around me into upward flying limbs when I screwed my eyes to stare from underneath above" (p. 27). I am here reminded of another great stylist of English prose, Samuel Beckett, who also refuses to be intimidated by the rules of English; compare this sentence with the one just quoted: "Ruins true refuge long last towards which so many false time out of mind."¹⁸ Not that Wilson Harris's is an academic style, any more than Rabelais's was or Beckett's now is. He does not avoid an archaic, obsolete word like "raiment," but neither does he disdain a contemporary vulgarism like "gimmick." In the precise meaning of those terms, Harris's style is both "metaphysical" and "baroque." Baroque in the way I have just tried to show: rich and convoluted; and metaphysical in its conceits, not the least of which is the habit of concealing quotations

and titles, in lower case and without inverted commas, in the fabric of his text. In this way the wary reader stumbles upon both "farewell sadness" from Paul Eluard and "sense and sensibility" from Jane Austen. Leavis, no doubt, would consider this prose as overcharged as Conrad's—it will be remembered how in *The Great Tradition* he reproaches *Heart of Darkness* with "adjectival insistence"—but these are symbolist works, that function by a process close to incantation. There are sentences of Conrad's which I find obscure; and many in Wilson Harris which, in a strict sense, are meaningless. Or rather, their meaning is like that of Blake or Eluard, one not accessible to pure reason. But we are not subjected to anything remotely like automatic writing, and we never completely lose our foothold; this is, rather, an elliptical type of prose, with the connectives omitted. But they are supplied instinctively by the communing reader, who can usually be sure of finding light at the end of the tunnel. One sentence may end, "every spidery mis-step he made turned into an intricate horror of space and a falling coincidence and wing." But the next begins: "The parrots wheeled and flew around his head on the cliff . . ." (p. 108). This does not mean that the first sentence was "just" about wheeling parrots, but certainly wheeling parrots are part of its allusive echo. Such is, continually, the strategy of Harris's prose: taking off, circling through a mist of symbolic utterance, and landing again in the hard-and-fast—which it had never left but which, as Eliot might say, it now envisions perfectly for the first time. And this is only to be expected; for there is clear evidence that the whole story takes place in the unfettered imagination of the I-narrator, who, like a god, dreams this universe into being, and ends it upon the realization of the great truth that "each of us now held at last in his arms what he had been for ever seeking and what he had eternally possessed" (p. 152). Thus all Harris's fiction holds in dynamic balance two major human myths: the "great leap forward" and "l'éternel retour."

"There inheres in man's fate, in spite of all the possibilities of defeat"—writes W. M. Frohock of Malraux—"the possibility of the power and glory of being a man."¹⁹ Out of a diffused sense of waste, in other words, Malraux elevates a monument to the dignity of man. But we also see that major Commonwealth writers like Wilson Harris, Patrick White and Malcolm Lowry, following upon Joseph Conrad, do so too; and unlike Conrad, who betrays through Marlow an impulsive recoil, they dominate the heart of the "conquering darkness" both by creating, as Kenneth Ramchand puts it, "a sense of man's original condition of terror and freedom prior to the accretions of history and civilization,"²⁰ and by showing forth its potentiality for ultimate enrichment.

- ¹ Patrick White, *Voss* (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1960), p. 381.
- ² Wilson Harris, *Palace of the Peacock* (London : Faber and Faber, 2nd ed., 1968), p. 130. All references are to this edition.
- ³ Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (New York : Bantam Books, 1969), p. 132.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 84.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 226.
- ⁹ *Voss*, p. 366.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 395.
- ¹¹ Malcolm Lowry, *Under the Volcano* (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1963), p. 350.
- ¹² *Voss*, p. 448.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁴ André Malraux, *Man's Estate*, translated by Alastair Macdonald (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1972), p. 319.
- ¹⁵ *Under the Volcano*, p. 375.
- ¹⁶ Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, translated by Willa and Edwin Muir (Harmondsworth : Penguin Books, 1953), p. 251.
- ¹⁷ Leo Spitzer, *Linguistics and Literary History* (New York : Russell and Russell, 1962), p. 17.
- ¹⁸ Samuel Beckett, *Lessness* (London : Calder and Boyars, 1970), p. 7.
- ¹⁹ W. H. Frohock, *André Malraux and the Tragic Imagination* (Stanford : University Press, 1952), p. 89.
- ²⁰ In the 1968 ed. of *Palace of the Peacock*, preface (unpaginated).

T. S. ELIOT'S *FOUR QUARTETS*
AND WILSON HARRIS'S *THE WAITING ROOM*

Eva Searl

If we are inclined to think of T. S. Eliot primarily as the poet-critic who in 1928 declared that he supported Anglo-Catholicism in religion, royalism in politics and classicism in literature, we probably would not expect to find that Wilson Harris's work bears much resemblance to Eliot's. *Four Quartets*¹ and *The Waiting Room*² seem a particularly unlikely association, considering such sharp contrasts as : the solitary yet representative exploration of the meaning of time and death through the first-person voice of the *Quartets*, the narrative of an imaginary man-woman relationship in *The Waiting Room*; the reflective, meditative note of much of Eliot's verse, the intensity and unpredictability of Harris's prose; the strongly Christian basis of Eliot's thought and imagery, and the more ancient symbols (stone, cave and sun) and myths (Ulysses and Circe, Ulysses and the Siren) that explicitly carry Harris's meaning. But there are pervasive similarities. Eliot's statement in *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (1919) that

the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence ... a sense... of the timeless and the temporal together

could serve as epigraph to the *Quartets* and *The Waiting Room* equally. Harris's work, like Eliot's, is concerned with a timeless meaning and purpose embodied in the flux of time; with the learning experience that returns you to your beginnings to find a new, more complete starting-point there; with the development, and so with the quality, of perception. The two writers are alike also in the demand for adaptation they make on the reader : the lenses of their vision are not really very much like those through which most of us habitually experience life, and the effort the reader must make to understand is correspondingly greater than usual. Once the issues these writers

are exploring, and their ways of exploring them, have been felt and seen, work like theirs has to be lived with and pondered repeatedly if its achievement is to be recognized. Harris's work *can*, as Eliot's did, alter the sensibility of his literate contemporaries—ourselves—and this gives his work a substantial claim to attention.

The *Quartets* appeared during World War Two, and a whole library of criticism exists on T. S. Eliot. Harris's work is more recent, and *The Waiting Room*, the seventh of his ten published novels to date, is not one of his better-known works. I shall assume, therefore, that we are all familiar with the *Quartets*, sufficiently at least for brief quotation to be clear in itself. This will enable us to dwell more fully on *The Waiting Room*.

Allowing, then, for unavoidable simplification, the central situation in Harris's novel might be given as follows. The "waiting room" itself is Susan Forrestal (we make the equation because Susan's existence is a state of waiting), and the novel opens on her as a married woman in her early forties, now almost blind after three unsuccessful eye-operations. What she is waiting for is a liberating vision into the meaning of a past distress. Years previously she had a lover, who abandoned her. Susan has never really relinquished him, is still obsessed with him, and over the intervening years has made him into a distinct inner-world personality of her own, the constant partner in an imaginary dialogue: "he" is imagined to be the sun in her life. But in fact Susan has always been divided in her feeling for him, and has never faced the sources of conflict in their relationship. This conflict still exists because she has ignored it. Her idolatry of the vanished lover is therefore at once an admission and an evasion of the real problem. In the first chapter the more complex figure of the lover as he really was emerges in Susan's imagination from within the illusory sun-figure, "he." (Susan's idol is designated as "he" within inverted commas, while the real memory-form is given without them: at no point is the lover given a name.) His feeling for Susan is as painfully divided as hers is for him. The same self-division—the impulse to idolize, the impulse to fear and resent—also estranges them from each other, and in this bewildered, defensive and accusing stasis the need for fulfilment that was born in the original relationship has remained blocked and distorted. In the course of the novel Susan and the lover re-enact their past—in Susan's imagination, the waiting room—until Susan's understanding, initially crippled by a kind of involuntary dishonesty, and the relationship itself are at last restored to a health and fulfilment they lacked earlier.

The imaginary "scenes" (if one can call them that) and the new dialogue and marriage Susan and the vanished lover eventually arrive at are recorded in Susan's log-book. One of the main effects of Harris's extraordinary use of the log-book is to register a very full and fluid order of perception in an introspective mode. The pair who write and are written into it scarcely exist as literal characters; they are rather "agents of personality." The outer-world time-scheme appears to cover a few hours of the afternoon, but

the contents of Susan's log-book cover imaginative territory (of recollection, immediate experience and intuition) that combines the different aspects of chronological time into something that corresponds to *Little Gidding's* "intersection of the timeless moment" (*Little Gidding*, I, 52). Or, again: "Here the impossible union / Of spheres of existence is actual, / Here the past and future / Are conquered and reconciled" (*The Dry Salvages*, V, 216-9). Nor have the contents of the log-book any literal setting in the space-dimension: the setting is at one point "ledge of night, edge of dawn" (p. 23), at another "the edge of the land" (p. 29) and at another it is a storm involving "the sea and the sky" (p. 38) which nevertheless breaks out in a "room" (p. 40). Setting is always determined by the present feeling, insight and capacity of Susan and the vanished lover: they are conceived as ready for natural extension into the elements and cosmos. The log-book, conventionally the journal in which the bearings and rate of progress on a sea-voyage are recorded, is here a journal of the imagination that records Susan's inner voyage through her blindness to her final contact with the source of life—the "river of gold"—located in a "subterranean cave" that is actually herself. "The river is within us, the sea is all about us" (*The Dry Salvages*, I, 15).

Some entries are written from the standpoint of Susan's memories, responses and intuitions; others from the lover's; while a third, less easily located, kind of entry expresses the more inclusive, complete and detached vision that it proves to be the purpose of the log-book to develop in Susan and him. As the couple re-enact long-dead scenes in the now timeless and placeless setting the revival brings successive shocks of partial insight, which transform both of them as layers of reproach, self-justification, self-deception and fear are stripped off. Each, in gaining a fresh sense step by step of who the other really is, becomes more real.

The lover, for instance, early on in "The Void" (title of the first part of the novel) is forced to realize that Susan has felt his attitude towards her as a brutal assault; and this late knowledge comes as an equally brutal shock to him:

he could not yet bring himself to believe that it was he who had inflicted this explosive burden upon her. And in fact he knew he was as helpless as she [she, meanwhile, "lay beneath him . . . in lightning upheaval and distress" and in process of being informed by her about himself . . . [he seemed to have] no alternative but to shrink in ultimate horror from himself. (pp. 39-40)

The lover's experience here is that outlined by the "familiar compound ghost," "some dead master," who in the "between two worlds" passage in *Little Gidding* recalls "the rending pain of re-enactment / Of all that you have done, and been." For Susan the major revelation is rather (as the *Little Gidding* passage continues) "the shame / Of motives late revealed" (II, 138-140), when she realizes that in shouting at the lover years before to make up his mind to go or stay (he had gone),

she secretly intended him to stay. No wonder she saw him still in the light of one she had not truly relinquished. (p. 71)

Or, to take a more general passage from the *Quartets* that ponders on what is also the subject of *The Waiting Room* :

There is, it seems to us,
At best, only a limited value
In the knowledge derived from experience.
The knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
For the pattern is new in every moment
And every moment is a new and shocking
Valuation of all we have been.

(*East Coker*, II, 81-87)

One has to read *The Waiting Room* closely, the tortuousness of its early pages in particular, to grasp *what* a “new and shocking valuation” of herself, what an overthrow of rooted and rigid feeling, this apparently simple insight is for Susan. It has been led up to through a revival of the operations on her eyes that in the outer world have confirmed her physical blindness. In the new, compound present of the log-book the surgeon becomes the lover, his (“helpless”) assault with his steel instruments *now* clearing her inner vision as she is reborn in the pain of the experience. This episode gives one of the most penetrating echoes, surely, of the *Quartets* :

The wounded surgeon plies the steel
That questions the distempered part;
Beneath the bleeding hands we feel
The sharp compassion of the healer’s art
.....
Our only health is the disease
.....
...to be restored, our sickness must grow worse.

(*East Coker*, IV, 147 et seq.)

Such moments of partial enlightenment as these are intense and often painful, and are followed by moments of recoil, or apparent regression and fresh blindness, which render very truthfully the flux in which this kind of exploration must take place. One feels a certain episodic quality in the writing as one station of insight after another is reached : what follows in the next chapter cannot be predicted. Yet, paradoxically, in spite of the astonishing “sceneless scenes” (if the expression is allowable), one is aware throughout of the underlying purpose and destination of the writing : Susan, the blind woman, is (we learn on p. 24) “*pregnant after all these years*” with her desire to “conceive . . . an extreme but true vision of him.” This new “seed or grain” of “fertile ash” grows out of the death of the old, tangled relationship, giving it the further life—the transfiguring life—that, by a necessity of its own, it simply will have. This “will have” has the same kind of strength as “To become” in the following lines from *Little Gidding* :

See, now they vanish,
The faces and places with the self which, *as it could*, loved them,
To become renewed, transfigured, in another pattern.

(*Little Gidding*, III, 163-165, italics mine)

We cannot account for the force and direction of Susan's experience: it is given as a fact of life. Each station reached is a new beginning in a sequence of beginnings, and the end of the development is a return *to* the beginning; yet the end of *The Waiting Room*, it transpires, is also a fresh "void" to provide yet another start. Both this consciousness of an immanent purpose working through our experience—a wholesome purpose, probably unrecognized by us—and this informing perception of the cyclical ordering of life are of course found in the *Quartets* too.

The last chapter of Part I, "The Void," in which Susan and the lover regain their "brutal relation," is particularly interesting for the way it develops the "boarhound and the boar . . . reconciled among the stars" passage in *Burnt Norton* (II, 59-61). I have not space to elaborate on this, but it is their reversion—or regression—to the "ground" of flight" (p. 53) in mutual pursuit that liberates them from the "shroud of 'subjective' fate," (p. 54) destroying the waiting room and opening up new, conscious centres of relatedness in them both. Susan's condition now, in spite of the title of the second part, "The Vortex," is close to the "dark night" in which the soul waits in stillness for God. She becomes aware of a new quality of silence in "the wreck of the room," (p. 65) a silence in which "nothing" (the lover's "true gift" to her perhaps, she now thinks) positively exists; at length "Nothing moved," and this no-movement leads, by an astonishing image of dual movement, anticlockwise and clockwise, past and future together, into direct, fertile, verbal dialogue at last with the lover, whose speech, like the freedom that shattered the void, strikes her ear as a song. The echo of *East Coker* (and, through Eliot, of St John of the Cross) is plain:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without [hope, love or faith]
. . . the faith and the love and the hope are all *in the waiting*.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.

(*East Coker*, III, 123-128, italics mine)

The conclusion of *The Waiting Room* with its recapitulations and shifts has to be described fairly fully if the development is to be, even at this level, intelligible. The last log-book entry is the lover's and sets the scene in the jungle: a primitive landscape in which the *wider-than-personal* past is always present. He is leading an exploratory party, and Susan is a member of it, now appearing to him as an Amerindian woman: one of the native people who belong to "time past" (and place past) in this setting. Susan's husband, one of the guides, is killed by a snake that is identified in the imagery with the sun and so with the lover. The illusory man—the unreal relationship—being thus broken, Susan now approaches the lover

to "make herself known" (p. 73) at last; this open, accepting attitude shows her approaching rebirth more fully than anything that has gone before. But the lover—the leader of the expedition, the sun-figure—experiences his own death in the death of the husband. At this point, by another sudden transition, the snake-sun image of destruction and creation together is found to be rendering not only the dead lover and the Amerindian Susan but also "the river of gold": "Eldorado, City of Gold, City of God,"³ the wholeness of the self, all true riches that are ever sought. To reach the source of the "golden river" the lover has to descend into "*the subterranean cave of Susan*," (p. 79) she being now the natural source of life, both land and womb. As soon as he becomes aware of the "circuit of compassion" there (previously a "circuit of fear and love engendered by her in him" [p. 34] and a "circuit of conviction" [p. 39]) he hears a "*delayed blast*" (p. 79). The train, or circuit, for the explosion had been laid years before by Susan and him, but since they could not then accept their common humanity and fallibility the previous blast had only blocked the entrance to the cave and all it signifies, leaving the couple in conflict in the waiting room. Now, however, what had previously been an "explosive burden" (p. 39) and "explosive self-containment" (p. 53) becomes release. The lover instantly re-enacts his descent into the cave, this time becoming aware of it as the Middle Passage that populated the Caribbean with slaves. The meaning of this, I think, is sufficiently indicated in the following lines from *The Dry Salvages* :

[...] approach to the meaning restores the experience
 In a different form, beyond any meaning
 We can assign to happiness. I have said before
 That the past experience revived in the meaning
 Is not the experience of one life only
 But of many generations.

(*The Dry Salvages*, II, 94-99)

As completely stripped of pretensions as Susan is now that he identifies with the humblest of his ancestors, he falls through the healing darkness and sees her "swimming" towards him: an image that plainly renders the generation of new life *through* an illuminated return to the source, as the lovers become the unborn.

The last paragraph repeats *verbatim* a passage from the first chapter, thus enforcing two of the truths with which the book is concerned: one, that ignorance and insight, conflict and reconciliation, are interdependent facets of a single, whole learning-experience; and two, that the waiting room is a universal state of unfulfilment that belongs to us at all stages of development and must be worked through to completion again and again. There is no moment, however joyful, at which we can say, with finality, "This is it!" "In our end is our beginning" (p. 70) is the most direct, but not the only echo of *Four Quartets*. Consider the relevance of :

We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

(*Little Gidding*, V, 239-242)

This summary, over-selective though it has to be, does at least indicate some similarities of subject and thought in *Four Quartets* and *The Waiting Room*. There is in both, most evidently, a penetrating concern with the nature and purpose of the "timeless" (or imaginative) dimension. There is the same preoccupation with past experience as a latent source of renewal in the present when a new "approach to the meaning" is made. Both works explore the apparent paradox that the "end" of an experience is present from the beginning to be fulfilled through the unpredictable flux of living; that the "end" thus posited and immanent is indeed *dependent* upon "our sickness" that "must grow worse," or on Susan's state of blindness, for its development towards completion. There is the same acceptance of agents of destruction—the fire-bomb which is also the "dove descending" in *Little Gidding*, the fire of the "delayed blast" in *The Waiting Room*—as being at the same time agents of creation: they exist in order to teach, through destruction, the compassion they express. There is the same moment of stillness and "poverty of existence"—the "nothing" of the dark night—before divinity becomes manifest. The humility and the seriousness are of the same kind.

Similarities of a slightly different order can be found in what might be called the two writers' musical use of language. Readers of Helen Gardner's essay, "The Music of the *Four Quartets*," will remember her analysis of the "shaft of sunlight" image (or motif) which returns with transformations throughout the *Quartets*. The first chapter alone of *The Waiting Room* is seen to achieve its coherent development through the same "musicality" if we compare the following sentences:

She drew the palm of her hand slowly across her face as if to darken her own image, and to discover therein another sun of personality. (p. 15)

Susan drew the palm of her hand slowly across her face as if it had turned to stone. (p. 17)

Susan drew a rigid hand across the marble of her eyes. (p. 18)

Susan Forrestal indicted him out of her sightless eyes. (p. 20)

Initially, Susan intends to evoke a "sun of personality"—the lover in the idealized form she loves to give him—from within her "darkened" idea of herself: in this she is relating only to herself, not to him. Two pages later the lover as he really was, with overt needs and fears that answer her own buried ones, has emerged, forcing a revival of the earlier conflict; the gesture of the hand drawn across the face now registers not Susan's anticipated delight but her incipient paralysis. One page later both hand and eye have contracted still further and become impenetrably unresponsive. The last

sentence of the chapter, blunt and discordant, expresses only the blind accusation that "Susan Forrestal"—and the name itself limits her—has not yet outgrown and is now being forced to re-experience. Each variation on the gesture—there are others later in the book, and "sun" and "circuit," as already mentioned, undergo the same kind of change—is determined by its immediate function in developing the meaning. The ideational quality of words is itself unmusical, of course, but rhythm, recurrence and modulation do make for a musical component which is a powerful part of our reading-experience even if we are unaware of it. This is not, in *The Waiting Room*, an "artistic (or artificial) device," but rather, a matter of thinking musically. The reader is forever encountering an idea he thought he had grasped earlier, only to find that it now has a new growth to it; what he took for a fairly fixed symbol is in fact fluid, each new occurrence establishing new relations with other ideas and so marking a new station—different from what has gone before, pointing to what may lie ahead. The relevance of this to the wider meanings of the work is surely clear.

Dissimilarities too exist, of course. Both Eliot and Harris are concerned with the "presence" within us of the historical past (compare the passage from Thomas Elyot's *The Governor in East Coker* with the revival of the Middle Passage in *The Waiting Room*). Harris is generally concerned with the incorporation of this past-made-present into the outer-world historical present too; but in *The Waiting Room*, perhaps the most interior of his novels, this is suggested in slight touches only: the "shop-window of the world," Susan's telephone-conversation with her husband. The modern world—the merely "technological" mind—is there, but is much less definitely there than in *Four Quartets*, where the travestied Communion on Good Friday in *East Coker* and the Dantesque meeting and "dove descending" passages in *Little Gidding* derive much of their force from their background, the Second World War. *The Waiting Room*, however, as a study of the lost or ailing Muse, seems in this respect to be a trial run for *Tumatumari* (which appeared the following year), in which Prudence's neurosis is the neurosis of the age.

A more important distinction is that whereas *Four Quartets* treats the "timeless" dimension in terms of traditional Christian thinking, so that awareness of divinity is a gift from God to man, which man must qualify himself to receive through discipline and prayer, in *The Waiting Room* fulfilment is located in an image of nature—the physical and human world—that includes all we understand by "divinity" within its own psychic energies. This change in emphasis is clear if we consider "the wounded surgeon," who in *East Coker* is Christ but in *The Waiting Room* is the lover. Similarly, the "wait without hope" passage in *East Coker* is paralleled in *The Waiting Room* by the "nothingness" passage that introduces the speech of the lover. Where divinity for Eliot is manifested in the formal "measured" pattern of the dance, for Harris the musical form taken by the deeper consciousness is the song, which implies a human voice. The lover really is potentially

a sun, a river of gold, and therefore divine; but so is Susan and so is everybody else, and for as long as Susan gives him, and he misappropriates by accepting it, a belief in his own extraordinariness he is not fully alive at all. The dual form of fire, too, is strikingly different in the two works. In the last of the *Quartets* fire appears, terrifyingly in the war-time context, as the "dove descending" from above, at once the bomber plane sent by the enemy and the Holy Ghost of baptism into new life sent by divine Love for our purgation. In *The Waiting Room* fire is a "blast" (title of the last chapter) that has already sounded more than once without shattering the rock of the fixed self; a blast for which Susan and the lover are directly responsible, and that takes place in the "subterranean cave" of Susan herself. In *The Waiting Room* the divine is not the gift of God but the "circuit of compassion" within the energies of nature and ourselves.

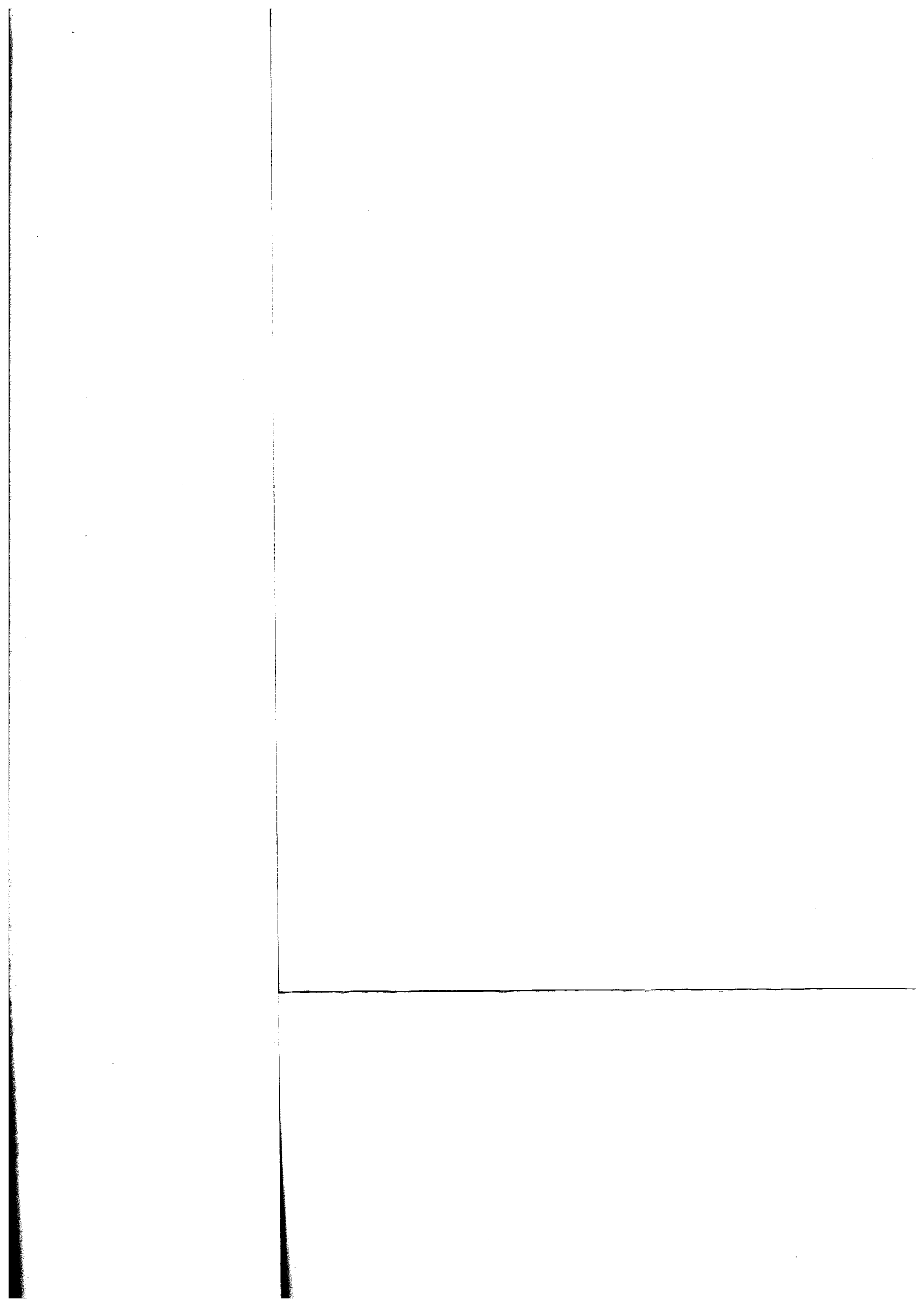
The difference, even so, is not one of meaning I think so much as of idiom. "The way up and the way down are one and the same" runs the epigraph from Herakleitos affixed to *Burnt Norton*. If Eliot gives us a way up, in Pentecostal sun and dove, Mr. Harris gives us a way down, through individual personality to universal cave. But by paths that, in spite of such vast differences, do correspond very closely they arrive at the same "intersection" point.

Our theme asks that the subject be placed within the context of the modern world. I have not dealt explicitly with this, but both *Four Quartets* and *The Waiting Room* deal with questions that are always with us, that never date and so are always modern. *The Waiting Room*, more specifically, puts the question, *Why* is one confused, possessive, ignorant, liable to fascination? And it answers: *in order to* provide an obsession—a need—as a pathway to rediscovery and growth. The novel looks seriously at the desire to bury or misrepresent failures in relationships that have mattered, and at the significance of resistance to change. All experience—even falsification and resistance—is seen as contributing finally to the "end" that was posited in the beginning: the "blast" has to be accepted, but even in "the waiting room" beforehand there is no true cause for despair. In times when we are finding it increasingly difficult to accept on faith the traditional forms in which this kind of truth is expressed, it may be claimed that Mr. Harris's *idiom* is far more modern, because more natural and inclusive, than Eliot's.

¹ T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber), 1944.

² Wilson Harris, *The Waiting Room* (London: Faber and Faber), 1967.

³ Wilson Harris, *Tradition the Writer and Society* (London: New Beacon, 1967), p. 35.



THE POETICAL JOURNEY OF DEREK WALCOTT

Michel Fabre

The impressive list of honours, prizes and awards which Caribbean-born poet Derek Walcott has won in British literary circles attuned to the niceties of rhetoric and language may be proof that he is slowly becoming one of the sacred monsters of our time, but they tend to distort his image : he appears as secure in his convictions as in the polished form of his verse, and thus deserves to be embraced by the "great tradition" of Western literature as one inheritor of the Greek Classics and T. S. Eliot. It is my contention that the rather exclusive emphasis placed upon his achievements along "classical" lines unfairly eclipses his attempt to render the tone, if not the dialect, of Caribbean folk sensibility. Dudley Randall, the Afro-American critic and poet, feels this when he states that Walcott, in his *Selected Poems*, is most effective "when his material or subject makes him transcend his formalism." This is why it seems appropriate to consider the major themes of Walcott's poetry in the light of his developing aesthetic views, carefully bearing in mind the necessity he has felt, at different stages, to emphasize certain elements in order to correct one-sided responses to his works. His development as a critic stems from tensions between mutually exclusive interpretations of his creative attempts. His evolution as a poet or dramatist clearly shows that he is aiming at becoming ever more finely attuned to the tone and the core of his people's experience.

Given more time, I should have liked to deal at greater length with the early poetry of Walcott, especially *In a Green Night*, *The Gulf* and *The Castaway*. However, since the major themes and perspectives contained in these books can also be found in *Another Life*,¹ I shall concentrate on this work. Very generally, one could say that Walcott's first volumes capture his native island, St. Lucia, in its natural beauty and metaphor : the abrupt

volcanic landscape, the sun and sea, the religion and folk culture tempered by alternating British and French conquest. Although Walcott also turns to the wider horizons of Jamaica, Europe and the United States, his early poems could be entitled "tales of the island," whereas "return to my native land" would be an apt sub-title to *Another Life*. From these shimmering early fragments, from images of people, animals, landscapes and folk scenes, from litanies, sea-chanteys and classical imagery, a vision of Walcott's world soon orders itself and themes emerge. Major themes are: the aboriginal roots (Carib and African), the white grandfather caught in the decline of colonialism, the aspirations of the exile and the longings of the prodigal, love and innocence, the delusions of religion and the bitterness of unbelief, the politics of our age and the role of the United States. These themes are treated in such striking terms and metaphors that one would like to quote at length. Let us, however, limit ourselves to a couple of examples.

Apropos of his origins, Walcott gives a fascinating picture of the Brown Earth Mother in "Bronze"; comparing her to Greek goddesses, among them Aphrodite, he claims that

Not one of these in such fierce sex was fired
Or holds its cunning secret as this one
Of lasting bronze, art of a savage race,
Marble, bronze, ebony, white, creole, black. ²

His piece on the African-European dilemma, "A Far Cry from Africa," is probably his most widely anthologized. Remember his final anguished outburst:

I who am poisoned with the blood of both,
Where shall I turn, divided to the vein?
I who have cursed
The drunken officer of British rule, how choose
Between this Africa and the English tongue I love?
Betray them both, or give back what they give?
How can I face such slaughter and be cool?
How can I turn from Africa and live? ³

Or, again, bear in mind the bitterness of the lonely visitor to England, his "half-home":

Never to go home again,
for this was home! The windows
leafed through history to the beat
of a school ballad, but the train
soon changed its poetry to the prose
of narrowing, pinched eyes you could not enter. ⁴

At this stage, when he left St. Lucia, and later in Jamaica and then in Trinidad where he founded his own troupe, Walcott was convinced that literature was able to change life. "The future of West Indian militancy

lies in art," he declares in the brilliant introductory essay to four of his plays which are collected in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*. This collection represents the tangible result of Walcott's long devotion to folk theatre in the Caribbean and, in its drama, achieves a balance between poetic intensity and dialect, between grandeur and the simple comedy of simple people. Without analysing the entire body of Walcott's dramatic work, I want to stress the relationship between this essay and *Another Life*, which I see as a treatment in verse of what it means to be a Caribbean writer. Furthermore, we could claim that this essay in poetic prose foreshadows in mood and content the new turn Walcott takes in *Another Life*; that it includes in a nutshell the concepts, themes and images he will grapple with in his later poetry; that it mirrors the plight of the Caribbean artist and his tradition:

In that single, schizophrenic boyhood, one could lead two lives: the interior life of poetry; the outward life of action and dialect. Yet the writers of my generation were natural assimilators. We knew the literature of Empires: Greek, Roman, British, through their essential classics; and both the patois of the street and the language of the classroom hid the elation of discovery.⁵

Here we find the poet's crisis and achievement evoked, both the double legacy of his childhood (British and creole, pagan and Christian) and his interpretation of his people's experience, direct, unromanticized, real.

Walcott looks with a cold eye at any "romanticization" of folk life, by either governments or individuals; the State, "impatient with anything it cannot trade," makes of the folk arts "an adjunct to tourism," i.e., "the symbol of a carefree, accommodating culture" (p. 7). The revolutionary who wants violent and sudden upheavals becomes "infuriated at the banal demands of the labourer and the peasant," or "the Roman patience of legal reforms" (p. 19). The writer reminds us that the last thing the poor need is the idealization of their poverty. This applies equally to language: twenty years ago illiteracy was seen as an obstacle, as a defect, not "the attribute it is now considered to be by revolutionaries." The whole history of the Black man in America and the West Indies is reflected in his creation of a language—"a language that went beyond mimicry, a dialect which had the force of revelation as it invented names for things, one which finally settled on its own mode of inflection and which began to create an oral culture of chants, jokes, folk songs and fables." And history shows that "the only way to recreate the language was to share in the agony of its articulation. *This did not mean the jettisoning of culture* [italics mine] but by the writer's making creative use of his schizophrenia, an electric fusion of the old and the new" (p. 17).

There was no vision of revenge against the whites, and no self-contempt in this "earning of language" achieved by former generations. Thus Walcott disagrees with those whom he calls "pastoralists of the African revival," i.e., the proponents of a romantic version of Black nationalism. Having lost their wish to be white, he thinks, they develop a longing to become

black, and "these two may be different but are still *careers*" (p. 20). Although he sympathizes with the nationalists, Walcott sees his own mission and vocation as taking him beyond simple "careers" to more complex and subtle approaches.

Walcott thus illuminates the temptations and the possibilities not only of the West Indian writer but also of the committed writer of the Third World. He opens a path to the re-evaluation of the artist's relationship to language :

Pastoralists of the African revival should know that what is needed is not new names for old things or old names for old things but the faith of using the old names anew so that, mongrel as I am, something prickles in me when I see the word Ashanti as with the word Warwickshire, both separately intimating my grandfather's roots, both baptizing me this neither proud nor ashamed bastard, this hybrid, this West Indian. The power of the dew still shakes off our dialects, which is what Césaire sings. (p. 10)

Although these questions are dealt with in general perspective, the personal touch is present everywhere. Walcott analyses the cultural components of his childhood : watching parades in the style of the Salvation Army Band, Christmas in the streets, the endless monologues and melodramas of the derelicts, the weird folk stories told by old Sidone, as well as his own yearning to belong "to the mighty line of Marlowe and Milton." This introductory essay concludes with some regret for the loss of the "true vision." Everything else has been "the sweated blurring of a mirror in which the people might have found their true reflection" (p. 40).

In many ways, *Another Life*, Walcott's latest volume of poetry, retells the same story. It begins with "The Divided Child"—an emerging vision of city smells and sounds, humble life, the radiance of Walcott's mother at the sewing machine. A vivid, jingling catalogue of childhood heroes follows from A to Z—from "Ajax, the lion-coloured stallion from Sealey's stable" (p. 16) ... to "Zandoli ... The ... exterminator" (p. 22). And the poet warns us : "These dead, these derelicts, / that alphabet of the emaciated, they were the stars of my mythology" (p. 22). In much the same way as Edgar Lee Masters wrote *The Spoon River Anthology*, Walcott conjures up the feeling of a folk epic with the ironic hint that "if these heroes have been given a stature / disproportionate to their cramped lives, / remember I beheld them at knee-height" (p. 41).

Into the poetic and almost mythical lives of these folk there intrudes the familiar struggle of the city and the bush, of the church and the devil, of black and white. And the poet himself must fight for his spiritual and racial soul which he calls :

an atavism stronger than their Mass,
stronger than chapel, whose
tubers gripped the rooted middle-class,
beginning where Africa began :
in the body's memory. (pp. 24-25)

In this section history intrudes painfully and explicitly whereas the cultural influence of the many writers and artists, largely European, who are mentioned throughout Walcott's poetry is generally more allusive. And nowhere else does the tragic figure of painter Harry Simmons, his compatriot, whose suicide is recorded as the end of a meaningful era, take the archetypal aura of bleeding and visionary Gregorias.

The second section is aptly titled "Homage to Gregorias," and a quotation from Alejo Carpentier's *The Lost Steps* revitalizes the feeling which was the concluding note of "What the Twilight Says" :

Years later, having frittered away their youth, they would return with vacant eyes, all initiative gone, without heart to set themselves to the only task appropriate to the milieu that was slowly revealing to me the nature of its values : Adam's task of giving things their names. (p. 48)

Gregorias represents the artist who creates objects and landscapes, pointing at a life more ancient than geography, at "Africa, heart-shaped, and the lost Arawak hieroglyphs and signs" (p. 54). He stands for the initiator, "mad, divine . . . imprisoned in his choice," (p. 66) whose serene and anguished devotion Walcott envies as he summarizes his own initiation to writing : "I had entered the house of literature as a houseboy" (p. 77).

The third section, "A Simple Flame," is both a resplendent and thankful hymn of love to Anna, with her red hair and freckles, and a cry to the fierce Castries fire which literally destroyed the world of his childhood. Never had Walcott sung so beautifully of love as in :

And I answer, Anna,
twenty years after,
a man lives half of life,
the second half is memory,

the first half, hesitation
for what should have happened
but could not, or

what happened with others
when it should not. (p. 101)

Anna, his "Beatrice" and the prototype of all his loves, will be revived in the texture of his memory. But Castries cannot. On the charred ruins "the cement phoenix rose," (p. 103) the ugly phoenix of a modern city where the adolescent poet is patronizingly invited to have tea with the British Council representative. At this stage, Walcott must leave the island in order to survive spiritually. He heads for Jamaica, then for Trinidad, and this heart-break is summarized in a couple of beloved names uttered as the plane soars.

The fourth section, "The Estranging Sea," is a nostalgic and perspicacious probing of the gulf created by his irrevocable departure. Sad news arrives : "Harry has killed himself / all day the sunset bleeds like a cut

wrist" (pp. 132-133). Traumatic news, indeed, with the loss of the now mythical Anna, but also, emerging slowly, the calmer poise of the maturing man. Yet Walcott finds a new strength in a companion ("For I have married one whose darkness is a tree, / bayed in whose arms I bring my stifled howl" [p. 140]) and also in founding a family. He can now listen to

the tireless hoarse anger of the waters
by which I can walk calm, a renewed, exhausted man,
balanced at its edge by the weight of two dear daughters. (p. 147)

At the end of his journey away from and then back to St. Lucia, Walcott can reflect: "This is not bitter, it is harder / to be a prodigal than a stranger" (p. 150). But he has not lost sight of his splendid mission:

Gregorias, listen, lit,
we were the light of the world!
we were blest with a virginal, unpainted world
with Adam's task of giving things their names. . . . (p. 152)

Thus with the years, Walcott has evolved from the wary self-affirmation of one who "had entered the house of literature as a houseboy" to open-hearted self-evaluation. This is the honesty of the wise man who feels he has nothing to hide because he has discovered in all men the same frailty which used to make him ashamed. What appeals to me in the man as in his poetry is not so much the density and intensity as the kindness and frailty at the core, not the enduring achievement of his lines but the humanity with its doubts and loves, not the classicist but the tempered romantic. Or rather, it is the tension between the smile and the anger, the lamb and the lion.

It has been said repeatedly that Walcott's verse is universal, that his cultural heritage makes him a "citizen of the world." Indeed, there is in his lines a high degree of universality. Such universality should not be mistaken, however, for the colourless common denominator often defined by Western humanism. Walcott's universality does not lie in the so-called "ageless nature of mankind" but in his own precise, circumscribed and deeply-rooted experience in the small-village culture of Castries with its unique mixture of contrasting traditions. Walcott can look fruitfully on the "other life" of his childhood and youth because he is ready to accept its particulars and because he now sees himself as a native of St. Lucia first, a "citizen of the world" second. He is thus beginning to achieve a solution to the dilemma of the Third World artist which he had described as "the natural terror of losing touch with the tribal truth and the natural ambition for universal recognition." After rendering in prose (dramatic or otherwise), in *Dream on Monkey Mountain*, the very *tone* of his people's experience, he has succeeded, in *Another Life*, in creating a poetic language which is tonally one with that of his people, which is deeply attuned to his personal growth and yet immediately universal. This is a more important achievement than

restoring dialect as the only authentic alternative to classical English. It proposes an original strategy towards the development of literature as global cultural synthesis; it opens a path not too remote from the prophetic vision that it takes another Caribbean genius, Wilson Harris, to create.

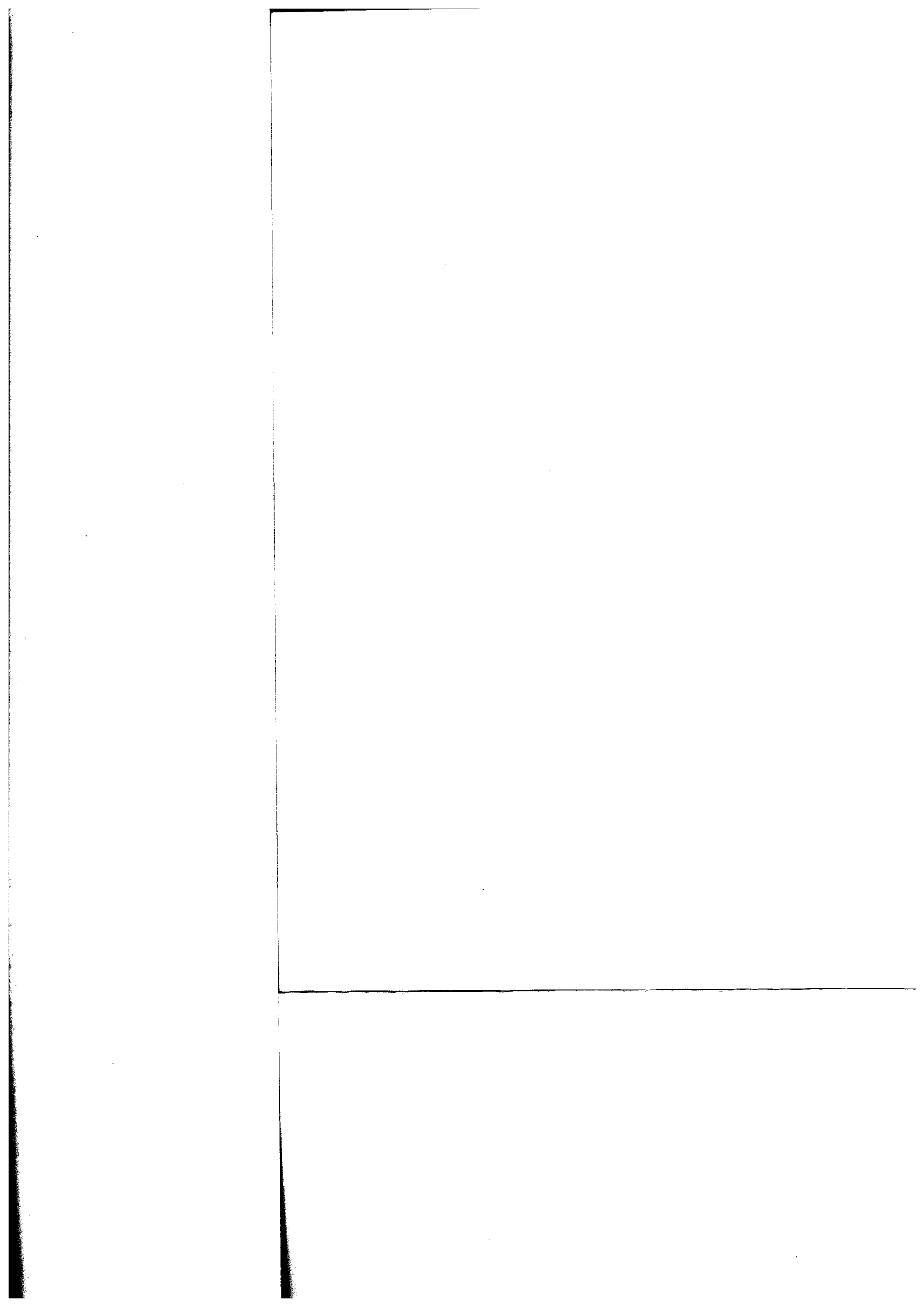
¹ Derek Walcott, *Another Life* (London : Cape, 1973).

² *In a Green Night*, first published 1962 (London : Cape, 1969), p. 78.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁴ Derek Walcott, from "Exile" in *The Gulf and Other Poems* (London : Cape, 1969), p. 21.

⁵ *Dream on Monkey Mountain and Other Plays*, (New-York : Farrar Strauss of Giradoux, 1970), p. 6.



V. S. NAIPAUL'S FREE STATEMENT

Alastair Niven

I remember commenting after I had read *The Mimic Men* a few years ago that I doubted if V. S. Naipaul could write another novel. He seemed to have advanced to a point of such absolute emotional bleakness that I could not see how he could continue the self-exploratory process that the creation of fiction normally entails. I was sure that his writing future must lie in documentary journalism where his special gifts of detached observation and neutrality could still find expression. Within a short time of my prophecy I was proved wrong by the publication of *In A Free State*¹: if not exactly a novel it was largely fiction and had a structural unity which made it far more than a random collection of short stories. Yet how wrong was I? *In A Free State* crystallizes and perfects that desolation which I and many others had recognized in *The Mimic Men*, but it does not radically alter it. Naipaul has produced a statement about freedom in which I can only liken his own rôle to that of an abandoned capsule in space, complete and entire in its own right but condemned to circle unattached around the circumference of existence, tied to nothing, serving no purpose. How has Naipaul arrived at this un-Forsterian position of total disconnection?

The clue may lie in the circumstances of his upbringing. Naipaul was born in 1932 in Trinidad, the second of seven children whose origins were in India. The Naipaul family is of brahmin caste and I believe this to be an essential piece of background knowledge, for the brahmins are the highest caste of Hindu society, essentially aristocratic, inately patrician, often poor yet spiritually and metaphysically superior to many of the maharajahs. For all his detachment and disorientation I think a kind of egotistical self-confidence finally triumphs in all Naipaul's writings. He is utterly brahmin in his revulsion at physical excess—in each of the three principal episodes in

In A Free State we find him harping on degeneration of the body, going to fat, over-eating—and he is utterly brahmin, too, in his distaste for physical squalor. Think of the emphasis on that word “spoil” in “Tell Me Who to Kill” and the narrator’s disgust at the cockroaches and filth in his brother’s kitchen. When, in his earlier book *An Area of Darkness*, Naipaul writes about a trip he had made to India to seek some sense of personal identification with his ancestors’ country he cannot overcome the sheer nausea he feels at the pervading smells wherever he goes or his horror at seeing not one but masses of people defecating publicly. In the book some of you have been reading this same nausea is welling up just below the surface, the product of a sense of brahminical self-purity. The paradox, inevitably, is that he is more intimately alive to human smells, to sweat marks, to armpits and private parts than a thoroughly dispassionate observer would be. Yet Naipaul, though brahmin by temperament, is not Hindu by commitment. If he were a religious writer we would not have before us such a bleak and ultimately loveless document of despair as I believe *In A Free State* to be.

In his early novels Naipaul places great value on human strength of character as a kind of passport to tolerable living. Since these first books Naipaul has retreated further and further into a private world of almost clinical detachment. His prose style has become lucid and fastidious and his control over the form of his books absolute, so that one may seriously advance his name as the most accomplished prose stylist now writing in English. But I want to ask the question—rhetorically, for I do not intend to answer it now—“Has this absolute control of form and language somehow emptied his writing of any real humanity or sympathy?” May not, alternatively, a sense of personal desolation, of dismay, of—to use favourite words of Naipaul himself—distress and frenzy, be the fit subject for mid-twentieth-century writing? Does a writer *have* to love his fellow-man? Is Naipaul not really saying to us “Tell Me Who to Hate”?

In A Free State is composed of five separate episodes. You may have been bothered by the abrupt change of setting between the different episodes, though both the Prologue and the Epilogue concern the narrator arriving, first by ship and then by plane, in Egypt. Why Egypt? I think if we ask that we shall begin to see something of the basic unity of design that is essential to an appreciation of the book. In Egypt are met the Empires of the world. To the north lies Greece, from which country and culture the book starts off (“The Tramp at Piraeus”). To the south lies the vastness of Africa, ethnically united to some extent but culturally and politically a conglomeration of systems. To the east is the Orient: India, but also, as Naipaul reminds us in the Epilogue, China. He introduces us in the closing pages to a hundred anonymous Chinese, members of a circus—a wonderful comic touch, for they are the next players in the Imperial game. Egypt has had its empire, as the Pyramids testify; Europe has come and gone—and remember that the narrator comments on a ship called the *Leonardo da Vinci*, highspot of European culture as the Pyramids are the great cultural expression

of Egyptian; the Indians have left their mark, as the merchant class; and just beyond is the untapped but perhaps one day threatening millions of black Africa.

Peonies, China! So many empires had come here. Not far from where we were was the colossus on whose shin the Emperor Hadrian had caused to be carved verses in praise of himself, to commemorate his visit. On the other bank, not far from the Winter Palace, was a stone with a rougher Roman inscription marking the southern limit of the Empire, defining an area of retreat. Now another, more remote empire was announcing itself. (pp. 245-246)

This is a book about empire; it is about private feelings too. Naipaul's Prologue prefigures and his Epilogue rounds off a vision of human history in which the individual, of whatever race (Hindu, like Santosh in the first story; West Indian, like the narrator of the second; European, like Bobby and Linda in the third), is manipulated by the impersonal forces of history. Societies change but their aggressiveness towards the individual remains constant. This is epitomized in the grotesque act of cruelty to the tramp in the opening episode, watched with callous neutrality by the international clientèle aboard this Ship of Fools. Naipaul knows the historic dangers of his own detachment and if there is compassion in his book it is for the utter desolation of his own awareness.

Thematic links between the three principal episodes are fairly obvious in that each concerns the predicament of a member of one culture when he is uprooted and placed within the confines of another. The process is at its most complex in the title story, *In A Free State* itself, for Bobby and Linda inhabit a world that (rather like Forster's club-house in *A Passage to India*) has transported the rituals of England out to Africa, rituals which Africa herself has learnt to mimic, parody, caricature or make grotesque. Let us look at "One out of Many," the first story. It opens, you will recall, with a definition of the narrator's status :

I am now an American citizen and I live in Washington, capital of the world. Many people, both here and in India, will feel that I have done well. But. (p. 21)

That "But" gives us the entrée to the story that Santosh has to tell. He tells it with immense control and self-awareness, clinical qualities, you may feel, for the simple warm-hearted rather frightened man who cannot even control himself in an aeroplane lavatory. The very detachment with which Santosh goes over his story is surely quite intentional, for the story itself chronicles the terrible loss of private happiness which growing self-awareness and the ability to articulate that self-awareness brings about. In Santosh's development from warmly ignorant peasant sleeping on the Bombay pavements to the Americanized bourgeois at the end of the story who can no longer feel, or wish to understand or to learn anything new, is an image of

Naipaul's own intellectual development. Not that he was ever an illiterate on the Bombay streets, but he moves from the humanity and group comedy of his first novels to the isolation and pervasive sense of futility of the recent books.

Santosh does, at the start of the story, have a sense of his own personality, even if he later looks back to a time when "I was once part of the flow, never thinking of myself as a presence." "O father," he says on arriving in Washington, "what was this place I had come to?" He has a sense of his ancestry, a knowledge of his place in a great scheme of things which he can recognize and accept. His lot is to sleep under the sky in Bombay. He can understand that, but he cannot understand the painted sky of the corridor in the apartment block in Washington. Naipaul extracts maximum comedy out of the awkwardness of this smelly, unkempt Indian at loose in sophisticated Washington, and I would not wish to kill the humour of this by over-analysing it. Suffice to say that it is an utterly fair-minded comedy, as alive to the silliness of the hippies with their specious Eastern culture as it is to the Chaplin-like figure of Santosh. I find myself using a film parallel—and Naipaul, both in this story and in the other two, uses film as a means of bringing home to us the central ambiguity in all the stories of what is dream and what is reality :

These trips to the supermarket were my only outings, and I was always glad to get back to the apartment. The work there was light. I watched a lot of television and my English improved. I grew to like certain commercials very much. It was in these commercials I saw the Americans whom in real life I so seldom saw and knew only by their gas-lamps. Up there in the apartment, with a view of the white domes and towers and greenery of the famous city, I entered the homes of the Americans and saw them cleaning those homes. I saw them cleaning floors and dishes. I saw them buying clothes and cleaning clothes, buying motor cars and cleaning motor cars. I saw them cleaning, cleaning.

The effect of all this television on me was curious. If by some chance I saw an American on the street I tried to fit him or her into the commercials; and I felt I had caught the person in an interval between his television duties. So to some extent Americans have remained to me, as people not quite real, as people temporarily absent from television. (p. 33)

Like the narrator in "Tell Me Who to Kill" who sees his brother as a kind of reincarnate Errol Flynn (except he can't spell the name properly), Santosh finds himself getting an increasing sense that only he is real and that he inhabits a world in which everything else is false or imitating reality. Bobby and Linda feel the same: each town they enter on their journey to the Southern Collectorate looks like a film set. Is Naipaul not writing of the state of twentieth-century life in which the boundaries between real behaviour, acting as we feel with all integrity we must, have not clearly been marked off from imitative behaviour, acting as we are programmed to act? We imitate the adverts on the telly, not they us. And in the colonial situation the African imitates his master (think of the immaculately dressed, beautifully

accented, but totally illiterate servant Peter in *In A Free State*) without any understanding of why he is doing it.

Santosh's story is about the stages of his self-discovery, his growth towards maturity and to the freedom he has always desired. The irony of this freedom needs no emphasis: he has exchanged the oblivious lack of ambition of the Bombay streetdweller for the perks of western urban life, and it has brought no joy, only an awareness of self-cheapening. The stages of this progression are marked by a series of small dramatic moments, a look in the mirror, a new suit that does not fit, a meeting with a dope addict, a misplaced word in a conversation (like "sahib" on page 48). Naipaul is the master of the telling detail, selecting his descriptive matter so rigorously that literally nothing is left over as flabby padding. He pares his own language down to its spare essentials and exactly renders the right word at the right time. One small example: look how Santosh's own vocabulary changes as he chronicles the stages of his "awakening." When he arrives in Washington the blacks are for him "hubshis" and he sees no *merit* in his master's eyes, yet by the end he is talking freely of pants and gasoline. It is not a simple case of swapping one culture for another: Naipaul's vision is much more complex. Santosh is in control of both languages by the end of the story, yet feels attached to neither. In his own words, "I am a stranger." And as the story is called "One out of Many" we may suppose that he is not alone in his feelings. Naipaul believes passionately that language must always be used with the greatest refinement and accuracy. He recognizes that through the power of language not just communities are united but people discover themselves. It can be a dangerous process, as we see with Santosh, but better than the kind of half-articulate mentality of a Doris Marshall with her "Suffafrikan ittykit." One false slip by Santosh or by the West Indians in London or by an African servant and a world of security and belonging is fractured. Naipaul has throughout this book a horror at the lack of moral control which a slovenly use of language connotes.

A concern with the control of language is obvious in "Tell Me Who to Kill." We are in a world of West Indian speech rhythms, the quick intimate patter of the adequately educated but far from intellectual immigrant. It is a world where words like "aeronautical engineering" or "bench-chemist" immediately separate one from one's origins and peers. The predicament of the Caribbean immigrant in London has been a favourite theme for West Indian writers, but Naipaul's treatment in this story is rather different from his compatriots. Whereas George Lamming, Samuel Selvon, Mustapha Matura and Michael Abbensetts write with a sense of social bitterness at the way in which the immigrant is made to feel unwelcome and always seem to come back to one point for which not even Enoch Powell can be held responsible—viz., the ghastly nature of the London climate when compared to the tropics—Naipaul is basically concerned to look at a personal situation. The narrator in this story is throughout a rather more passionate character

than Santosh, but his particular passion is hatred. In one respect at least Naipaul has probably caught a socially significant aspect of the Caribbean immigrant personality: a kind of seething unco-ordinated eventual violence. The other quality he isolates here more strongly than in either of the other stories (though it is latent in them too) is nostalgia, a powerful yearning for the country one has left behind and a recognition that attempts to reproduce it elsewhere can only end in mimicry and parody.

This story, like the first, and like the story of Bobby and Linda to come, charts by stages a loss of will, vitality and purpose in the main character. He who achieves a comfortable bank balance and opens a shop fails to sustain his moment of triumph. Just as empires only flourish for a moment, then decline and fall, so individuals lose the power to sustain their energies. Constantly in these stories we have a parallel implied between the lives of individuals and the development of empires. Santosh yearns to be free, which legally he becomes by marrying a "hubshi" wife; spiritually and even linguistically he is imprisoned. The brothers in the second story aspire to freedom and lose even their love for each other; the sacred family values of the immigrant are destroyed. In all three stories we have the spiritual and material decay partly emblemised by the actual journey that each character undertakes: Santosh's flight to Washington, the train in "Tell Me Who to Kill," the epic car ride in the title story. Each episode centres on a journey, for that is what each character is inwardly engaged upon, a journey towards a sense of home and belonging which in every case evades him.

All the journeys in this volume end without a psychological resolution or any spiritual fulfilment. The narrator of the Epilogue seems engaged on a purposeless re-enactment of the visit to Egypt in the Prologue. No reason for the return is given. The narrator observes neutrally, flaring up for a moment as he sees a man whipping another man as though the embers of compassion are not wholly dead, but then his passion flickers out and he returns to his state of rootlessness and indifference. In most cases the journeys in each section of the book will continue after we cease to observe them. Certainly this is so with Bobby and Linda in the title episode. They reach journey's end in a physical sense, scurrying for the army-surrounded compound that is their temporary base, but we must sense that both of them face years of purposeless drifting in an increasingly indifferent and probably violent continent to which they have no absolute attachment. Their story is called *In A Free State* with careful irony. Like those surrounding it, it is clearly about the nature of personal freedom. The characters in every episode of the book seem extraordinarily unattached. The narrator of the Prologue and Epilogue appears to travel alone; Santosh purchases his "hubshi" wife only to gain citizenship; the narrator of "Tell Me Who to Kill" records the severing of his bonds with his brother and his own personal isolation, though there may be just a hint of a homosexual attachment in the final paragraph. "I have my own place to go back to. Frank will take me

there when this is over." If this is so it would help to bridge the gap between this story and *In A Free State* itself, where the central character Bobby experiences relationships only through casual pick-ups and hesitant flirtations. The only marriage we are really given in the book is that of Linda and her husband Martin, and that is a hollow shell of middle-aged sterility in which, significantly, there appear to be no children. The characters in these stories have no meaningful commitments to other human beings and yet gain no advantage from their freedom.

A more specific indication of the title is a political one, for the action of each episode takes place in an apparently free nation. Egypt, independent but having to fight to preserve this freedom; the United States (significantly Washington, the very capital of the world's freedom, one might suggest—yet is it? Santosh would hardly agree, and certainly the resentful "hubshis" with their "Black is beautiful" slogans would not agree); there is London, freedom personified if it were not for the hostile tension and the long impersonal streets. And there is the carefully unnamed African state in which the main story takes place. It is newly independent, but this independence is already fragmenting, being converted from a celebration of freedom into a ghastly re-enactment of tribal dissension. In each story, then, the setting is that of a free state, but in each case the freedom of that state is menaced by a real political threat. Egypt is in a state of war, as the final sentences of the book remind us; Washington is a well of racial conflict with not just the blacks but the hippies representing the disorder that threatens to disrupt the capital city; London seethes with the pent-up resentments of the immigrant, only awaiting the sign that will Tell Him Who to Kill; and the African state is threatened by a total collapse of order and control. Which threat, we might say now, has perhaps been realized if we see that the country on which Naipaul's free state is most directly modelled must be Uganda.

The story opens as though a folk tale was about to be unfolded. "In this country in Africa there was a president and there was also a king." A folk tale usually shows in miniature, through the actions of its characters, some universally applicable moral truths. I am sure that one way we could approach *In A Free State* would be to recognize that the journey undertaken by Bobby and Linda as they move southwards is a kind of folk tale allegory. The journey away from the capital takes Bobby and Linda to the various types of Africa—through rainforests, mountains, dusty plains and open savannah land, to a fading colonial hotel, Indian-dominated towns, isolated mud-hut villages and eventually to the abandoned palace of the murdered king. Whatever Africa we think of, Negro, Arab or white, hot or wet, live with wildlife and insects and creepers, or dead with a terrible pervasive numbness, we will find it at some point in this book.

At the start of the story we are in the capital city. The city Naipaul describes is all façade ("décor" is the word he uses), a gigantic film studio peopled by a few star actors like the President and milling with extras who

wear the costumes of the crowd. Everyone in this story is expected to fulfil a certain role. Bobby and Linda are described at one point as "like actors in a play, neither really listening to the other . . . fussing tremendously with the ivory-coloured suitcase, as with a stage property" (p. 112). Bobby is unacceptable to his own particular section of the community because he does not play the prescribed part : he flirts instead with black boys and wears coloured shirts. Doris Marshall speaks for all in saying that this is just not "Suffafrikan ittykit"; it is not "done." Bobby betrays (rather like Fielding in *A Passage to India*) the expectations of his class, even, we might say, his caste.

The absurdity of the white people in the story is allied to the impassive arrogance of the black. The whites are seen in as disgusted a manner as the blacks—marionette figures, their broken limbs and plaster-casts and flabby bodies clear evidence of decay and disintegration. The Africans are physically superb in most cases—the exceptions are the army personnel whose access to European life is more intimate than the rest of the population and hence they look fatter and uglier. But the physical excellence of the African is invariably matched by a mental emptiness which is both threatening and inscrutable. I leave it to you to decide whether Naipaul's attitudes are patronizing towards the African, lumping the whole stock together as ethnically dumb and unassertive. If we take that line we must not forget Bobby's admission that after his nervous breakdown "Africa saved my life," (p. 116) and that for all its oppressiveness it is a kind of home to him and to Linda and to the colonel. Africa cannot be separated from the African.

As Bobby and Linda travel south their conversation goes through as many phases of emotion as the landscape around them changes its identity. It starts with impersonal talk about the political situation, with an implied assumption, soon to be broken down, that the wogs are at it again whilst the world-weary British look on indulgently at the native folly. This separation between "them" and "us" must break down for this *is* an independent country and the Bobbys and Lindas no longer control its reins of power. The conversation takes on a tone of panic as the menace grows. Remember that in passages of the story a helicopter hovers hawk-like overhead; in other passages men dash mysteriously from the bush and then merge back into it; army trucks lie just ahead; the searchers for the fleeing king are all around. This apparently desolate landscape is in fact peopled by a nation of watchers and trackers. In the distance can be heard the throbbing of drums or the howl of dogs or the yak-yak-yak of the helicopter. Linda suspects that the forest and mountains conceal the most hideous rituals, what Conrad calls unspeakable rites. As a barrier against their fear the only defence that Bobby and Linda have is the certainty of their shared language. They can parody Doris Marshall's speech and smile over complicated African names. But it is a fragile satisfaction to share a language that is foreign to the whole country through which they travel.

And language proves inadequate cover when other tensions of a non-political kind spring up between them. Naipaul is careful to show the sexual nature not only of Bobby but of Linda. She is predatory, a colonial wife for whom one night of adultery is a kind of thrilling violation of the social code, but not too serious a violation. Martin, her husband, probably won't find out and if he does, so what? At first glance it might seem that Naipaul is straying into territory already fully charted by Somerset Maugham, the most famous recorder of adulterous affairs in colonial society. Naipaul himself mentions Maugham in the story, but his own writing is altogether tougher, totally devoid of the stock response. The scene in which Linda breaks up a budding flirtation between Bobby and the young waiter Carolus shows a despair and human meanness on all sides that Maugham may perhaps have demonstrated in his private life but which he would have sentimentalized and made theatrically glamorous in his stories. The whole journey in this novel is on one level a metaphor for inadequate sexual relationships, Bobby and Linda coming together, touching for a moment, but separating before the true moment of contact has been made. There is great pity in Naipaul's vision here, as though he yearns for contact and love but realizes the inevitable gulfs. At the end of the story Bobby and Linda have endured each other for long enough, we feel: no powerful fusion of bodies or wills has been effected on their journey.

A more meaningful comparison than that of Naipaul and Maugham would be to invoke Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, as Naipaul himself does on page 161 when Bobby says "I hate that book, don't you?" He hates it because, perhaps, it is too accurate for him to bear. I cannot leave *In A Free State* without suggesting that it achieves for the post-colonial period in Africa what Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* did for the Imperial period at its height. The motif of the journey is the same as that used by Conrad so that we feel that the further south that Bobby and Linda travel or, in Conrad's book, the further up the Congo River that Marlow goes, the more layers of "civilized" existence are being peeled away. This is a journey back to primeval Africa, through the land of the forest people to the ancient kingdom which antedates colonialism by many centuries. Naipaul, like Conrad, suggests that the Imperial experience analysed here is but a re-enactment of what many empires have endured before. Naipaul invokes Greece, Egypt, India and China, Conrad invokes Rome and Belgium, but both novelists suggest the immensity of history and the depths of uncivilization which lie just below the surface of their books. And both writers set their tales at the heart of the continent where the equator crosses it.

An emotional neutrality exists in *In A Free State* which offers neither consolation nor even the satisfying bitterness of social criticism. Naipaul here perfects his negativism, a free statement in the sense that his attitude to humanity seems to have cut all the connecting links with the conventional linchpins of liberalism, compassion or concern. He may wish that this was not the case, but for this stage of his writing career he can say no other.

The narrator floats without ties of any sort. Naipaul here distils the essence of non-commitment. I risk a lot and repeat my wrong prophecy of a few years ago. Can there be another novel in him? I sense not, though since his one attachment may be to his art I suspect that time will eventually prove me wrong.

¹ V. S. Naipaul, *In a Free State*, first published 1971 (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1973). All references are to the paperback edition.

TOWARDS A HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

Albert Gérard

In the course of the last dozen years or so, the main subject of my research has been the history of creative writing in Subsaharan Africa. This is a vast stretch of almost virgin territory still to be mapped out. But the most surprising blank I have come across is the total absence of any attempt at providing a comprehensive history of poetry, drama and prose fiction in the various languages of the Republic of South Africa. Yet that country occupies what is probably a unique position among industrially developed nations in having produced, in the last century and a half, an impressive body of creative writing in nine different languages, two of which—English and Afrikaans—are European, while the other seven are the officially recognized Bantu languages.

True, there are several excellent book-length accounts of Afrikaans literature.¹ In the course of the last few years historical surveys have been provided for literature in Xhosa² and in Zulu;³ the evolution of imaginative literature in Southern Sotho has also been studied, but without any endeavour to analyse the distinction between the works that were and still are produced and published in Lesotho itself, and those that come from authors who can be considered South Africans.⁴ Finally, my queries have failed to reveal the existence of any book dealing with South African literature in English in a comprehensive diachronic way.⁵

There are of course reasons for this lack of any coordinated approach. It is not necessary to recall that since the foundation of the Union in 1910, the relations between the various ethnic groups that constitute the population of the country have been increasingly controlled by the divisive concept of apartheid. The result was the development of a definite turn of mind which tends to view the South African experience and its literary expressions in terms of segregation rather than symbiosis.

But the major stumbling-block is probably connected with language. Many South African intellectuals, white and non-white, are practically bilingual, fluent in English and in Afrikaans; non-white intellectuals will often have mastered one or two vernacular languages as well. But a fully informed and competent account of South African literature can only arise as the outcome of carefully allocated and organized team-work. It is highly significant that no committee of the various departments concerned has ever been set up in any South African university for that purpose.

I am certainly inordinately incompetent for that sort of job. Although I have a decent knowledge of English, I can read Afrikaans only with great difficulty, and I don't have the haziest notion of African languages. What I want to do here is to take things at a very elementary level, using mostly secondary sources, in order to suggest that there is something to be said for the notion that the various trends in South African literature are more closely knit together than is usually assumed, and that a promising case can be made for viewing them in their relationships and parallels rather than in their separation and contrasts.

Although white settlement in South Africa began in the middle of the seventeenth century, and although culture contact between black and white had become operative by the late eighteenth century, truly creative writing by authors born on African soil did not make a start on any significant scale until the early years of the twentieth century.

Historians usually begin their accounts with Thomas Pringle (1784-1834), but he was born in Scotland and did not spend more than fifteen years on the black continent. In fact, three pregnant events occurred in the course of the nineteenth century.

First came the foundation of the Lovedale School by the Glasgow Missionary Society in the 1820s. This was established among the southernmost Bantu-speaking tribe, the Xhosa. After a few decades the school proved a hatching-ground for such writers as Tiyo Soga (1829-1878), who produced many hymns in the Xhosa language, while collecting samples of oral art (fables, legends, proverbs, praises, and genealogies). His translation of the first part of *The Pilgrim's Progress*, published in 1867, set the standard for literary Xhosa.

The second trend was the emergence of Cape Dutch as a substantive language under the name Afrikaans. This was accomplished by the so-called *Eerste Taalbeweging* (First Language Movement) which arose around 1875 as a reaction against the cultural supremacy of Dutch in official life. The products were far from impressive, but the pioneers of the movement laid the foundations for the subsequent development and flowering of creative writing in Afrikaans.

Finally, in 1883, there appeared *The Story of an African Farm*, the now classic tale of the first white novelist born in Africa, who also happened to be a woman, Olive Schreiner (1862-1920). Here as in her other works,

the author showed herself aware, however dimly, of the tragic problems that were bound to arise from the increasingly close coexistence of British, Boer and Bantu.

The antagonisms generated by this complex relationship came to a head at the turn of the century in the Boer Wars (1899-1902). This, of course, was a conflict between Afrikaners and Britishers, but it also appeared as a moment of danger and opportunity for the literate black élite that had been allowed to emerge in missionary schools thanks to the climate of comparative tolerance and liberalism prevailing in the British-controlled Cape Province. The effervescence of those times of strife was most impressively reflected in the journalism of a group of Xhosa intellectuals born in the 1850s, and including John Tengo Jabavu (1859-1921), John Knox Bokwe (1855-1922) and Walter Rubusana (1858-1916).

Yet the emergence of creative writing, both in Afrikaans and in the vernaculars proved to be the result of, and a compensation for, military and political defeats.

Military defeat fanned Afrikaner nationalism not only in a political, but also in a linguistic and literary sense. The *Tweede Taalbeweging* (Second Language Movement) began in 1905 under the leadership of such poets as Jan F. W. Celliers (1865-1940), Eugène Marais (1871-1936), J. D. Du Toit (1877-1953) and C. L. Leipoldt (1880-1947). It testified to the victory of Afrikaans over Dutch. At the same time the somewhat didactic parochialism of the first movement made room for a heightened perception of the wider significance which the local experience of strife and defeat, of pride and obstinacy in the face of a historic challenge was capable of bearing.

But the military defeat of the Boers was granted another type of compensation as well. In the negotiations leading to the constitution of the Union in 1910, the British government agreed to a compromise on the racial issue: while a qualified, non-racial franchise was maintained in the Cape Province and Natal, suffrage remained restricted to whites in the former Boer Republics of Transvaal and the Orange Free State. This was effected despite obdurate but vain opposition from the black élite, whose backbone was constituted by the Xhosa intellectuals already mentioned, but which also included a few younger leaders of Zulu and Tswana origin, born in the 1870s. Disillusionment turned them all away from politics. By the end of the first World War, the South African Native National Congress—founded in 1912—had disintegrated. Its members and sympathizers had turned to other pursuits. Some of them devoted themselves to the promotion of education: Fort Hare College was inaugurated in 1916. Others turned to creative writing in a variety of ways: John L. Dube (1870-1949), who had been the first President of the Congress, was to write the first novel in Zulu, which appeared in 1930; Samuel E. K. Mqhayi (1875-1945) provided the first work of original prose fiction in Xhosa, a tale published in 1914 and intended to vindicate native judiciary customs as against western procedure;

Solomon T. Plaatje (1878-1932), a journalist of Tswana origin, authored the first novel in English by a black South African writer; entitled *Mhudi*, it was not published until 1930, although it had been written toward 1916; this work is all the more important as there was an almost complete dearth of creative literature by English-speaking South Africans at the time.

Indeed, while the military victory of the British kindled a tremendous outburst of imaginative activity in Afrikaans in the first two decades of the century, and while the political victory of the Afrikaners in racial matters led to a remarkable growth and diversification of vernacular, especially Xhosa, writing in the early 1920s, only one English writer of any interest emerged during the whole period. This was Sarah Gertrude Millin (1889-1968). From *God's Stepchildren* (1924) to *King of the Bastards* (1950), one major element in her admittedly wide range of interests was the drama of miscegenation, which she handled with genuine insight and compassion, but always in order to warn against the dangers and sorrows of racially mixed marriages.

The most important single factor that determined the literary evolution of South Africa from the late 1920s was the process that has been called "the rise of Afrikanerdom."

The Second Language Movement had been an act of cultural self-preservation in the face of military defeat. But the Afrikaners had other grievances as well. "At the end of the First World War," says Colin Legum, "all mining, trading, banking and commerce; the liberal professions and the high-grade clerical jobs; skilled work and craftsmanship were in the hands of non-Afrikaners." The Afrikaners "had clung too long to an impoverished land system. They preferred the education of the Old Testament to that of the New World; they abhorred the cities and the mines 'of the English' and they looked upon commerce, trade and mining as 'foreign.' The multiplying family turned sub-divided farms into dust-bowls; and harsh poverty turned proud minds resentful and vengeful."⁶ This experience was reflected in the romantic nationalism of the poets of the Second Movement and in the realistic prose fiction of such contemporaries as Jochem van Bruggen (1881-1957) and D. F. Malherbe (b. 1881). But in their obdurate determination to improve their status the more ambitious and forward-looking elements in the Afrikaner population hastened to catch up with the times after World War I. They turned away from the traditional pastoral way of life, they participated in the industrial growth of the country, they developed a passion for education. They availed themselves of their demographic superiority—as exemplified in the victory of the Nationalist Party at the 1924 elections—to strengthen segregational institutions and they managed to have Afrikaans recognized as an official language on a par with English in 1925.

The growing influence of the Afrikaner population and language in the wider context of South African life, and the mutations within Afrikaner

society, reverberated in Afrikaans literature, in the poetry and fiction of the so-called *Dertigers* (the generation of the 1930s). These were men (and one woman) born in the decade preceding World War I. They included such poets as N. P. Van Wyk Louw (b. 1906) and W. E. G. Louw (b. 1913), and such novelists as C. M. Van den Heever (1902-1957) and C. H. Kuhn (b. 1903).

The writers of the thirties were a far more sophisticated group than their elders had been. As Rob Antonissen put it, "they claimed freedom of independent research in opposition to Calvinistic conservatism. In the face of growing conformism and standardization, these writers upheld the idea of an intellectual élite. Their self-analysis, religious unrest, acceptance and proclamation of universal humanism, furnish the themes of their idealistic, emotional art." ⁷

At a time, then, when the growing power of the Afrikaners enabled them to impose ever harsher racial laws, the appearance of a sophisticated, cosmopolitan, enlightened élite fostered some interesting literary phenomena among the generation that was born during the early years of this century.

In 1926, poet Roy Campbell (1901-1957) and novelist William Plomer (b. 1903), together with Laurence Van der Post (b. 1906), an anglophone writer of Afrikaner origin, founded a progressive bilingual journal, *Voorslag*, which aroused such hostility in respectable circles that it had to stop publication in 1927. Its three co-editors felt it advisable to leave their native country. This significant but premature endeavour brought to a temporary stop the uneasy growth of South African creative writing in English: it was not to be resumed until their contemporary, Alan Paton (b. 1903), published his widely acclaimed novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, twenty years later.

Another interesting trend was the intrusion of the racial theme in Afrikaans fiction, which, until then, had been mainly preoccupied with the Boer-British relationship, and had seen the black man as either a devil or a clown. In 1935 C. H. Kuhn, writing under the pseudonym of Mikro, started a series of novels which make him the first Afrikaans writer to deal with the Coloured people, not as a faceless community of stock characters, but as individual men and women, even though, as black critic Ezekiel Mphahlele once put it, "like Sarah Gertrude Millin, [he] depicts grovelling, degenerate Coloured labour squatters . . . and . . . dislikes mixed blood." ⁸

The growth of Afrikaans writing in the thirties was only paralleled by the growth of vernacular literature, which was likewise achieved by authors born in the early years of this century. Xhosa literature reached its apex with the poetry of James J. R. Jolobe (b. 1902) and a master piece of prose fiction by Archibald C. Jordan (1906-1960). While Dube was launching the Zulu novel, two younger Zulu authors, the brothers R. R. R. Dhlomo (b. 1901) and H. I. E. Dhlomo (1905-1956) tried their hand in English, but the elder soon turned back to his mother tongue, in which he wrote a number of vivid historical novels dealing with the vicissitudes of the Zulu nation and its leaders in the nineteenth century. At the same time, Zulu poet,

B. W. Vilakazi (1906-1947), after experimenting with European poetic forms in Zulu returned to the traditional manner of oral art, applied to modern topics and written poetry.

To a large extent, the development of vernacular imaginative writing throughout British Africa during the decade preceding World War II was a logical outcome of Protestant missionary policy, whose leading principle it was that every man should receive the word of God in his language. Hence the need for reducing African languages to writing, and for translating the Bible. But once literacy was achieved, it could be put to a great variety of purposes—and so it was. In 1926, a missionary conference held at Le Zoute (Belgium) led to the creation of the International Committee on Christian Literature for Africa, whose purpose was to promote the writing and publication, not solely of religious and educational books, but also of purely literary works. And, starting in 1930, the International African Institute—which had been founded in London in 1928—organized yearly competitions: from the beginning to 1940, prizes were awarded to writers in some 30 languages throughout black Africa. Other steps were taken locally by persons interested in the promotion of vernacular authorship. One was the May Esther Bedford Competition, whose prize was awarded for the first time in 1936. In 1936 too the University of the Witwatersrand launched its Bantu Treasury series. And in 1936 and 1937 two conferences of South African vernacular writers were convened under the aegis of the Lovedale Institution.

The next stage in the seizing of power by the Afrikaner community—the victory of Dr. Malan's Nationalist Party in 1948—crystallized a development that resulted in many interesting changes in the literary physiognomy of the country after World War II.

For one thing, educational progress among Afrikaners created an intellectual élite whose views about race, among other things, were not always in conformity with the government's policy of total apartheid. True, many Afrikaans writers showed little concern with the social and racial issues that beset the country. But Uys Krige (b. 1910) was the first to present the black man as a genuine human individual rather than an object of paternalistic condescension, and his example was followed in some plays by Dirk Opperman (b. 1914), and in the novels of Jan S. Rabie (b. 1920). Some of the most vigorous protest against the establishment of censorship in 1963 came from as uncommitted a writer as W. A. de Klerk (b. 1917).

Secondly, whereas encouragement to vernacular writing had so far come mainly from the British side, the new educational policy, culminating in the notorious Bantu Education Act of 1953, strongly increased the vernacular reading audience through its insistence on the use of the children's mother tongues as the "most important secular subject and the only medium of instruction."⁹ This widened the market for vernacular writing to such proportions that the publishing of imaginative vernacular literature at the

low prices which blacks can afford to pay became, almost overnight, a sound business proposition. Since the mid-fifties, a steady flow of poetry, drama and fiction has poured forth from South African Presses, not only in the senior literary languages (Xhosa and Zulu), but also in Southern Sotho—which had started in Basutoland early in this century, but which now set up, as it were, a South African branch with such writers as S. M. Mofokeng (1923-1957)—and in the four other African languages officially recognized in the Republic, namely Tsonga, Northern Sotho (or Pedi), Venda and Tswana. This would be a highly felicitous development were it not that the systematic downgrading of Bantu education after 1953, combined with the effects of censorship as promulgated in the Publications and Entertainments Act of 1963, is, to say the least, not conducive to literary excellence.

It will be the task of future historians to ascertain how far the sudden outburst of English writing in post-war South Africa can be regarded as a response to the challenge of Afrikaner supremacy. Interestingly enough, the renewal was launched in collections of short stories published in the forties by two non-white writers born in 1919, Peter Abrahams and Ezekiel Mphahlele. The former's novel, *Mine Boy* (1946), was the first African novel in any language to capture world-wide attention. Through the well-known Jim-goes-to-Jo'burg motif, which had been endlessly rehashed by vernacular authors, it dealt with the demoralization wrought among non-whites by the conditions prevailing in the native locations around big industrial cities. As to Mphahlele, who was a teacher, he left South Africa in disgusted protest at the Bantu Education Act and has since been tirelessly and most fruitfully engaged in working for the promotion of creative writing throughout former British Africa.

Their example was soon followed by a host of slightly younger writers, whites and non-whites, born in the 1920s. On the black side, they include such well-known authors as storyteller Can Themba (1924-1969), poet Dennis Brutus (b. 1924), novelist Alex La Guma (b. 1925) and playwright and critic Lewis Nkosi (b. 1936). On the white side, novelists Nadine Gordimer (b. 1923) and Dan Jacobson (b. 1929) and dramatist Athol Fugard (b. 1938). All those writers, whatever their skin colour, have two things in common. First, they are all committed, much more deeply than any Afrikaans author, to the outspoken imaginative discussion of the effects, ethical and psychological, of racialism and apartheid on white and non-white alike. Secondly, and as a result, they are seldom liked in official circles; it is true, as Mphahlele observes, that "the white writer can still get away with a lot in South Africa"¹⁰; yet there is none of those English-speaking writers, whether black or white, but has had some opportunity to get closer acquaintance with the South African judiciary: some have been imprisoned, others have lived in home confinement, Paton and Fugard cannot travel abroad, many of their works are banned in the Republic, and as at present, most of them live in exile.

It seems clear that the evolution of South African literature as a whole, since its inception, has been mainly conditioned by the attitudes of the Afrikaner section of the population. Its dynamism, which is all too conspicuous in the political field, has also been at work in the steady growth and increasing diversification of Afrikaans writing. The course of the vernacular literatures produced by black writers has been decisively influenced by the legislation taken by nationalist governments in order to implement their segregationist programme. As to literature in English, it seems to have finally reached its flowering after World War II in the white authors' need to proclaim their anxiety and moral indignation, and in the black authors' determination to make the plight of their people known to the international audience.

At present, literary South Africa is in a position roughly and uncomfortably similar to that of Hitler's Third Reich, with most of those writers whose work can be known internationally, living in exile. This is an unpleasant quandary, and it is likely that much of the change that is bound to occur will depend on the attitudes of the younger generation of the Afrikaner intelligentsia.

¹ See for example Rob Antonissen, *Die Afrikaanse Letterkunde van Aanvang tot Hede* (Cape Town, n.d.), G. Dekker, *Afrikaanse Literatuurgeskiedenis* (Cape Town, n.d.), and - in Dutch - A. Coetzee, *De hedendaagse Afrikaanse Letterkunde* (Bruges, 1963).

² A. C. Jordan, *Towards an African Literature. The Emergence of Literary Form in Xhosa* (Berkeley, 1973). This is a welcome reprint of several pioneering articles first published in *South African Outlook* (1945) and *Africa South* (1957-1960). See also Albert S. Gérard, *Four African Literatures: Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* (Berkeley, 1971), pp. 21-100 and B. E. N. Mahlasela, *A General Survey of Xhosa Literature from its Early Beginnings in the 1800's to the Present* (Grahamstown, 1973).

³ C. L. S. Nyembezi, *A Review of Zulu Literature* (Durban: University of Natal Press, 1961). See also Gérard, *op. cit.*, pp. 181-270.

⁴ On Southern Sotho writing, see Gérard, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-180.

⁵ See however Vladimir Klima, *South African Prose Fiction in English* (Prague, 1971).

⁶ Colin Legum, (ed.) *Africa Handbook* (Harmondsworth, 1969), pp. 486-487.

⁷ Rob Antonissen, article on "Afrikaans Literature" in *Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th Century*, vol. I (New York, 1967).

⁸ Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image* (New York, 1962), p. 108.

⁹ From a pamphlet issued by the Afrikaner Institute for Christian National Education, quoted in Brian Bunting, *The Rise of the South African Reich* (Harmondsworth, 1964), p. 195.

¹⁰ Ezekiel Mphahlele, *Voices in the Whirlwind and Other Essays* (New York, 1972), p. 214.

XHOSA	ENGLISH (white)	ENGLISH (non-white)	AFRIKAANS	ZULU	OTHERS
Tiyo Soga (1829-1878)			S.J. Du Toit (1847-1911)		
J.K. Bokwe (1855-1922) W. Rubusana (1858-1916) J.T. Jabavu (1859-1921)	O. Schreiner (1862-1920)		J.F.W. Celliers (1865-1940)	J.L. Dube (1870-1949)	
S.E.K. Mqhayi (1875-1945)		S.T. Plaatje (1878-1932)	E. Marais (1871-1936)		
			J.D. Du Toit (1877-1953)		
	S.G. Millin (1889-1968) R. Campbell (1901-1957)		C.L. Leipoldt (1880-1947) D.F. Malherbe (1881) J. van Bruggen (1881-1957)		NORTHERN SOTHO (PEDI) E.M. Ramailo (1897-1962)
J.J.R. Jolobe (1902) G.B. Sinxo (1902-1962)	A. Paton (1903) W. Plomer (1903)		C.H. Van den Heever (1902-1957)	R.R.R. Dhlomo (1901)	
		H.I.E. Dhlomo (1905-1956)	C.H. Kuhn (1903)		TSWANA
A.C. Jordan (1906-1960)	L. Van der Post (1906)		N.P. Van Wyk (1906) U. Krige (1910) W.E.G. Louw (1913) D. Opperman (1914) D. Eybers (1915) W.A. De Klerk (1917)	B.W. Vilakazi (1906-1947)	L.D. Raditladi (1910-1971)
		P. Abrahams (1919)			TSONGA S.J. Baloyi (1914)

XHOSA	ENGLISH (white)	ENGLISH (non-white)	AFRIKAANS	ZULU	OTHERS
	N. Gordimer (1923)	E. Mphahlele (1919)	J.S. Rabie (1920)	C.L.S. Nyembezi (1919)	
	D. Jacobson (1929)	D. Brutus (1924)			VENDA
	A. Fugard (1938)	C. Themba (1924-1969)			M.E.R. Mathiva (1921)
		A. La Guma (1925)			SOUTHERN SOTHO
		L. Nkosi (1936)		M. Kunene (1930)	S.M. Mofokeng (1923-1957)

BLACK SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE IN ENGLISH, 1900-1950

T. J. Couzens

The magazine *Drum*, begun in 1951, is deservedly famous both for the ethos it created and the writers it fostered—writers such as Nat Nakasa, Can Themba, Ezekiel Mphahlele. But the popular image of black writing up to 1951 is that it consists only of the odd isolated literary event. In this view there are a few lonely milestones at odd intervals, such as Mofolo's *Chaka*,¹ Plaatje's *Mhudi*² and Dhlomo's *Valley of a Thousand Hills*.³ Peter Abrahams, for these critics, becomes the first major writer.

This picture is an unfortunate one. After the stage of "primary resistance" to colonialism, i.e. open resistance on the battlefield, blacks in South Africa resorted to other forms of resistance, taking the form, perhaps, of political organization or, sublimated, in such forms as separatist church movements where political and social grievances were articulated in religious terms. Continuous resistance to white rule has also manifested itself in continuous literary production. African literature in South Africa arises out of two major initial sources :

- 1) productions stemming from churches and missions
- 2) journalism which finds its origins, as Professor Gérard has pointed out,⁴ in 1837.

My aims in this paper are three-fold :

- 1) To show a continuous tradition of writing in English by blacks between 1900 and 1950.
- 2) To show the almost inseparable links between literature, journalism and politics in this context. In other words, literary works are not isolated events, suddenly occurring. They are part of a continuous debate, articulated in other media as well (such as the newspaper).

3) To discuss a writer who, I believe, will be seen as a major figure in South African literary history.

There are two important early writers, Sol Plaatje and John Dube, who provide a kind of model for this paper. Plaatje's recently discovered Boer War diary, written between 1899 and 1900, sets the starting point, time-wise, for this period. After the Boer War he became editor of two Tswana/English newspapers and also a founder member and secretary, in 1912, of what is now the African National Congress. Out of his journalism and out of his politics stem his two famous books, *Native Life in South Africa*, his political book, and *Mhudi*, his novel. The same nexus of politics, journalism and literature appears in the life of John Dube. He founded his famous newspaper *Ilanga Lase Natal* in 1903, and helped found the A.N.C. in 1912 (as well as founding the Ohlange Institute along the lines of Booker T. Washington's college—the influence of American black thinking on South African blacks has also been continuous since before the turn of the century). Dube's vernacular novel *Insila ka Shaka* appeared in 1930.

Plaatje was still attacking the crucial land apportionment in South Africa in newspaper articles in 1929.⁵ On 18 February, 1928, in a newspaper article, he bemoans the quality of black leadership: a letter in the same paper by the young H. I. E. Dhlomo points out the need for non-political as well as political leadership. When John Dube resigned the editorship of his newspaper there was on the paper a young columnist, R. R. R. Dhlomo, who was to become editor in the Forties. Plaatje and Dube, major figures of the period 1900-1930, almost symbolically hand over to the Dhlomo brothers, major literary and journalist figures of the Thirties and Forties. I have collected articles often written under different pseudonyms by one or other of these two from the mid-Twenties to the mid-Fifties, as well as articles by other poets and writers. Although their overt published work is small,⁶ I have collected thousands of pages of their writing.

As regards actual influence on literature, newspapers, first and foremost, provided an outlet for educated blacks: journalism gave them a reasonably stimulating occupation with status, and newspapers often printed their creative work. Newspapers probably also directly influenced their imaginative work—for good or bad. For instance, writers often wrote in the essay form. The short story, also, for obvious reasons of space, was encouraged. (The connection of the South African short story to journalism is a subject of possible interesting future research.) Further, the creative writers came to follow fairly closely the kinds of observation and main preoccupations of the newspapers. Perhaps most importantly, because newspapers are involved in public writing, public concerns and social critique, the creative writers who sprang from them tended to be concerned with public matters rather than the private wrangles of individual psychologies and "characterization" (of course, there are other reasons for this: the peculiar make-up of the South African state, it could be argued, inflicts the public on the private life to a greater than normal extent). Further, creative writers like the

Dhlomo brothers wrote under various pseudonyms which allowed for at least slight variations in style and register. For the researcher, the chronology of the newspapers is a valuable clue in the dating of a writer's works and themes. Also the newspaper chronology, or news chronology, was often the direct inspiration for particular works. For instance, "Dingaan's Day," the 16th of December, frequently inspired particular works. R. R. R. Dhlomo has a short story in the magazine *Sjambok* which is a case in point.

The two Dhlomo brothers are interesting. Both were connected with the A.N.C. Four years older, R.R.R. tended to be more conservative politically and, interestingly, wrote in Zulu. H.I.E., more radical, more nationalist (he seems to have helped Albert Luthuli win the chairmanship of the Natal A.N.C. ?), writes mainly in English, reflecting his more nationalist approach. What is interesting is the process of division of labour. Both the Dhlomos are active in the A.N.C. but do not occupy nearly as high positions as the chairmanship and secretaryship that Dube and Plaatje occupied respectively. This continuing split between political position and literary occupation is largely complete in the 1950's when the writers are mainly relatively junior members of the A.N.C.

I would now like to turn to H. I. E. Dhlomo, a major figure of the Thirties and Forties. One *caveat*, first, however. The writers of this period are heavily influenced by the English Romantics (and Shakespeare). This slightly impairs their writing (in terms of usual literary criteria). We must, however, look below the surface style to what they are trying to say. As Mark Twain has said, "Wagner's music is better than it sounds." Now, why were they influenced by the Romantics? Mazisi Kunene has suggested to me the following reasons :

- 1) the readability of the Romantics
- 2) their themes of escape.

I think one can add a third, viz. that the Romantics were the English poets hit by the impact of the industrial revolution.⁸ It is nice to be sentimental and say, as one recent reviewer did, that the poet B. W. Vilikazi, a contemporary of the Dhlomos (and incidentally related by marriage—perhaps a fourth aspect of the journalism-politics-literature nexus), is better writing rural rather than urban poetry.⁹ But these writers of the Thirties and Forties are interesting and crucial for their debate on the adaptation of blacks to urban life. This is their major interest and major contribution.

H. I. E. Dhlomo worked as a teacher in the Twenties, then as a journalist on *Bantu World*, a librarian in Germiston, near Johannesburg, and finally he moved to Durban to become assistant editor to his brother on *Ilanga Lase Natal*. His published works are only two: a play¹⁰ and a 40-page poem.¹¹ Unpublished manuscripts, which Dr. N. Visser and I discovered recently after three years' search, aside from hundreds of pages of journalism,

include thirteen plays, nine short stories, essays and a book on *Zulu Life and Thought*. Thus the sheer bulk is fairly staggering. I know of no other such bulk of literary creation by any African before 1950.

The first published work of his that I have found so far is a short story called "An Experiment in Colour,"¹² a sort of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde story, where a black man, learning science, discovers an injection for transforming skin colour. With tragic results he falls in love with a white and a black girl in his various skin colours. He eventually destroys the formula but gives a public demonstration showing the tragic tendencies of racialism. He is, however, shot by a white man who shouts, "Ons wil wit kafers in ons land bie (*sic*) nie. Waar sou ons vrou-mense wees?" ("We don't want white Kaffirs in our land. Where would our womenfolk be?").

Interesting is the note the white magazine, *The African Observer*, felt obliged to publish at the head of the story :

We publish this well-written and interesting piece of fiction by a Native author. We would, however, point out that the author's views are not necessarily those of *The African Observer*.¹³

An intimate friend of his suggested to me that he did not publish much

1) because of lack of money

2) because local white publishers would not publish his kind of criticism.¹⁴ It was perhaps tragic. His unpublished writing, full of fascinating ideas, are flawed because of the lack of a little criticism.

Dhlomo has two large themes (though this is, of course, to parody the complexity of his writing but, within the present limited space, this is unavoidable). These are :

1) the adaptation of his people to the new urban and industrial setting

2) the adaptation of the historical past and the rural life of his people to this new world.

On the first of these, he is, on numerous occasions, unashamedly urban. In *A Girl Who Killed To Save* he adopts the, at first, seemingly amazing stance that the "Xhosa suicide" was a good thing. His reason ultimately emerges in the contention that it helped rapidly to smash tribalism and helped in the process of modernization. In his play *Ntsikana*¹⁵ he also comes down on the side of the Christian modernizers against the pagan conservatives.

His range, however, is enormous (several historical plays, *Dingana*, *Cetywayo*, *Moshesh* etc., though we have not yet found his play *Shaka*, and several plays with contemporary settings), but his opposition and resistance to the political situation is continuous. He has, for instance, a play called *The Workers*¹⁶ which is largely Marxist in orientation, and is about an incipient revolution in the compound of the factory belonging to the Nigger Exploitation Slave Manufacturing Crookpany. After being dismissed from a couple of jobs for his impending separation from his wife

(and later divorce) Dhlomo became disillusioned with white liberals and attacked them violently in *The Expert*,¹⁷ the title representing all those whites who have made their money or their name by being "experts" on the "natives" and who are, underneath, totally hypocritical. For instance, one character, Professor Self, gets up at the committee meeting and says :

I stand for Bantu languages!
I turn them out like sausages!
They help to give me bread, and prove
I am an expert wise and great.

He also attacks missionaries, social workers, institutes of race relations and black collaborators. In an interesting early example he has Christ appear dressed as a common black worker, naturally to be rejected by the liberals (a technique Richard Rive was to use later in a short story).

In his poetry, too, Dhlomo was outspoken politically. For example, the poem *Drum of Africa*, published in 1944,¹⁸ is remarkably similar to the title poem of Oswald Mtshali's *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, written nearly thirty years later.

Sound the drum!
Sound the drum!
Boom!
Boom!
Beat! Beat! Beat!
Strive!
Fight!
Do or die!

Praise ye, praise them!
Praise the Spirits!
Sing ye, sing them!
Sing our Fathers!

The drum the voice of war!
A whole no parts doth mar!
One Tone without a jar!
O let it sound out far!
It stirs up all men's hearts!
'Tis king of battle arts!
Of sacred oxen hide,
The drum will e'er abide.
It speaks of our great Past,
Of first things and of last.
Despite the oppressor's din,
The day the drum will win!
Brave soul, it calls, fight on!
Strive till the work is done—
The task to set us free;
No docile cowards we,
Souls who will win or die,

And will not cringe nor cry.
 The Cause needs men will dare,
 Hold fast and not despair!
 Braves who will lead the masses
 Through life's stiff, guarded passes,
 And serve the Fatherland,
 And gain the Chosen Land.
 Though troubles envelope,
 Warbling of Afric's Hope,
 The drum will set us free!
 The drum of unity.
 The Drum of Life says, "come!"
 O men of might—the Drum!
 Yea, 'tis the drum!
 (Praise ye, Praise it)
 Yea, fight we will!
 (Sing ye, sing them)
 Strive!
 Fight!
 Save the people!
 Rise!
 March!
 Who'd be there?

In his second theme—the adaptation of African traditional life to modern life—he is not sentimental. "It is not traditional to neglect the contemporary scene," he writes.¹⁹ He has, it seems to me, a fascinating answer. One cannot artificially preserve the past as Sir Theophilus Shepstone and his policy of separate development tried to do (see, for instance, Dhlomo's play *Cetywayo*). But in a play called *The Living Dead*²⁰ he manages to fuse the ideas that the living characters are about to die, are, in a way, "dead," because they do not recognize the existence of or pay respect to their ancestors; in other words they do not understand that the dead are really living. In other words, they fail to recognize the past and fuse it with the present.

To return to the newspapers, in 1935 H. I. E. Dhlomo joined *Bantu World* and probably wrote the bulk of his dramas in the next five years. In 1936 a sixteen-year-old schoolboy began contributing poems to *Bantu World*. One was entitled "The Negro Youth."²¹

He stood alone
 A Negro youth
 What of his future?
 His cap was worn,
 This Negro youth.
 Why was he born?
 Born to lead an empty, useless life,
 Born to mar the record of his race,
 Or born to lead his race?
 Locked are the doors,

Locked—the doors of his future.
His burden to bear,
To suffer the pain of life's cruel ways,
That is why he was born.

This sixteen-year-old received terrific acclaim for his newspaper poems. It is possibly this acclaim that encouraged Peter Abrahams to pursue a career of writing.

So Plaatje and Dube handed over to R. R. R. and H. I. E. Dhlomo. Peter Abrahams appears. One of the earliest contributors to *Drum* was H. I. E. Dhlomo, with a poem called "Lindiwe Laughs," in June 1951. So the line of writers leads straight into *Drum*. The young writers could take over from H.I.E.

Sometime in January 1955, Herbert Dhlomo wrote his last article in *Ilanga Lase Natal*. Because of illness his pen is henceforth silent. On 22 October, 1955, a young columnist working for the same paper, wrote a short praise poem, "To Herbert Dhlomo,"²² in which he begged Dhlomo to write again.

H.I.E., H.I.E.,

Me and all my brothers dark,
Those that mumble in the dust,
Without a hope, without a joy,
Streaked with tears for ravaged Africa
Have, with thy silence, ceased to live.

In vain we seek the lost dream to regain,
In vain the vision yet to capture :
The Destiny of a Thousand, million dark folk
Who seek, who yearn—
Alas! A fruitless toil.

H.I.E., H.I.E.,

Speak to us again!
Whisper thoughts yet to empower us
To live the Dream, to live the Vision
Of a free Africa over again.

The young journalist's name was Lewis Nkosi.

For permission to use, edit and publish the work of H.I.E. Dhlomo, Dr. N. W. Visser and I have to thank his son and heir, Mr. Desmond Dhlomo. We must also thank Professor André De Villiers and the Institute for the Study of English in Africa, Rhodes University, for financial and other support. I would also like to thank the University of the Witwatersrand and its African Studies Institute for its similar help and the Killie Campbell Library, Natal University, for its assistance.

¹ To Mofolo, *Chaka*, Morija Sesuto Book Depot, Morija, 1925 (Translated into English by H. F. Dutton, London : O.U.P., 1931); written about 1910.

² Sol T. Plaatje, *Mhudi* (Lovedale, 1930).

³ H. I. E. Dhlomo, *Valley of a Thousand Hills* (Durban : Knox Publishing House, 1941).

⁴ Albert S. Gérard, *Four African Literatures* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1971), pp. 29-30.

⁵ See, for instance, *Umteteli wa Bantu*, 13 July, 1929.

⁶ See J. Jahn and C. P. Dressler, *Bibliography of Creative African Writing* (Nendeln : Kraus-Thomson Organization Limited, 1971), pp. 296-297.

⁷ Private Interview with A. G. W. Champion, Durban, 7 December, 1973.

⁸ See also Maria K. Mootry, "Literature and Resistance in South Africa : Two Zulu Poets," in *African Literature Today : No. 6. Poetry in Africa*, edited by Eldred Jones, (London : Heinemann, 1973), pp. 112-129.

⁹ Mary Morison Webster, *Sunday Times*, Johannesburg, 3 February, 1974.

¹⁰ *The Girl Who Killed To Save* (Lovedale : Lovedale Press, 1935).

¹¹ *Valley of a Thousand Hills* (Durban : Knox Publishing House, 1941).

¹² *African Observer* III, 4, 1935, pp. 67-80.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁴ Private Interview with Miss Theresa Dhlamini, 10 December, 1973.

¹⁵ Unpublished manuscript.

¹⁶ Unpublished manuscript.

¹⁷ Unpublished manuscript.

¹⁸ *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 30 December, 1944.

¹⁹ Unpublished manuscript, *Zulu Life and Thought*.

²⁰ Unpublished manuscript.

²¹ *Bantu World*, 24 October, 1936.

²² *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 22 October, 1955.

THE CRITICISM OF AFRICAN NOVELISTS AND THEIR NARRATIVE RESOURCES -

Christopher Heywood

Critical studies of African novels and novelists are now increasingly abundant. The recent appearance of a rich harvest of thought about the criticism of African literature, in a collection of essays edited by Edgar Wright,¹ has underlined the need for care in approaching the criticism of works by African writers. The need for flexibility in approaching new works remains, and with it, the case for examining the range of reference in the available forms of debate. Although neo-classical forms of approach are frequently under attack, many of their frames of reference retain their importance as a means of arriving at certainty about the position or substance of literary arguments. In a helpful contribution to the frequently opposed "Chicago" school, for example, Richard McKeon identifies the forms of experience which can govern the criticism of literature. He gives three examples of leading topics: the writer's struggle with his material, "the artistic problem of creating art"; and distinct from this, the observer's experience, "the aesthetic experience of perceiving art"; and lastly, the implication of the form selected by the writer and the light which this may shed on his intentions: "what has the poet tried to express and how has he expressed it?"² In practice, the objection runs, these distinctions cannot be rigidly observed, and societies which place a weaker emphasis on distinctions between the work of art, the artist and the participant (as in ritualized art generally), call for a different set of rules.

Nevertheless, the art of the novelist remains the work of a writer who is remote from his audience. Despite their involvement in a complexity of social and mythological backgrounds, novels from Africa have continued to give rise to debates falling into lines comparable to those noted by McKeon. In another paper, Peter Young provides a timely reminder

that the critic of African literature has to some extent been set free from "European literary reminiscence";³ nevertheless, the debates continue within categories presented by critics of other ages, and the work of writers in the past, Lawrence and Conrad, Balzac and Scott, continues to influence the work of writers at work today. Criticism which stresses the verifiable social substance presented in a novel, or which defines the novelist's use of language and style, or which emphasizes the determining characteristics of the species of work being written, inevitably falls within the terms of debates of the kind identified by McKeon.

An inner debate, often invisible on the surface, precedes the critical judgment, which emerges through such questions as whether a novel is an accurate picture of a set of events, or whether it offers a coherent pattern of symbols or themes, or what relationship can be found between a new work and its literary forbears. For example, Eustace Palmer, in a useful introductory study, finds in Lenrie Peters's *The Second Round*, "pretentious language, overworked and rather self-conscious medical imagery, and . . . spurious pieces from Jungian psychology."⁴ Stating his conclusion first, Palmer condemns the work on the grounds of inner contradictoriness: this, he finds, is "one of those novels in which the novelist has failed to keep his themes clearly before his mind, and pursue them to a logical conclusion."⁵ Here, clearly, the idea of inner coherence and continuity of style is dominant, but in Palmer's rejection of Ekwensi, a different criterion is applied. In the case of Ekwensi, the "art is that of the sensational thriller," and its weaknesses are those of "fourth-rate American sex-and-crime fiction."⁶ The reader hoping for information about either Ekwensi or his literary ancestry will be unrewarded (this is, however, merely an introductory exploration by Palmer), and left with a questionable generalization: "The novelist's task is not merely to convey experience, but also to attempt to clarify and order the chaos of experience."⁷

It is well to keep in mind the African-ness of African literature. The case for this has been best put by Abiola Irele in his paper "The Criticism of Modern African Literature." In a memorable passage, Irele insists on the importance of seeing first the value of African social and intellectual configurations:

If we focus rather on the essential than on the contingent, on the substance rather than on the accessories, these societies will strike us as so many snakes shedding their old skins . . . Africa is being transformed not into something or somebody else, but into something or somebody new.⁸

But the distinction between "the essential" and "the contingent," itself neo-classical, leaves unresolved the companion problems of relating given works of literature to their forbears, and (most important perhaps) projecting the reader into the total experience which the novelist seeks, or should seek, to offer. The literature of modern Africa is cosmopolitan in origin, and its cosmopolitanism includes the African experience which has made it possible.

The art of criticism is itself a creative art compounded of identification with the object of criticism and a clinical detachment on the part of the critic. As a form of writing, criticism as we know it resembles the art of the novelist. Both forms of writing emerged in the eighteenth century, the age of the English novel, and of the "man of letters," and, we may observe, of trade, slavery, the movement towards the abolition of slavery, and much of the national and international thinking that projected itself into the novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Many novels are, indeed, criticisms of preceding novels, as *The Portrait of a Lady* is a criticism of the late novels of George Eliot, or as *Shamela* is a criticism of *Pamela*. Edgar Wright makes a pertinent observation on the novelist's function partly as editor and partly as the projector of the national identity of subject nations, as it emerged in the work of Scott, and continues in the work of modern African novelists.⁹

Despite their African setting, origin and importance, novels as widely scattered as Oyono's *The Old Man and the Medal*, Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Omotoso's *The Combat* have produced, or can produce, widely divergent forms of debate, each related to the problems of literary intention implied by the form used by the artist: satire, oral narrative, allegory. Debates about novels have, as we have seen, a tendency to move between one frame of reference and another, between, for example, the social reality which provides the substance or setting of a story, and the often unexamined inner dynamics of the literary form, or imaginative pattern, which the writer is using. Failure to arrive at significant conclusions can result from insufficient exploration of the categories suggested by McKeon. Tutuola's obvious debt to the oral tradition of his society and the relationship of his work to that of Fagunwa—that is, the approach through "form" or *genre*—cannot reasonably be used as an immediate counter to a review by Dylan Thomas which, like others of its kind, sheds as much light on the reviewer as on the work being reviewed and demands, as a starting point, a very full appreciation of the aesthetic experience which is reflected in the review.¹⁰ Neither approach fully explains the popular success of Tutuola's art, though its humour, humanity and dream-like fluidity can be seen by comparison with the cognate work by Fagunwa, now available in Soyinka's translation.¹¹

Like satire, allegory is a form with Mediterranean origins; both forms are latent as modes of feeling and intention within the classifications available for the study of oral literature,¹² but in modern times owe their success to such works as *Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Tale of a Tub* and *Young Goodman Brown*. Like the cinema and the arts of criticism and the novel, it may be safe, and quick, to assume (as Eldred Jones implies in the case of the cinematic technique of Soyinka's *The Interpreters*)¹³ that allegory as we have it in *The Combat* and in Maddy's *No Past, No Present, No Future* is an importation—in this case not entirely "western," since the extent of a possible debt to oriental sources for the medieval techniques of allegorical writing remains little explored.¹⁴ The literary or oral modes which are cognate to this and

other "western" forms, latent within oral tradition and available to African novelists from both traditions, do undoubtedly provide a complex and rewarding area of investigation, though it ranges beyond the grasp of single disciplines and most single scholars. Besides the literary forms, the other ingredients in debates about works of art—social experience, word patterns, psychological shifts, and the implications of discernible literary tradition—all have equal rights in the myriad impressions which form a literary experience.

As a corollary to this, modern African literature, and especially the novel, is open to all the critical approaches which the last three centuries have generated. The search for authenticity, for accuracy and sympathy, is the key to criticism, as it is to the writing of novels. Novelists learn the art from one another, as, for example, Conrad learned it from Flaubert: "My Flaubert is the Flaubert of *St Antoine* and *Education Sentimentale*, and that only from the point of view of the rendering of concrete things and visual impressions. I thought him marvellous in that respect."¹⁵ No literary tradition is static, and the new literature of Africa has links with the literature of past ages. In speaking of the coherence of literary tradition, C. S. Lewis tells of the effect of his youthful reading of Arnold's *Sohrab and Rustum* on his reading of Homer: "For me the relation between Arnold and Homer worked the other way; when I came, years later, to read the *Iliad* I liked it partly because it was for me reminiscent of *Sohrab*."¹⁶ Meanings undreamed of in Dickens until his admirers, Dostoevsky and Kafka, showed the way, are now commonplace.

The literary traditions available to the modern African writer are as mixed as the society of modern Africa itself. Okigbo has said:

"I think that I've been influenced by various literatures and cultures, right from Classical times to the present day, in English, Latin, Greek and a little French, a little Spanish, but I think that in fact the question of influence is a very complicated thing. One reads something and says, this might have been influenced by one person. It's often difficult to pin down an influence to particular sources. If those sources have become assimilated into the subject and have come together to form an integral work it is very difficult to sort them out—to know where the Babylonian influence ends and the classical influence starts, and where the classical influence ends and where, if you like, the modern influence starts."¹⁷

Modern art is habitually eclectic, and all societies include in their processes the tension between modern and ancient, progressive and traditional, which animates current thinking about the African cultural situation. At the end of the eighteenth century, in a violent age, Scott saw the form of conflict which re-emerged in the novels of Balzac and their successors and admirers. The same conflict stirs again in the novels of Ngugi and Achebe. The African writer's and reader's position in a world of tension resembles that of others in other ages, and deserves to be enriched, by the comparison.

An instance of the complexities of cultural change is afforded by a talk

given by Jean-Paul Sartre, a principal figure in the critical discussion of African literature. His talk was given in 1946 and represented his answer to the critics who had taxed him with his preference for bad novels by American writers. To the writer in France in the 1930's, as Sartre saw it, the national tradition was exhausted, and in its place the novels of the Depression writers of America gave lessons in social, intellectual and artistic freedom: "We have not sought with morose delight, stories of murder and rape, but lessons in the art of writing."¹⁸ Speaking of his discovery of technical innovations with admirable simplicity, Sartre explains:

It was after reading a book by Dos Passos that I thought for the first time of weaving a novel out of various simultaneous lives, with characters who pass each other by without ever knowing one another and who all contribute to the atmosphere of a movement or of a historical period.¹⁹

From Faulkner, Sartre and his circle borrowed "the idea . . . of cutting the chronological order of the story and substituting instead a more subtle order, half logical, half intuitive."²⁰ The picture of a society emancipating itself by means of its industrial flood carried the possibility of freedom from the meanness besetting peasant and intellectual alike in the immobilized society of Europe. Against the background of this familiar literary process, Sartre springs an ambiguous anecdote. Of Marcel Mouloudji, "the young son of an Arabian workman, at thirteen, adopted by French writers and actors" and able to write "'American' as naturally as one breathes, and with the same innocence," he tells a tale of the rediscovery of past literary traditions, but with an unmistakable humour and irony:

"Not very long ago, when he was nearly twenty, he spoke to me enthusiastically, about a book he had just read, which related events 'in such a new and original manner'. It was the *Three Musketeers* of Alexandre Dumas père!"²¹

It should not be forgotten that their literary indebtedness did not prevent a generation of French novelists from producing works of great originality. Literary tradition is often transmitted by lesser talents; as Eliot has remarked, "the poet must be very conscious of the main current, which does not all flow invariably through the most distinguished reputations."²²

The charge of unoriginality which in various forms figures in, and often distorts, debates about the African novel, has by now produced clusters of texts, each of which deserves comparative study. Ouologuem's *Le devoir de violence* can now take its place with *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* and Laye's *Le regard du roi* as material for study of a "case-book" kind. Writing on Ouologuem's novel and seeking to defend its plagiarisms, Professor Wolitz argues:

Evidently Ouologuem borrows wholesale. But his "plagiarisms" do not prove a lack of authenticity in his work. On the contrary, his borrowings are aptly shown. He adapts the texts to his own literary aims. He is a

writer who extracts and removes all that he needs for his creative ends. In this he follows an established tradition among artists.²³

Despite this defence, which lacks conclusive documentation, the passages in Ouologuem's novel which derive from Graham Greene's *It's a Battlefield* suggest a more unimaginative, indeed, copybook, form of borrowing than the recollection of phrases or themes which are taken for granted as the basis of literary transmission. Their isolation from the context of an exceedingly generalized historical narrative gives to the material taken from Greene a sketchy, unreal quality; and the novel as a whole is not in any way a comment on Greene's presentation of life in a violent modern society. In contrast, in her cogent and detailed study of the relationship between Laye's *Le regard du roi* and Kafka's *The Castle*, Jean Ita establishes that in his novel, Laye "has consistently transformed the Kafka elements in accordance with a coherent pattern—that is to say, the changes they undergo are consistent with one another."²⁴ A generous attitude on the part of a "donor" author is evinced by M. Schwarz-Bart, author of *Le dernier des justes*, another of Ouologuem's sources: "I have always looked on my books as appletrees, happy that my apples be eaten and happy if now and again one is taken and planted in different soil,"²⁵ but the need for the "borrower" author to transform the material remains. It is also possible to question Jean Ita's attendant view, that the literature of modern periods since the Renaissance has introduced a view of originality which need not be applied to the modern literature of Africa,²⁶ when so much of modern literature can be shown to owe its life to borrowing and transmission of a more or less "classical kind." An Indian tale is cognate to *The Pardoner's Tale* and to a story by Kipling,²⁷ and forms the basis of a gripping film, *The Treasure of Sierra Madre*. Examples of this kind, suggesting the persistence of literary borrowing and adaptation, can be multiplied. The critic's task in the midst of these comparisons, is to discern the imaginative essence which gives uniqueness to works of sustained imagination and sensibility.

The width of literary resources should be paralleled in the critic's breadth of reference. No material can come amiss to the scholar and critic. The resources of allegory, folk-tale, chronicle, thriller, casebook or sociological investigation are the traditional food of the novelist, in Africa or elsewhere. Malraux is cited by Sartre as warning against assuming that works can be judged merely by reference to their *genre*: the mixed form used by Faulkner, "eruptions of Greek tragedy in the detective story," can produce great works.²⁸ All forms of art exist in a context of comparisons. A work of reportage such as Richard Rive's *Emergency* can be compared to others of its kind, for example, Defoe's *Journal of the Plague Year*, or Capote's *In Cold Blood*, or Zola's *L'Argent*, without the intervention of special categories which would screen the African writer from comparison with other writers. Allegorical works by Maddy or Omotoso, or prison

writings by Soyinka and La Guma, fall within recognizable "kinds" of modern literature and should be seen in the context of comparable works if their individual qualities are to emerge fully into the light.

Recent studies of Tutuola have shown that critical approaches based on scholarly criticism can bring originality into a true perspective. In her study, Omolara Leslie concentrates on Tutuola's use of language and the presentation of reality and experience: "Tutuola . . . writes genuinely about a real world, about a world which has validity for some men."²⁹ Attending to Tutuola's literary sources and analogues, Bernth Lindfors, in another leading study, concludes that "it is still very difficult to appraise accurately Tutuola's natural assets and outstanding debts as a writer, because so little is known about his resources. More research needs to be done on the oral and written narratives that were available to him. . ."³⁰ Literary criticism, and with it literature itself, thrives in a climate of this kind, where detachment and breadth of reading are available. These things are increasingly the atmosphere in which African writers can expect to move.

- ¹ Edgar Wright (ed.), *The Critical Evaluation of African Literature* (London, 1973).
- ² R. McKeon, "The Philosophic Bases of Art Criticism," in : R. S. Crane (ed.), *Critics and Criticism Ancient and Modern*, Abridged ed. (Chicago, 1957), pp. 191-273.
- ³ Peter Young, "Tradition, Language and the Reintegration of Identity in West African Literature in English," in : Edgar Wright (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 23-50 (p. 24).
- ⁴ Eustace Palmer, *An Introduction to the African Novel* (London, 1973), p. xv.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xii.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*
- ⁸ Abiola Irele, "The Criticism of Modern African Literature," in : Christopher Heywood (ed.), *Perspectives on African Literature* (London, 1971), pp. 9-24.
- ⁹ Edgar Wright (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.
- ¹⁰ References to the debate about Tutuola are given in Edgar Wright (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 14, f. 15. See also : A. Afolayan, "Language and Sources of Amos Tutuola," in : Christopher Heywood (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 49-63.
- ¹¹ W. Soyinka and D. O. Fagunwa, *The Forest of a Thousand Daemons* (London, 1969).
- ¹² For an introduction to the problem of classification, see : Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Oxford, 1970), Ch. 13, "Prose Narratives II. Content and Form," pp. 335-388.
- ¹³ Eldred Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* (London, 1973), p. 30.
- ¹⁴ Cf. M. A. Palacios, *Islam and the Divine Comedy* (London, 1968).
- ¹⁵ Joseph Conrad, Letter of 7 June 1918, in G. J. Aubry (ed.), *Life and Letters of Joseph Conrad* (London, 1927), p. 206.
- ¹⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy. The Shape of my Early Life* (London, 1955), p. 56.
- ¹⁷ Christopher Okigbo, cited in : D. Duerden and C. Pieterse (eds.), *African Writers Talking* (London, 1972), p. 145.
- ¹⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, "American Novelists in French Eyes," *Atlantic Monthly* (Aug. 1946), pp. 114-118 (p. 118).
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 115.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*
- ²² T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in his *Selected Essays* (London, 1951), pp. 13-22 (p. 16).
- ²³ Seth I. Wolitz, "L'art du plagiat, ou, une brève défense de Ouologuem," *Research in African Literatures*, IV (1973), pp. 130-134.
- ²⁴ Jean Ita, "Laye's *Radiance of the King* and Kafka's *Castle*," *Odu*, N.S. No 4 (Oct. 1970), pp. 18-45 (p. 37).
- ²⁵ André Schwarz-Bart, cited in P. Flamand, "Something new out of Africa?," *TLS*, 19 May 1972, p. 576.
- ²⁶ Jean Ita, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- ²⁷ F. N. Robinson (ed.), *The Complete works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, n.d.), p. 834.
- ²⁸ Jean-Paul Sartre, *op. cit.*, p. 114.
- ²⁹ Omolara Leslie, "The Palm-Wine Drinkard. A Re-assessment of Amos Tutuola," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 9 (1970), pp. 48-56 (p. 51).
- ³⁰ Bernth Lindfors, "Amos Tutuola and D. O. Fagunwa," *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 9 (1970), pp. 57-65 (p. 65).

THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR IN NIGERIAN LITERATURE

Arthur Ravenscroft

Reading books about the Nigerian Civil War suggests two rather broad conclusions about the impact on African writers of events in Nigeria during 1966 and of the most important emotively harnessed effect of those events—the Civil War itself. The two conclusions are, first, that the writers saw 1966-1970 as the acrid experience of eating the fruit of the tree of very bitter knowledge; and, secondly, that the extinguishing of the most inventive poetic talent, Okigbo's, has for the writers taken on a poignant symbolism for the loss of African possibilities that the war has perhaps indefinitely postponed. Of course, there was dissatisfaction with the new African political kingdom before 1966. Soyinka raised serious questions as early as the inception of Nigerian Independence with *A Dance of the Forests*,¹ and later lashed out satirically in *The Interpreters*² and *Kongi's Harvest*.³ There was Okara's *The Voice*,⁴ prophetically denouncing political corruption, and there was Achebe's astringent bitterness in *A Man of the People*.⁵ But, like most satire, these works admitted the possibilities of reform or even revolution, to which the writers would contribute creatively, since to them tribal divisions could not be allowed to blight African potential. The nature of the eruptions in Northern Nigeria in 1966 was unthinkable. The first poetic reaction occurs in the section of six poems headed "october '66" in Soyinka's *Idanre* volume⁶: the realization of what the massacres destroyed appears especially in the poem "Harvest of Hate," the third stanza of which reads:

Now pay we forfeit on old abdications
The child dares flames his fathers lit
And in the briefness of too bright flares
Shrivels a heritage of blighted futures.

In the poem "Massacre, October '66," also in *Idanre*, with its superscription *Written in Tegel*, Soyinka links the implications of the massacre with the excesses of Nazi Germany in an effort to grasp them within a larger context, and the acorns, hog's food, scattered on the autumnal European landscape figure the skulls of the massacred Nigerian victims.

In a poem in *Casualties*,⁷ John Pepper Clark uses the imagery of cups for the skulls of those killed in the war. "Skulls and Cups" is a short poem about broken vessels from which the precious contents are spilled :

Skulls and Cups

'Look, JP,
How do you tell a skull
From another?' asked Obi.
'That this, could you find where he fell,
Was Chris, that Sam, and
This there in the sand
Of course Emman. Oh yes,
How does one tell a cup on the floor
From another, when the spirit is emptied?'
And the goblets are legion,
Broken upon the fields after Nsukka.⁸

Casualties contains some very fine poems of almost simple statement on the pre-war events as well as on the brutalities that happened daily in the war—poems like "Benin Sacrifice" and "Incident at the Police Station, Warri." I admire less the poem "The Casualties" addressed to Chinua Achebe, for its public-speaker rhetoric strikes the pose of saying portentously what was perhaps obvious : that the survivors are also, though not physically, casualties. Nevertheless its ending, looking beyond Nigeria, is something to my purpose :

We are all casualties,
All sagging as are
The cases celebrated for kwashiorkor,
The unforeseen camp-follower of not just our war.⁹

But Clark is more convincing when he records particularities than when he tries to meditate upon the philosophical truths behind the events.

In his volume *Beware Soul Brother*,¹⁰ Achebe also records the particularities of human suffering during the war, and he is not afraid to celebrate a mother's tenderness for her dying child in the poem "Refugee Mother and Child," where he creates pathos without sentimentality by means of the throw-away irony of juxtaposing a formerly simple, almost careless action, with the same action now invested with new meaning :

Refugee Mother and Child

No Madonna and Child could touch
that picture of a mother's tenderness
for a son she soon would have to forget.

The air was heavy with odours
of diarrhoea of unwashed children
with washed-out ribs and dried-up
bottoms struggling in laboured
steps behind blown empty bellies. Most
mothers there had long ceased
to care but not this one; she held
a ghost smile between her teeth
and in her eyes the ghost of a mother's
pride as she combed the rust-coloured
hair left on his skull and then —
singing in her eyes—began carefully
to part it . . . In another life this
must have been a little daily
act of no consequence before his
breakfast and school; now she
did it like putting flowers
on a tiny grave.¹¹

In "Mango Seedling," originally dedicated to the memory of Okigbo, Achebe's observation of a mango seedling lodged on the concrete canopy of a building and trying to strike root where there is no sustenance, becomes the image, perhaps of Okigbo's death, but certainly of an Africa where beneficent growth now seems doomed. The poem ends :

It went from purple to sickly green
Before it died.
Today I see it still—
Dry, wire-thin in sun and dust of the dry months—
Headstone on tiny debris of passionate courage.¹²

In the poem "Vultures," Achebe also establishes a parallel between the Civil War and the Europe of Hitler's Belsen :

Vultures

In the greyness
and drizzle of one despondent
dawn unstirred by harbingers
of sunbreak a vulture
perching high on broken
bone of a dead tree
nestled close to his
mate his smooth
bashed-in head, a pebble
on a stem rooted in
a dump of gross
feathers, inclined affectionately
to hers. Yesterday they picked
the eyes of a swollen
corpse in a water-logged
trench and ate the
things in its bowel. Full
gorged they chose their roost

keeping the hollowed remnant
in easy range of cold
telescopic eyes . . .

Strange
indeed how love in other
ways so particular
will pick a corner
in that charnel-house
tidy it and lie there
coiled up — perhaps even
fall asleep — her face
turned to the wall!

. . . Thus the Commandant at Belsen
Camp going home for
the day with fumes of
human roast clinging
rebelliously to his hairy
nostrils will stop
at the wayside sweet-shop
and pick up a chocolate
for his tender offspring
waiting at home for Daddy's
return . . .

Praise bounteous
providence if you will
that grants even an ogre
a tiny glow-worm
tenderness encapsulated
in icy caverns of a cruel
heart or else despair
for in the very germ
of that kindred love is
lodged the perpetuity
of evil.¹³

Achebe's characteristic sense of the ironic produces in the simultaneously humorous and pathetic short story "Civil Peace" in *Girls at War*¹⁴ a muted tribute to human resilience in the figure of Jonathan Iwegbu—at the end of the war he could utter the greeting "Happy survival" with fervent wonder that "Nothing puzzles God," for he "had come out of the war with five inestimable blessings—his head, his wife Maria's head and the heads of three out of their four children"—not to mention his bicycle, buried early in the war and now unearthed and oiled. But the title story of the collection, "Girls at War" has much the same bitterness about human corruptibility as *A Man of the People*, though now modified by a deep sense of the *pity* of lost ideals and untold derelictions.

Before the Nigerian Civil War Ngugi's three novels¹⁵ set amid the events of the Mau Mau Rebellion and Kenyan Independence were the only Anglophone African works that examined brutality and moral dereliction against a background of wholesale violence, but sober hope was possible

for, after all, it was an anti-colonialist struggle and dawn lay beyond it. But the books I am discussing are about the first full-scale technological war in which Africans fought and killed each other. So far, there have been two non-fictional accounts of personal experience and knife-edge survival of the war: *Sunset in Biafra*¹⁶ by the novelist Elechi Amadi and *The Man Died*¹⁷ by Wole Soyinka. Amadi, a member of the minority Ikwere tribe, found himself an involuntary Biafran when the breakaway state was proclaimed, and he looked to the Federal forces for a viable future for himself and the Ikwere people. Despite his former military career he would not join the Biafran Army, was consequently harrassed and eventually detained by the Biafran Security. He escaped when the Federal Army captured Port Harcourt, joined the Federal Army and is today Commissioner for Information in the Rivers State Government. The two dominant impressions that *Sunset in Biafra* makes on the reader are, first, anger at the relish with which the avaricious and sadistic members of society seized the golden opportunity created by wartime social disruption, and, secondly, the courage and self-control that is needed for survival when a man is at the complete mercy of such people. Imprisonment without trial. The dehumanization of prison guards. The prisoner's efforts to maintain sanity under the most appalling conditions. A spirited woman detainee named Boma had resisted the attempt of a guard named Augustine to punish her. Here is Amadi's account of what followed:

To my surprise, Augustine did not react violently. He moved away and sat on a chair brooding. Shortly afterwards he announced that anyone who wished to urinate could do so. No detainee would lose a chance to get outside, no matter for how short a time. As they filed out one by one, Augustine ordered them to urinate on the floor of the lavatory, and not into the water closet. Baffled, the detainees nevertheless obeyed. I decided to obey the call to general relief. There was no knowing what Augustine had up his sleeve. He might well decide not to open the door for the next twelve hours. I had to stand by the door to do it, for by now the entire floor was flooded. I felt extremely foolish. I thought that Augustine had gone completely off his head at last. I dared not question him, in the nasty mood in which he was. So far I had escaped any form of beating; there was no point in rushing into it unnecessarily. After several men had done the round, the lavatory floor was a mess. Augustine inspected it, and heaved a sigh of satisfaction. He then ordered Boma to sit on the lavatory floor. She refused, and there was a prolonged struggle, during which her daughter cried loudly in alarm. The uproar attracted Joe and another soldier. They tried to talk Augustine out of it but failed. He reminded them that as the guard on duty it was his prerogative to discipline any unruly detainees. In any case, if the DMI got to know that a detainee refused to be punished, they themselves would get into trouble. In the end, Boma was dragged into the lavatory with her daughter, who clung desperately to her. Augustine locked the door on her with pleasure. The woman's contempt for Augustine was so strong that all through the struggle and the final humiliation she did not cry, as most women would have done under the circumstances. She was released some two hours later, after Joe had pleaded strongly on her behalf.¹⁸

Amadi's book is a straightforward account of his experiences. At one level, Soyinka's *The Man Died* is also a record of personal experience—he describes it himself as “a private record of one survival.” But it is also a searing attack upon inhumanity, viciousness, and established evil that makes his pre-war satire seem avuncularly benign. *The Man Died* openly names individuals who did cruel and shameful things. But one never feels that Soyinka is just trying to get his own back in print. There is a great deal of personal bitterness (and two years of solitary confinement can incubate a lot of bitterness), but the bitter experiences he went through stimulated an imaginative apprehension of what it is to be thrown entirely upon one's own resources in order to maintain not just life but sanity itself. The result is a strangely affirmative work that refuses to flinch before the most horrifying truths and achieves an imaginative scale that is powerful and immensely disturbing. He responds to an almost sacrilegious series of affronts to human dignity with an extraordinarily resourceful defence of his own integrity and identity, and his account of this process raises the book above the level of mere personal experience. It becomes a living memorial to all the myriads of political prisoners who have rotted in cells, camps and detention centres in the twentieth century, from the Urals to Robben Island. As a fortification against unreason Soyinka practised withdrawal into himself, shutting off all memories of his past, all thoughts about his family, all stimuli upon his nervous system :

I recognize, and welcome the beginning of a withdrawal process, an accentuation of the imposed isolation by an instinctive self-isolation. I find first of all that my body rejects all objects, a process which did not take place during my four months in Lagos. The very contrary took place in Lagos. My body adjusted to its surrounding, picked up a rhythm of the prison, accepted and absorbed the pulse, sounds, the touch of objects and the feel of food. It reacted only against things which would normally disgust me : filth and bad smells, treachery between the prisoners, callousness among the warders. I slipped into prison life as one dives into a stream, an unnatural element but one to which the body does adjust. The reverse has happened here. I reject everything, make no contact. One object after another is rejected by my skin. Lying down, even this involves no contact. Walking, I do not feel I touch the ground. The process accelerates towards total completion. Reality is killed and buried with memories of the past. Words play a part of it, hypnotizing the mind and de-sensitizing the body.¹⁹

On various occasions he went on hunger-strike in protest against his treatment, but the encapsulation of himself described in the passage just quoted eventually makes fasting almost easy, a kind of sensuous indulgence :

The body achieves, of course, true weightlessness. I am blown about by the lightest breeze, by the lightest lyrical thought or metaphor. The body is like an onion and I watch the flesh peel off, layer by layer, layer by layer. And this is the risk, it is this condition that begins the danger of self-indulgence. For, by the fourth day the will is no longer involved. I become hungry for the show-down, the moment when I must choose between death

or surrender. I resent even the glass of water and begin to cheat. Each day it gets lesser by a fraction. Once, for a whole day I did not drink at all. In the morning I said, I shall drink at noon. At noon I began to cheat, procrastinating until I decided I shall drink an entire cupful when the sun goes down. I lay in bed until dark, then said, I did not see the sun go down.²⁰

Soyinka's volume of poems *A Shuttle in the Crypt*²¹ consists of poems that capture particular moments in the long-drawn out palisading of his mind and integrity. Hence perhaps the almost hymn-like tone of the verse and a far greater attention to regular verse forms than appears in his pre-war poems. But one feels also that nearly every poem is not only a record of self-defence but is itself part of that defence. One example must suffice—the poem "I Anoint My Flesh" with its superscription "(Tenth Day of Fast)":

I Anoint My Flesh

(Tenth Day of Fast)

I anoint my flesh
Thought is hallowed in the lean
Oil of solitude
I call you forth, all, upon
Terraces of light. Let the dark
Withdraw

I anoint my voice
And let it sound hereafter
Or dissolve upon its lonely passage
In your void. Voices new
Shall rouse the echoes when
Evil shall again arise

I anoint my heart
Within its flame I lay
Spent ashes of your hate —
Let evil die.²²

The Man Died contains some references to the Northern Nigerian massacres of 1966. But Soyinka's novel *Season of Anomy*²³ draws heavily upon those events for its central concern. Using an unlikely blend of the Utopian story and the exciting tale of conspiratorial intrigue, Soyinka has produced a beautifully structured novel of our times, in which individuality-within-earth-anchored-community struggles, rather naively, against a political-cum-internationalist-finance-cum-military Cartel, and, in spite of betrayal, rigged law, despotism, and wholesale massacre is not entirely extinguished by the end of the novel. Like *The Man Died*, *Season of Anomy* looks deep into the abyss, and records the shock of what is seen, this time not in formal war but in communal slaughter. "Anomy" of the title is an obsolete word meaning "lawlessness." The paradigm for a sane way of life is the Utopian commune of Aiyéro with its mystical-religious acknowledgement of man's close relationship with the earth and natural

forms of life. Aiyéro is contrasted with an insane political polity that is presumably a blend of the old Federal Nigerian set-up and the present military regime. The distressing details of mass killings (clearly based on the 1966 massacres), in which Africans murder fellow-Africans is backed up by quiet reminders (as in *The Man Died*) of how Africans enslaved fellow-Africans in the days of the slave trade. And yet the powerful imagination that shaped *Season of Anomy* makes of plot and action and tension the framework of an analysis of social, political, and moral insanity. The action of the final section takes place inside a prison that is also a haven for refugees and a hospital, through a series of chinese boxes of steadily increasing degrees of imprisonment and containment, into the enclosure for leper criminals and finally into the centre of the monstrous system—the ultimate confinement for the insane. The journey from the bureaucratic Governor's office to this ultimate refuge and cell images the hero's larger journeyings in the novel, through a society of brutality and unreason. And yet, one asks, is the unspeakable human bloodletting of the Fourth section entitled "Harvest," a possible imaginative expansion, applying to the entire country, of the sacrificial and symbolic rite of drenching the earth with bulls' blood in the Aiyéro commune described in the First section "Seminal"?

Such ambiguity (in Empson's sense) also informs Soyinka's play, *Madmen and Specialists*.²⁴ Which of the meanings that the title suggests are we to take? The obvious specialist of the play is the doctor-turned-liquidator, Dr Bero, resplendent in military uniform.

He claims to be saving his father from the authorities by alleging that he is insane, but if the basement of the Bero home is an insane ward it is also a prison cell guarded by the four victims of the war turned predators, and Bero's intentions for his father are undoubtedly sinister. They seem to invite our sympathy for the Old Man until near the end we see him trying to cut, as coolly as any specialist, into the still living flesh of Cripple. Set against both father and son, through the potential mediation of the daughter are the shadowy figures of the two herbalist earth-mothers, who would give plenteously to humanity but demand just and true repayment. As one of them says in their confrontation with Dr Bero :

We put back what we take, in one form or another. Or more than we take. It's the only law. What laws do you obey?²⁵

Whatever else, Soyinka's durance has made him even more articulate than he was and given his boisterous imagination a new power and coherence.

I think the experiences of 1966-1970 have opened up new and terrifying chasms for the African consciousness. There are many signs of a loss of innocence, and hints that the writers are horrified (but courageously facing the horror), that in violent conflict between African and African there is as much evil as in the two orgies of slaughter that Europe has indulged itself with in the twentieth century. Soyinka makes it explicit in these words (

Blindman in *Madmen and Specialists*, where he satirically parodies an African politician :

It was our duty and a historical necessity. It is our duty and a historical beauty. It shall always be. What we have, we hold. What though the wind of change is blowing over this entire continent, our principles and traditions—yes, must be maintained. For we are threatened, yes, we are indeed threatened. Excuse me, please, but we are entitled to match you history for history to the nearest half-million souls.²⁶

¹ (O.U.P., 1962).

² (André Deutsch, 1965).

³ (O.U.P., 1967).

⁴ (André Deutsch, 1964).

⁵ (Heinemann, 1966).

⁶ *Idanre and other poems*, (Methuen, 1967).

⁷ *Casualties : Poems 1966-1968*, (Longman, 1969).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

¹⁰ *Beware Soul Brother and other poems*, (Enugu, Nigeria : Nwankwo-Ifejika, 1971).

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

¹⁴ *Girls at War and other stories*, (Heinemann, 1971).

¹⁵ James Ngugi, *Weep Not, Child*, (Heinemann, 1964); *The River Between*, (Heinemann, 1965); *A Grain of Wheat*, (Heinemann, 1967).

¹⁶ *Sunset in Biafra : A Civil War Diary*, (Heinemann, 1973).

¹⁷ *The Man Died : Prison Notes*, (Rex Collings, 1972).

¹⁸ *Sunset in Biafra*, pp. 101-102.

¹⁹ *The Man Died*, pp. 128-129.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

²¹ *A Shuttle in the Crypt*, (Collings/Eyre Methuen, 1972).

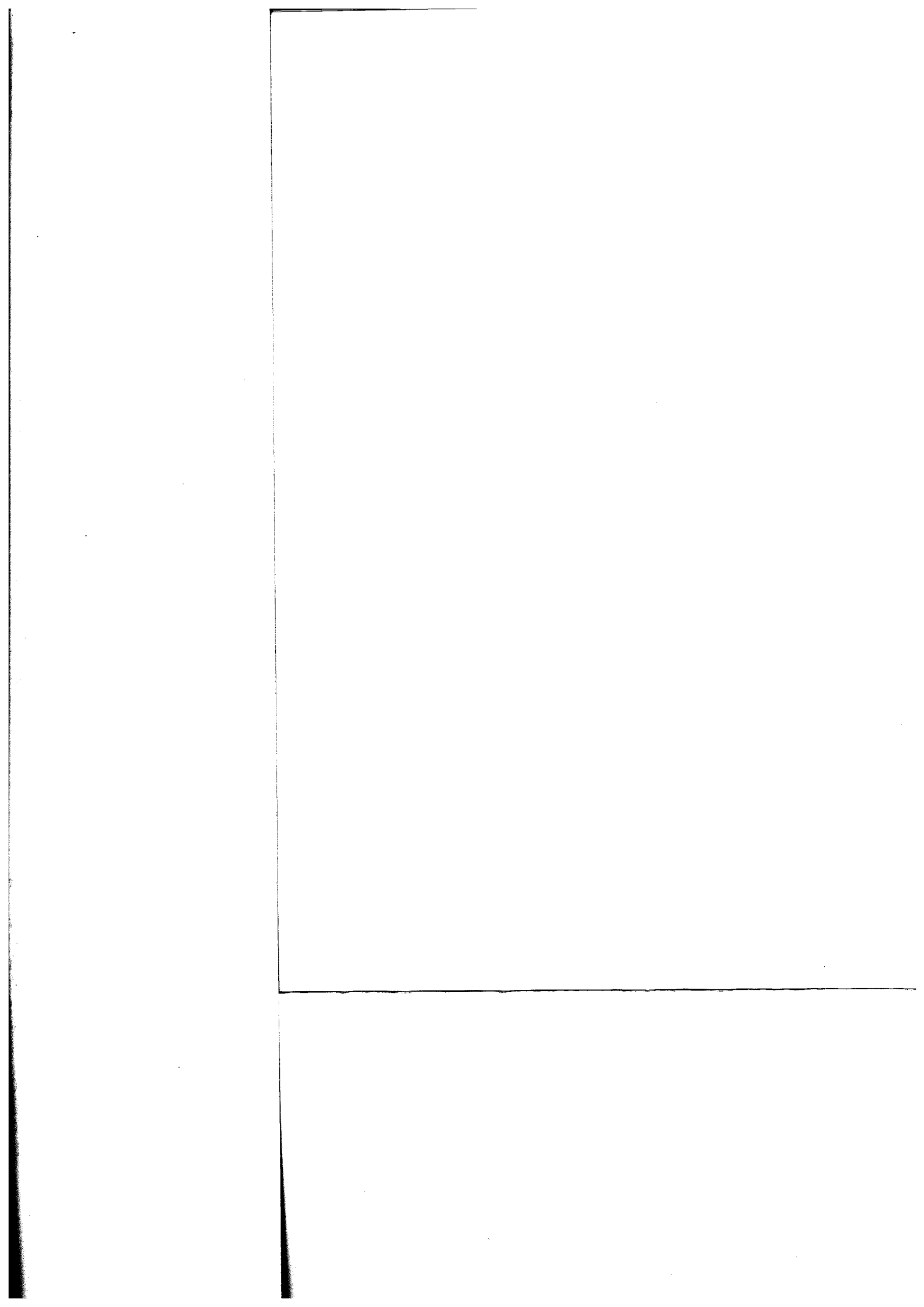
²² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²³ *Season of Anomy*, (Rex Collings, 1973).

²⁴ *Madmen and Specialists*, (Methuen, 1971).

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-70; other works that have come out of the Civil War but are not discussed in this paper are : Soyinka's play, "Jero's Metamorphosis" in *The Jero Plays*, (Eyre Methuen, 1973); *The Insider : Stories of War and Peace from Nigeria*, Enugu, Nigeria : Nwankwo-Ifejika, 1971; S. O. Mezu, *Behind the Rising Sun*, Heinemann, 1971; Kole Omotosho, *The Combat*, Heinemann, 1972. (Ali A. Mazrui of Kenya has written a novel about writers and war, *The Trial of Christopher Okigbo*, Heinemann, 1971.)



WOLE SOYINKA TALKING THROUGH HIS HAT

Bernth Lindfors

When Wole Soyinka returned to Nigeria early in 1960 after nearly six years of study and preliminary professional activity in England, he leapt back into Nigerian life with gusto. Awarded a fellowship by the Rockefeller Foundation for research into African drama,¹ he was able to buy a Landrover and travel about Western Nigeria with ease. However, he appears to have spent most of his time in Ibadan where he held a position at the University as Research Fellow in African drama.² From this base he made frequent jaunts to Lagos, at times commuting between the two cities almost daily in order to rehearse with those members of his newly-formed acting company (*The 1960 Masks*) who lived in the capital. Gerald Moore and others have sketched in the outlines of this very busy period in Soyinka's life.³

What has not been discussed or even mentioned in the literature on Soyinka is his work in Nigerian radio and television in 1960 and 1961. The Nigerian *Radio Times* (later called the *Radio-TV Times*), a programme journal of the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation, provides a goldmine of information on his performances and productions for the electronic media during this period. As early as March 6, 1960, he was on the air participating in a dramatic reading of his first one-act play "The Swamp Dwellers," which had been performed in London and Ibadan the year before.⁴ Five months later, in the *TV Times and Radio News*, an entertainment publication spawned by the Daily Times of Lagos, there was a report on Soyinka's first television play, "My Father's Burden," which was broadcast on Western Nigeria Television at 8:45 p.m. on August 6, 1960.⁵ This was the first full-length play produced in the studios of WNTV in Ibadan, and Soyinka acted in what was described as the production's "most burdensome role"—the hero's drinking companion.⁶ The script has never been published.⁷

Then, on September 25, 1960, just one week before the ceremonies marking Nigeria's full political independence, the *Radio Times* announced a forthcoming radio production of Soyinka's "Camwood on the Leaves," which had been "specially commissioned by Radio Nigeria for INDEPENDENCE."⁸ This play, broadcast five years later on the BBC's "African Theatre" programme and finally published in 1973,⁹ is the only radio script by Soyinka readily available to the reading public.¹⁰ Another radio play called "The Tortoise," broadcast by NBC in mid-December 1960 and again in late January 1961, has never seen print; from accounts of it in the *Radio Times*, "The Tortoise" appears to have been a rather unusual Anansi story set in the Wild West and featuring a blood-feud between Anansi and the Ajantala family which is finally resolved when Anansi makes use of his "one-shooter" and a lethal home-made bomb called the "Anansi Milk-Shake."¹¹

Soyinka also took part in a number of radio plays, performing the role of Elihu in a dramatization of the story of Job broadcast on January 21, 1961, and acting as the "Voice" in a production of Alfred Opubor's "Children of the Sea" on March 12, 1961, to cite just two examples.¹²

Radio and television work did not absorb all of his energies, however. In his first year back home he also managed to find sufficient time to play a leading role in a University of Ibadan production of Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle*;¹³ to complete the manuscript of *The Trials of Brother Jero* which had its premiere performance in Ibadan that same year;¹⁴ to script, produce, direct and act in his most ambitious play, *A Dance of the Forests*, which had been commissioned for the Nigerian Independence celebrations;¹⁵ and to publish a number of poems and critical essays in *The Horn*, a University of Ibadan poetry magazine founded a few years earlier by J. P. Clark and Martin Banham.¹⁶ He was clearly a very busy young man, a veritable dynamo constantly generating new literary and theatrical activity.

His involvement with the Nigerian electronic media was not restricted only to writing and acting in plays. On July 3, 1960, the *Radio Times* announced that "this keen intellectual playwright from Abeokuta" could now be heard at 8:15 every Monday night in "a new radio series of talks entitled 'Talking through your hat' in which his light-hearted approach can once again be felt."¹⁷ Though there was never any indication in the weekly programme guides of what Wole would be talking about, many listeners must have tuned in at this hour to hear his madcap commentary. In the next half-year the *Radio Times* published four of his talks, and if they are a representative sample, "Talking through your Hat" was probably one of the most amusing programs on the air in Nigeria's year of independence.

The first script to appear in print was entitled "The Old Boys' Dinner Speech,"¹⁸ purportedly a transcription of postprandial oratory at the Sir Milton Mackenzie Grammar School Eve of Independence Old Boys' Dinner. The distinguished guest invited to open the ceremonies is a Mr. Bilgernon from Harvard University, who begins by unctuously praising the charm,

grace, beauty, intelligence and marvellous hospitality he has found characteristic of Nigerians. Elaborating on some of these qualities, he says :

The music of the night-clubs is for instance a memory I shall always treasure—high-life, such enchanting rhythm, whose greatest attraction is the fact that when one has heard one high-life, one has heard every high-life. It is this simplicity that is the charm of Nigeria to me; there is no pretence, no nonsense, simply that delightful simplicity which endears Nigerians to the hearts of we poor so-called civilised foreigners. There is such a simple dignity, I find, in every individual from the Ministers to the night-soil men whose silent transit through every town in the dark, their sense of duty as they rival the women in pail-balancing act—I have incidentally always considered this a feat of the highest order, this balancing of the most fantastic weights on the head, especially by women—but as I was saying, the sight of these men, with pails of night-soil on their heads, filled with a sense of duty which in a sense is quite chivalric (*sic*) and I understand—hereditary—this is a sight which makes one proud to be associated in any way with a country which can breed such devoted citizens whose very humility is the proof of their dignity.

Bilgernon then goes on to warn a Government Minister in the audience that the strike which has been called by these night-soil men on the eve of independence

can only mean one danger—Communism. I assure you sir, that this agitation could only have been Communist inspired. It is an attempt to undermine the security and the economy of the country by making your citizens lose faith in their own individualism, in the only thing that has always set them apart as unique human beings, the bulwark of Nigeria's sanitation.

The Government Minister replies by thanking Bilgernon "for putting forth this early indication, for switching on the red light, for sounding the gong of alert," and then announces that he is ready to take steps to resolve the crisis :

The matter must be looked into. And I can promise you one thing tonight. I shall do everything in my power to make sure that the passports of all these night-soil men who have gone on strike are seized, impounded and confiscated as soon as possible. So much for that. Let us now eat, drink and make merry.

A moment later the Minister launches into a long spiel introducing the Guest of Honour at the Old Boys' Dinner :

It is proper, no, it is more than proper, it is fitting—no, it is more than fitting; it is befitting—no, it is more than befitting; it is obligatory—no, even more than obligatory; it is incumbent upon me, it is incumbent upon me, your humble Minister to say a few words about this august personage who [is] not only... our Guest of Honour, he is also the Oldest Old Boy. A Grand Old Boy, a benevolent octogenarian, avuncular in manner, paternal in affection, fraternal in sacrifice, and maternal in infinite patience... Chairman, ladies and gentlemen, and the rest, pray, lend your oricular reception to our Oldest Old Boy, who, one might almost say without fear

of flattery is omniscient in wisdom, provident in exigencies, confident in adversity, courageous in emergency, combatant in idealism, colossal in dynamism, and dynamic in personality. Ladies and gentlemen, the Oldest Old Boy.

After this tremendous build-up, only part of which has been quoted here, the next voice to reach our ears is that of a frail old man obviously lost in the fog of senility. He makes a few incoherent remarks about how the world has changed since his time, and the programme gradually fades out—or rather, sputters out—in the middle of his fractured reminiscences.

Anyone familiar with Soyinka's later writings will recognize certain hallmarks of his comic imagination in this early radio sketch. The scatological discourse on the night-soil men anticipates Sagoe's hilarious voidancy philosophy in *The Interpreters*; the bloated politician's empty grandiloquence reminds one of Brother Jero's incantatory nonsense and Kongi's extravagant dreams of glory; and the Oldest Old Boy has affinities with foolish Agboreko in *A Dance of the Forests* on the one hand and with the wise Old Man in *Madmen and Specialists* on the other. Throughout the piece there is an awareness of appropriate verbal register and a tendency towards bold burlesque which combine to give each voice its own distinctive absurdity. Above all, the comedy is dramatic, involving not only four different characters in interaction (an announcer as well as the three "speakers") but also an abrupt humorous deflation of expectations which have been deliberately puffed up to abnormal proportions. Even as a young man Soyinka was the kind of jester who knew how to fool his audience with quick-witted foolishness.

The next sketch from "Talking through your Hat" to appear in the *Radio Times* was "Oga Look Properly," a monologue narrated by a salvaged passenger lorry.¹⁹ This may have been Soyinka's first attempt to write about the world of lorry drivers, motor mechanics and police inspectors—the hilariously lugubrious, life-and-death world of *The Road*.²⁰ The narrative begins at the beginning—that is, at the lorry's beginning, which is to say, with a bang!

I was born on a roundabout—yes, you might almost call me a Siamese twin. Cephalic conjoint—that is what the doctor said, the one who came to attend the one or two injured. He took a look at "No Road to Heaven" and he took a look at "Do Unto Others No. 2" and he said—"Cephalic Conjoint." They will take some separating! He was right. My two vehicular progenitors were locked in "rigor mortis" embrace, brought by the fact that "No Road to Heaven" was travelling at about sixty m.p.h. approaching the roundabout and could not stop in time for "Do Unto Others No. 2" whose driver was already in the innermost Paradise of Heaven. By this I mean that Rasaki had taken several whiffs of marijuana that night and was in such a state of bliss that he actually imagined that the signboard read "Keep Right" instead of "Keep Left!" He was only doing thirty at the most, but it was enough. They met, impacted, the driver of "No Road to Heaven" leapt off and—even though you might say he was in the right—disappeared into the night and was never heard off (*sic*) again. Rasaki broke an arm and his lower jaw, but was lucky not to wake up in an actual

Heaven. Then the breakdown people arrived. By now of course it was morning. After trying in vain to separate the two lovers, they decided to tow them just as they were. And it was in this rather undignified manner that they all arrived at the breakdown yard in Somolu.

There was, need I mention? A tussle between the two de-owners, but it was surprisingly brief. They both admitted that it had become impossible to tell which part of the lorries belonged to which. So it was decided that one de-owner should buy out the other. And the de-owner of "Do Unto Others No. 2" being rather saddled with liabilities, he sold out to "No Road to Heaven". The motor mechanics of Somolu, being reinforced by Salawu Alagbede, the famous "Galvaniser-Specialis" of Abule-Ijesha got to work on the double wreck. Olojede Asumonnu, alias Man Proposes, God Disposes, otherwise known as the Demon Carpenter was summoned to put together the two shattered bodies and create a new one. And finally, if you go along Somigona Street, you will find a big signpost on which is written :

Patronise Adegbenro Brothers and Co.
Signboard, Notices, Motor Numbers
...And House Painters.
With Modern Electric Sprayer Machine.
The Fear of God is the Beginning of Wisdom
Say No Evil, Do No Evil, Fear No Evil
God will Provide
A Trial Will Convince You
Come One Come All.

Each line is written in a different style and angle : and altogether, there are sixteen different colours employed in the inscription of this legend. It was obvious that no less a team than Adegbenro Brothers and Co. could paint me, and such was the masterpiece that they performed on me that I at once got the nickname of Joseph Alarabara. But that was only my nickname. My new de-owner, anxious to preserve the dual nature of my creation also insists on giving me a name which would be a mixture of the names of my two parents. He examined "Do Unto Others No. 2" and he examined "No Road to Heaven" and he decided that the approximate equation would be "No Road Unto Others No. 1" (You see, in strict fairness, he also divided No. 2 by 2, thereby evolving the idea of a No. 1). And that, I'm afraid, is how I came to exist.

This passage, written in what could be called Soyinka's hit-and-run joking style, is full of local references and names which a Yoruba audience living in Western Nigeria would find delightful.²¹ But anyone who has survived a journey on Nigerian roads would recognize the derelict demi-world described. After providing further particulars on "No Road Unto Others No. 1" and introducing its first driver Adisa Ojerinde alias Ekuro Ijero ("the palm kernel from Ijero [a small town in Ekiti Division]" or "the Ijero man tough as a palmkernel") and a police inspector nicknamed Ogun Epe ("the Lip"), Soyinka has the lorry relate an incident which occurred after the Lip had stopped the Palm Kernel for speeding and other related infractions on the road to Ibadan. The incident is told in dramatic form with a few interpolations by the lorry :

"Get down!"

Without hesitation Adisa obeyed.

"I might have guessed Adisa. So this is your new lorry eh? No Road Unto Others."

"Oga, na so so!"

"No Road Unto Others. Hm. I suppose you think that is a licence for obstruction on the road, for overspeeding, for overloading and for dangerously carrying a passenger on your tailboard."

"Ah, Inspector, a no 'overload.'"

"Give me your licence."

"Oga, come see for yourself, make you come. How you go fit see am from outside. Unless you climb here and look for inside, you no fit see properly."

I must confess at this stage that I was totally baffled. What on earth was Adisa playing at. He knew very well that I was overloaded, and yet he was asking the Inspector to climb up the tailboard and place himself in a position where he could see very clearly. However, it soon became clear. I ought to mention at this stage that when I was completed, I discovered that a little niche, about four inches long and one inch deep had been made into my roof, just where a passenger might have to hold if he was climbing aboard when the tailboard was shut. Well, even as Adisa was manoeuvring the Inspector to the back, the apprentice had climbed up and placed some coins in that little niche. Before I had time to give myself caburettor (*sic*) ulcer trying to solve the meaning of this strange action, the Inspector himself climbed up.

"You say you are not overload. What is this. Look over there. Is that not eight persons on that bench?"

"Oga, look properly."

"What do you mean, look properly. Do you think I have not got eyes."

"Oga, look properly."

"What more remain for me to see. In fact, where is your spare tyre?"

"Oga, look properly."

Adisa was sounding really desperate, why, I could not yet understand. Even his apprentice had joined him in this refrain. But the Inspector was adamant.

"I say where is your spare tyre. Show me, where is it?"

But now, there began a strange innovation in the Inspector's movements. Gently, ever so gently, he began to caress my back. He was still standing remember, on the rear foot-rest, and he was holding onto the roof. Now, he released one hand and began to feel me along the top, gently. He had such long sensitive fingers that the motion was as soothing as a light drizzle or a breeze. And all the time, the chorus was kept up by Ekuro and his apprentice. . .

"Oga look properly. Oga look properly."

And such was the intensity of the plea that before they knew it themselves, the whole lorryload of passengers had joined in. "Oga look properly. Oga look properly." Under such inspiration, it was inevitable that Oga should look properly. His index finger was the first to arrive at the niche, followed. (*sic*) His middle finger also fell into it, and with the aid of the thumb, he scooped up the shillings which the apprentice had hidden there.

It was as I said, the beginning of a long and beautiful friendship. I wish I had time to tell you about the different hiding-places which were favoured from time to time by the different drivers who were employed to

kick me. Or about Kalamanzoo Joe who tricked Ogun Epe into looking for his money in the exhaust pipe. Ogun Epe, not knowing that after even two miles, my exhaust pipe could be warmer than a blacksmith's forge, foolishly dipped his usual exploratory fingers into the mouth of the pipe and was rewarded by a searing pain that wrung a horrified cry from him. To make it worse, the pipe was of the type which is flattened at the end, and as Ogun Epe had grown steadily plumper from the proceeds of passenger-lorry inspectorship, his fat fingers did not immediately agree to be pulled out, and for at least five seconds, he remained there until with a superhuman effort, he tugged at the pipe, and he fell backwards.

For this, he was off-duty for a week but when Kalamanzoo Joe took me past his post again, he was on patrol, with his right hand heavily bandaged.

These two examples of Soyinka talking through his hat—i.e., “The Old Boys’ Dinner Speech” and “Oga Look Properly”—give us an impression of his powers of comic invention at the age of twenty-five. His zany imagination, facile wit and flair for drama were matched by a remarkable gift of expression which enabled him to tickle any idea into hilarity. At this point in his development he apparently was not interested in clothing his cleverness in obscurity or vague, resonant symbols. He just wanted to make people laugh loud and long. So while talking through his hat, he never tried to speak over the heads of his audience. He created public entertainment, not private jokes.

The same could be said of one of his later broadcasts that year, a travelogue on Paris entitled “Land of Flesh and Bread.”²³ Though this was ostensibly a non-fictional account, Soyinka added plenty of comic embroidery. He says he visited Paris twice, once in the middle of an epidemic :

Asia had just conquered Europe when I first visited Paris. You might call it germ warfare. The attacking force was of an invisible virus whose resultant inertia was nicknamed Asia flu. It is inevitable that my immediate recollection of Paris should be linked forever with this mysterious flu, since it had such unfortunate, and rather expensive consequences. I would never dream of taking a room in a first-class hotel in any country, much less Paris. But this is precisely what I was forced to do Until Lagos opened up hotels, I would have said that Paris was the most exorbitant city in the world.

After that devastating experience, he says he “did not tackle Paris again until two years later” when he stayed “for about three months, earning my living as a folk-singer.” Among the things he learned while singing for his supper were :

1. that “during the summer, Paris is not the Paris of Parisians—it is merely a tourist centre. It becomes a sort of Little Rich America Overseas.”
2. that “the Eiffel (*sic*) tower is a complete bore . . . So is the Arc de Triumph. So is the Champs Elysses (*sic*). In fact, the best way to see Paris is not to follow the usual Points of Interest which you get in guidebooks. As in any other city, you simply must set out and start walking. Walk

in a different direction each day, and simply follow your nose. And at night especially. There are more wonders perpetrated in Paris at night than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

3. that one of the most amusing nightspots in Paris is a little cafe in the Latin Quarter called "La Methode" which is always "filled with that curious breed of human beings, the neither-nors, . . . the Third Sex, whose antics are as grotesque as they are disturbingly pathetic. Sometimes I would spend a whole hour trying to decide whether a particular specimen was a man pretending to be a woman or a masculine woman playing copy, or whether the creature had never really made up its mind what it was."
4. that the "clochards," the tramps of Paris "who have renounced all allegiance or responsibility towards their fellow men," constitute possibly the "most intriguing element" in French society.
5. that "Parisians are famous for their love of the belly" and are absolute fanatics when it comes to bread.

Soyinka's remarks about French bread are worth quoting in full because they reveal his ability to rise to a yeasty subject :

Talking of bread rolls—it is well worth going to Paris just to see to what amazing uses the Fresh roll is put. First you must understand that bread is not an item of food in Paris. It is just a habit. Lets see now, to what can I compare it here? Ah yes of course—the Hausaman and goro. Would you say that a Northerner was eating if you saw him chewing Kolanuts? It is the same with a Frenchman and bread roll. In Paris, you stumble over rolls. If a law of hygiene was passed—as they have in England—making it an offence to leave bread uncovered—the whole of Paris would go on strike. I mean, where would they get that amount of paper. The newsvendor props up his bicycle with a bread roll. The gendarme uses it instead of a truncheon. If you don't believe me, take a look at the traffic policeman. Often you'll find that the poor man has picked up a breadroll instead of a truncheon, and doesn't even know it. If a chair or a table has lost a leg, or one leg is shorter than the others, you use a chunk of bread. In England they use a book. I've seen students carve lampshades out of a hardened crust. Political demonstrations are officially admitted to take on a physically dangerous aspect only when the demonstrators are armed with bread-rolls. If you remember a man (one of the many) who overthrew French Parliament and caused another of the many re-elections, one Monsieur Poujade—he was a baker. A baker! The bakers are indeed a formidable element in French constitution—internal or political.

When Soyinka turned to more serious subjects, as he did at least once in a broadcast devoted to examining the concept of an "African Personality,"²⁸ he still found a way to make his approach entertaining. He started this broadcast by talking about Shirley Bassey, a British pop singer born and bred in a seamy area of London yet hailed by British disc jockeys as a "world-famous Nigerian singer" because her father happened to be a Nigerian sailor. Soyinka says he found this amusing because it implied that anyone with a drop of African blood was regarded by Europeans as being genetically

polluted. Like a cask of low-grade wine or a metal alloy, Shirley Bassey was too impure to be considered the equal of British citizens of unmixed ancestry. Soyinka then points out that the Negritudists who claim that Alexandre Dumas and Beethoven were negro because they had some fraction of negro blood in them are affirming basically the same racist notion of negro inferiority. "In their anxiety to claim every public or famous figure for Africa, the Africanists are subscribing to the idea of inherent pollution by contact."

Soyinka admits that in places like South Africa or the Deep South of America, "it is necessary to be militant and aggressive in the impregnation of a conscious faith in black dignity, in the destiny of the negro as a race," but elsewhere such stridency is out of place.

I know that I am not proud to be an African. Nor am I ashamed to be an African. I simply accept the fact as a normal, unhysterical phenomenon. I am an African and that is that.

Soyinka goes on to ridicule the old colonial notion of a primitive "African mentality" which makes Africans fundamentally different from Europeans. Most educated Africans, he notes, would reject this outdated concept as a racial slur, yet some of these same intellectuals now

demand that we accept a new concept of the African. His personality. His mentality was an insult, but his personality is not? I find neither a compliment, because they both imply that the African is some peculiar animal, with peculiar characteristics that set him apart from the human race. It is no use trying to romanticise these characteristics—the implication still exists.

Soyinka also believes that negritude leads to a type of mental laziness that destroys literary art :

Of all the bad poems ever written by West Africans. Of all the lazy poems, the unpoetic poems, you will find that the negritudinous poems take the share of the lion's head. It seems rhythm, blood, blood, rhythm, blood plus rhythm plus blood with rhythm again—if repeated often and fervently enough constitute brilliant poem already. (*sic*)

Soyinka concludes his remarks by reiterating his main point :

The final proof of negro humanity is in the human variety of its individuals, and the proof of negro maturity is his unhysterical acceptance [of] himself. Dignity, to me, has always been a quality quite incapable of being forced. The louder it is, the more ludicrous the object becomes. The whole concept of negritude is, for this reason, partially false. It began by being the cry of need by French dominated Africans who had become assimilated and deculturised. It is perhaps an inevitable phase—certainly no more than the temporary Euphoria of the dope addict. The African Personality is several and any attempt to straight-jacket him is a travesty of his humanity.

By the time Soyinka finishes, we have been taken a long distance from Shirley Bassey but it has been a fascinating excursion. As in his travelogue on Paris, we have been entertained by his wit, ingenuity, unorthodox opinions and shrewd arguments. Even when dealing with a serious subject, Soyinka evidently could not totally suppress his sense of humour. Ridicule remains his major mode of persuasion. He makes us laugh at what he attacks.

Soyinka gave many more radio talks and performances before accepting a position in 1962 as Lecturer in English at the University of Ife in Ibadan. For instance, on April 7, 1961, he read a part in Yemi Lijadu's "Okonkwo," a radio adaptation of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.²⁴ A few months later he participated in a Sunday night NBC radio series on "the African Novel" by speaking on William Conton, Amos Tutuola and D. O. Fagunwa.²⁵ His activities can be easily traced in the weekly or monthly programme guides published by Nigerian radio and television broadcasting companies.²⁶ Unfortunately, the scripts of most of these plays and talks do not exist in printed form and may never be recovered,²⁷ but the few that have survived in the pages of the *Radio Times* give us a revealing glimpse of Wole Soyinka's genius in embryo. He was soon to hatch out of the local media and earn a place on a much wider international stage, but during this transitional period, these two-and-a-half years of electronic incubation, he was growing fast and discovering a very satisfying outlet for his maturing talents. Literary scholars and critics who ignore such an important formative phrase in Soyinka's career do so only at the risk of talking through their hats.

¹ Gerald Moore, *Wole Soyinka* (London: Evans, 1971), p. 9. Moore says Soyinka was awarded a "research fellowship which would enable him to travel widely in Nigeria, studying and recording traditional festivals, rituals and masquerades rich in dramatic content," but an account in Nigeria's *Radio Times* (3 July, 1960) says, "A grant was made recently by the Rockefeller Foundation to enable Wole to make a survey of Nigerian drama in its modern development." It appears that he was studying modern developments in traditional theatre.

² James Gibbs, "Wole Soyinka: Bio-Bibliography," *Africana Library Journal*, 3, 1 (1972), 16.

³ Moore, pp. 14-15; Gibbs, pp. 15-16; Alain Ricard, *Théâtre et nationalisme: Wole Soyinka et Le Roi Jones* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1972), p. 66; Eldred Jones, *The Writing of Wole Soyinka* (London: Heinemann, 1973), p. 10.

⁴ *Radio Times* (March 1960), p. 5. Reviews of the Ibadan production appeared in *Black Orpheus*, 6 (1959), 50-51, and *Ibadan*, 6 (1959), 27-29.

⁵ *TV Times and Radio News*, 28 July, 1960, pp. 12-13.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Judging from the description given of the play (*Ibid.*), it was not a version of "Camwood on the Leaves."

⁸ *Radio Times*, 25 September, 1960, p. 6. Soyinka mentions this fact in an interview in *African Writers Talking*, ed. Cosmo Pieterse and Dennis Duerden (New York: Africana Publishing Corp., 1972), p. 171.

⁹ *Camwood on the Leaves* (London : Eyre Methuen, 1973). The BBC production is mentioned in Shirley Cordeaux, "The BBC African Service's Involvement in African Theatre," *Research in African Literatures*, 1 (1970), 153. It was broadcast on March 21, 1965.

¹⁰ Cordeaux (p. 153) also mentions a BBC production of another radio play by Soyinka entitled "The Detainee" which was broadcast on September 5, 1965.

¹¹ *Radio Times*, 18 December 1960, p. 3; *Radio Times*, 22 January 1961, p. 7.

¹² *Radio Times*, 15 January 1961; *Radio Times*, 12 March 1961, p. 10.

¹³ *Ibadan*, 9 (1960), 20; Moore, p. 15. The play was performed on February 18, 1960.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Moore, p. 15; Gibbs, pp. 16-17. Reviews of the performance can be found in *Ibadan*, 10 (1960), 30-32, and *African Horizon*, 2 (January 1961), 8-11.

¹⁶ See, e.g., "Poisoners of the World, Unite," *The Horn*, 3, 3 (1960), 4-5, 9; "Proverb : Okonjo de Hunter," *The Horn*, 3, 3 (1960), 6-7; "Stage," *The Horn*, 4, 1 (1960), 1; "Audience to Performer," *The Horn*, 4, 1 (1960), 4; and "The Future of West African Writing," *The Horn*, 4, 1 (1960), 10-16. For a history of this magazine, see W. H. Stevenson, "The Horn : What it was and what it did," *Research in African Literatures*, 6, 1 (1975).

¹⁷ *Radio Times*, 3 July 1960, p. 6.

¹⁸ *Radio Times*, 11 September 1960, p. 7. Quotations are taken from this source.

¹⁹ *Radio Times*, 18 September 1960, p. 7. Quotations are taken from this source.

²⁰ Soyinka also published a poem called "epitaph for Say Tokyo Kid," *The Horn*, 4, 5 (1962), 10-11, which makes use of one of the characters who later appeared in *The Road*.

²¹ For example, most of the forenames (Rasaki, Salawu, Adisa) are Muslim names which sound funny to Yorubas, the place names are taken from communities in or near Lagos (Somolu, Ijesha, Ijero), and at least one name, Joseph Alarabara ("Joseph of the Coat of Many Colours") has Biblical overtones. I am in debt to Dapo Adelugba for this information.

²² *Radio Times*, 4 December 1960, pp. 6-7. Quotations are taken from this source.

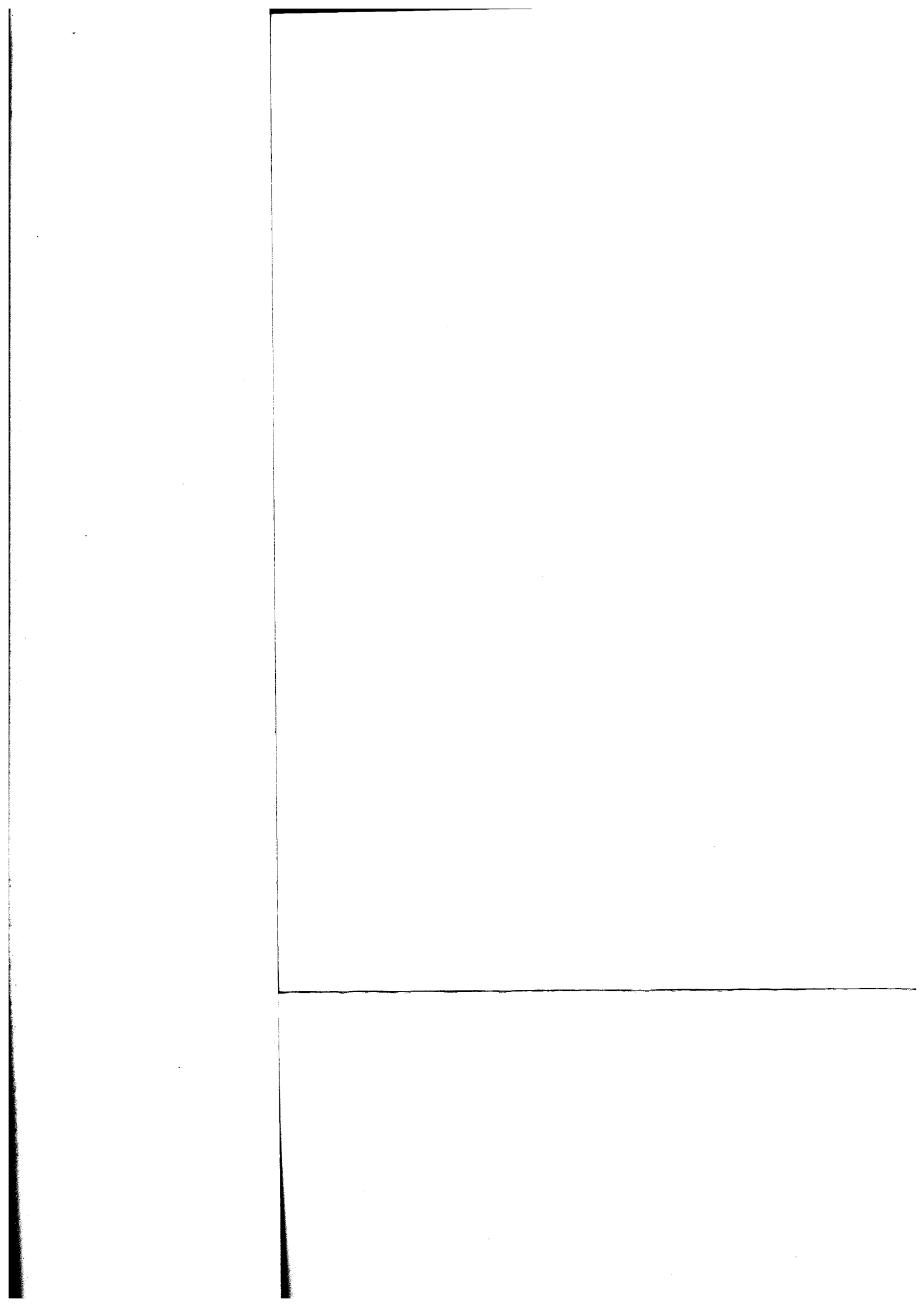
²³ *Radio Times*, 22 January 1961, pp. 6-7. Quotations are taken from this source.

²⁴ *Radio Times*, 2 April 1961, p. 14; *Radio Times*, 7 May 1961, p. 14. An earlier preview of this program appears in *Radio Times*, 21 August 1960, p. 9.

²⁵ *Radio Times*, 16 July 1961, p. 2; *Radio Times*, 23 July 1961, p. 2.

²⁶ In addition to the *Radio Times* (later the *Radio-TV Times*), one can check the *TV Times and Radio News*, the *TV Times*, *The Broadcaster*, and various regional guides such as the *ECBS Radio-TV Digest*.

²⁷ The radio and television publications consulted were found in the Africana Collection of the University of Ibadan Library. Since this library did not have complete runs of many of these publications (lacking, e.g., nearly all the issues of *Radio Times* published between 17 September 1961 and 1 April 1962, when Soyinka was still very active in radio and television work), it is possible that a few more texts could be found in issues available elsewhere.



THE CROSS TILTED TO FALL : HAL PORTER'S *THE TILTED CROSS*

Anna Rutherford

In his article *On the Teaching of Modern Literature* Lionel Trilling discusses Nietzsche's *The Genealogy of Morals* and points out that "Nietzsche's theory of the social order dismisses all ethical impulse from its origins—the basis of society is to be found in the rationalization of cruelty." The method of cynicism which Nietzsche pursued goes so far as to describe punishment in terms of the pleasure derived from the exercise of cruelty : "Compensation" he says "consists in a legal warrant entitling one man to exercise his cruelty on another." ¹

The basis of society is the rationalization of cruelty.

Compensation consists in a legal warrant entitling one man to exercise his cruelty on another.

I am sure that most of my audience on hearing these two statements would think automatically of Africa and the West Indies, the slave trade and the exploitation of the negro by the white colonisers. But it is to another part of the Commonwealth that I wish to turn, namely to Australia and the convict system on which that nation was built. Time does not permit me to give even a brief account of this system; all I can do is to ask you to accept my word when I say that in an age when cruelty was commonplace the convict system must take pride of place. It was a system designed to change the most humane person into a criminal and an animal and in many instances it was extremely successful.

It is out of the experiences of that system plus the individual experiences of one felon that the Australian Hal Porter has created his novel, *The Tilted Cross*. The setting is Hobart Town, the year 1847, and one of the two main characters, Judas Griffin Vaneleigh, almost duplicates the infamous and inscrutable forger-painter, Thomas Griffiths Wainwright, who was trans-

ported to Van Diemen's Land not only for forgery but also on suspicion of having murdered his sister-in-law, because he said, "she had thick ankles."

Porter immediately creates a setting that leaves us in little doubt about his opinion of the system and where his sympathies lie :

Van Diemen's land, an ugly trinket suspended at the world's discredited rump, was freezing ... Ladders and gallows and crucifixes of fused snow slanted up the precipices of Organ-pipe and the steeps of Knocklofty to the skylights of a firmament lacking angels to cosset anything or manna to sustain anyone. ²

In words strongly reminiscent of Nietzsche's comment which I quoted at the beginning of this paper he continues :

Land and sky alike seemed repelled by the English and the half-cultured urbanity they had securely established on a solid foundation of *political brutality, crime, unemployment and colonial corruption*. (p. 9, my italics)

And what had they created "at the world's discredited rump?"

It was a town of the dispossessed; half its creatures criminal, half its creatures lower class or lower middle class. It was the privy of London; it was indeed, a miniature and foundling London, a Johnny-come-lately London, turnkey-ridden and soldier-hounded, its barracks and prisons imprisoned between a height of stone and a depthless water. Nothing and no one attempted the barricades of Organ-pipe except convict escapees blotched, like leopards, with gaol-sores. No one returned over the crags except bushrangers, crazed from suppers of human flesh, and chattering a litany learned in a hinterland of horror. There was nowhere to go in Hobart Town except Hobart Town. Since it had been planted in perversity it had taken root and grown, a weed town, perverse and obverse. (p. 10)

The use of the word "obverse" has led Adrian Mitchell to suggest that in this antipodean world there is a complete reversal of values, and there can be no disagreeing with him over this point. ³ The topsy-turvy world of the Antipodes with its reversal of seasons, its black swans instead of white, is a strangely fitting setting for a colony founded on a system that is itself perverse and obverse. But the reversal of all acceptable human values is not indigenous to the Antipodes. And so one disagrees when Mitchell argues that in this world we find a complete inversion of normal (European) behaviour, that Hobart Town is the moral and cultural antithesis of London, darkness to Europe's Enlightenment. European Enlightenment! It is European Enlightenment that founded this colony, European Enlightenment that completely annihilated the Tasmanian aborigines, European Enlightenment that created this Hell and the book explicitly says so :

The colonists brought bellropes and the gallows; the gallows night-cap and Capuchin hoods of taffeta; leg-irons and chinchilla muffs; Flogging Tommies and backs to flog. In sweat-stiff shirts, stinking boots and urine-splashed buckskin breeches they hunted with infinite care and to extinction, the naked people who had built no chapel, no goal, brewery, snuff-shop or brothel. (p. 92, see also p. 137)

If Hobart Town is the underworld in both senses of the word, and we dispute neither, then we may also comment that it is not an underworld indiginous to the Antipodes but one transported from Europe and further nourished by Europe.

Hobart Town is inhabited by people whose "natures ripened to decay as perceptibly as melons under an equatorial planet" (p. 24). The whole place is one festering and superating sore, a gangrenous body doomed to destruction. It's a world where "morality . . . had been hurled away" (p. 24) and "exiled humanity . . . gulp[ed] and drown[ed] in the dead black waters" (p. 37).

This world is divided into two groups, those who rule (the colonial authorities) and those they rule (the convicts). And when we look at both groups we are reminded of Macquarie's words when he first came to the colony, namely that it consisted of those who had been transported and those who should have been.

We cannot help being disgusted and repulsed by the general populace. Animal-like in their debauchery they present a horrifying picture of society. But their actions and attitudes are not so much an indictment of themselves as of a system that could turn human beings into little more than animals. No beasts of burden were permitted at Port Arthur or the other probation stations so that consequently all the drudgery of labour was borne by the convicts. The short verse

They whipped us, they lashed us
They drove us thro the strand
They harnessed us like horses
To plow Van Diemen's Land

could easily have been inspired by a factual account from an ex-convict, Joseph Smith, who reported, "Many a time I have been yoked like a bullock with twenty or thirty others to drag along timber. About eight hundred died in six months at a place called Toongabbie." ⁴

In *The Tilted Cross* Porter describes the return of a chain gang to prison :

Those bipeds, grotesque when they had left in cloudiness and the twilight of morning, were more grotesque in the rain and the twilight of night. Man's animality is not so brought to the senses by his gait in his more animal movements . . . in unencumbered walking, in skipping, dancing or running. But, hobbled by a long chain that was manacled at each end to the ankles like a wasteful and weighty piece of *bijouterie*, and was held up from the nasty ground, as it were fastidiously, by a ladylike sling of twine, man employed a gait that recalled that of animals—a waddling, a shambling, a dragging.

To the assured clashing of cathedral bells, and the dull sonata of the links swaying in suspension, in a single file that the oil-lamps deformed to a frieze of impossibilities, the monsters returning home conventionally entered. (p. 245)

Vaneleigh, Porter's spokesman on most occasions, remarks: "There's a gulf between humans and animals: I've always thought it to be narrower than many suppose" (p. 111). And of course it is only natural to suppose that when human beings treat other humans as animals then the gulf between the human and the animal is narrowed—for both parties.

In spite of all its faults the mob displays a certain amount of generosity, loyalty and humanity. But nothing positive can be found in the other world of Hobart, the world of colonial society represented by Sir Sidney Knight, Lady Rose, his wife, and Sir Sidney's cousin, the cripple, Asnetha Sleep. These are the inhabitants of Cindermead, a name as symbolic as Gatsby's Valley of Ashes. Porter's description of Cindermead prepares us for the nature of its residents:

There, southerly, the lawns of *Cindermead*, inclining downwards below the upper-class and custard slush of Sandy Bay Road, rotted bluey beneath the intemperance of weather. The walnut trees and peach-orchard and lilacs were pickpocketed leafless. The elm avenue was just old enough, and rooted just deeply in enough toward the frozen core of hell, to indicate without chance of being misunderstood the pointless falsity of its perspective. Intimating the grand manner of an hereditary wealth and aristocracy, though all-bones as Job's turkey, it led down barbaric and final slopes to nothing except the adzes of rock on the margin of The Estuary that was, that season, ice-coloured, ice-still, and icy as a penitentiary moat. (p. 10)

These people are characterized by malice, hate, lust, hypocrisy, cruelty and treachery and it is for this society that Porter saves his most biting and savage criticism. His portrait of Asnetha Sleep is Hogarthian in its cruelty, and in true satirical fashion he displays through her deformity the crippling nature of the whole system just as its barren nature is displayed through the impotence of Sir Sidney.⁵ Yet it is to these people and those like them that power has been given "over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death."⁶

Adrian Mitchell has attempted to relate the story to the myth of Orpheus and the underworld and whilst agreeing that there are some overtones it falls down in too many ways to be valid. Following this line of thought he has argued for Queely as Apollo and this is of course particularly applicable when we consider the Apollonian-Dionysian conflict. But one could just as easily and, I believe, with more justification argue for Queely as a Christ-like figure, and when one considers the book as a whole I believe this to be a more valid interpretation.

It has been suggested by some critics that the novel is a "monstrous parody of Christian myth and morality" but I would argue against this. It is not Christianity that is parodied but the perversion of it as practised by the colonial authorities. The religious hypocrisy of the administrators had an early beginning in Australia. The first service took place in Australia on the 2nd of February, 1788, six days after the First Fleet had landed. And what was the text chosen for this first sermon, to be preached you will remember, to "the conscripts sent to Hell?" The 116 Psalm, 12th verse.

“What shall I render unto the Lord for all his benefit toward me”?
The title of the book is of course relevant when it comes to a discussion of the religious aspects. A cross can function as a dual symbol :

- a. positive, reminding us of Christ’s sacrifice, his love for man.
- b. negative, reminding us of man’s cruelty and inhumanity.

It is the latter aspect that almost completely dominates Porter’s novel. The “town’s well-planned centre” with “gaol opposite courthouse, courthouse opposite cathedral, cathedral opposite gibbet, the gibbet opposite the gaol,” (p. 94) draws our attention to important relationships and connections. There is a constant juxtaposition between gallows and crucifixes (p. 8, p. 237), flogging posts and artistic spires (p. 24), the dull sonata of the links and the assured clashing of cathedral bells (p. 245), the stroke of the cat and the stroke of the bell (p. 247). One of the convicts is to be flogged and in the description of the punishment we cannot help being reminded of Nietzsche’s comment quoted earlier in this paper :

As the cat-o’-nine-tails struck for the first time on the enamelled back, the second floggee, alone of them all, closed his eyes; all the others drawn up in the dwindling rain and the dwindling year avidly watched. As the cat was uprooted from its plot of flesh, and wrenched back to descend again, *One!* they all recorded, for an inner system of counting had begun in the senses of the sightseers. They were more soothed and delighted than they could express . . . cock-fighting, bear-baiting, wrestling, boxing, fox-hunting were noise-inducing pleasures with sordid implications of gambling. To condone, it seemed, that purer performance of skill, the bell-ringers rehearsing Christmas exulted in metal. (p. 247)

The congregation attending the flogging is paralleled by the congregation at chapel, both witnesses to a sacrifice.

The grim perversion of christianity and the dominance of the negative aspect mentioned earlier is represented by the tilt of the cross. One person alone saves it from falling completely, one person alone represents the positive aspect, one person alone remains untouched by evil, Queely Sheill, son of John Death Sheill, proprietor of the Shades, the taproom which throughout the book is portrayed as Hell’s mouth. God-like in appearance Queely has “a sublime vision of a dissolving world” (p. 126). “No experience had taught or would ever teach [him] . . . the delights of inhumanity” (p. 26). In a world full of hypocrisy he “is incapable of acting,” (p. 126) he believes that “no ’arm comes of human feelings” (p. 31) and he “does what ’is heart tells him” (p. 33). There is an intensity in his solicitude and love for all who need it, and he has an intuitive awareness of other people’s needs. “Queely sees” (p. 33). It is he alone who senses the ache and despair that lies behind much of Asnetha Sleep’s behaviour, and the scene where he makes love to her is one of the most sensitively portrayed that I have ever read. In his desire to comfort others he never stops to count the cost or consider the consequences, “he felt he knew when the *wine and bread of his*

body could not be denied" (p. 95, my italics). "In the face of a warier and selfish humanity" (p. 58) he is, like Billy Budd, doomed to destruction, just as assuredly as "the Cross [is] tilted to fall" (p. 257).

Like Christ, he becomes a sacrificial victim. There are several references to him in this role in the book. Whatever the act of making love had meant to Asnetha Sleep, Queely knew that "for him it was a crucifixion hedged with tears . . . his violence and frenzy were not those of the one who hungers but of the one who is sacrificed" (p. 100). Sacrificed he is. Betrayed by the inhabitants of Cindermead Queely is committed for trial. The trial is remarkable for its travesty of justice; its outcome is a foregone conclusion. As in Kafka's *The Penal Colony*, "Guilt is never to be doubted." In spite of Polidorio's protests "But you are *innocent*, my child. You are *guiltless* as a sucking dove. You are a *sacrifice*" (p. 241) Queely is condemned to prison. Poli persuades him to escape. Queely fails in his attempt and in doing so smashes his leg so badly that it is necessary to amputate it (This operation is performed by Asnetha Sleep's new suitor, himself a cripple). Gangrene sets in, and after eleven days of terrible agony during which time he is attended by *thieves* and cries in his agony " 'I thirst. I thirst' " (p. 257) Queely dies—on Christmas eve! With Queely's death we have a world bereft of all goodness; no longer is there wine for the cup, or a head for the crown of thorns. All that we are left with is the Cup, "the empty Cup. The Crown that fitted no head, The Cross tilted to fall" (p. 257). As with the death of Christ, darkness and chaos reign supreme :

The Shades, like a world's mouth gaping to show the rum-swollen tongue and dripping molars and song-raked purple gullet, belched thunderingly, once. Immediately, as though gulping back its own drunken horror, the mouth shut, and Campbell Street was empty. (p. 263-264)

We have reached what Northrop Frye calls "the point of demonic epiphany, the dark tower and prison of endless pain, the city of dreadful night." This is the sixth phase which "presents human life in terms of largely unrelieved bondage. Its settings feature prisons, madhouses, lynching mobs, and places of execution, and it differs from a pure inferno mainly in the fact that in human experience suffering has an end in death." 7

Queely's fate and death, like Christ's, suggest the idea of individual man as victim of a cruel and unjust authority. For the Australian this is an idea that has been associated with the outlaw Ned Kelly, and it is interesting to see it reflected in a sketch by Sidney Nolan on the cover of the catalogue for his recent exhibition in London.

For individuals such as this there is one escape only—death. And so it was that

Polidorio Smith danced. Grave and grotesque, his arms rising to the restless ceiling, he tangled the foggy skein of years gone with years to come and go. He and the mingling shadows were useless spectres that may have been dancing unknowingly for Time itself, or for Life, to halt its accumulations of ever-blackening blood, or for the undying god who grants all—Death. (p. 257)

The last section of this paper is an attempt to relate *The Tilted Cross* to Northrop Frye's theory of myths, for I believe that an examination of the work according to this theory will throw another light on it and suggest that the final solution does not lie in death. In his essay "The Archetypes of Literature" Frye remarks :

In the solar cycle of the day, the seasonal cycle of the year, and the organic cycle of human life, there is a single pattern of significance, out of which myth constructs a central narrative around a figure who is partly the sun, partly vegetative fertility and partly a god or archetypal human being.⁸

Queely fits all three roles. I have made passing reference to him in the role of Apollo. It is also interesting to note that Apollo is the healer, the only God who is skilled in this art apart from his son, Asclepius, who inherited the skill from him, for it is Queely, "the veritable Apollo," who tries to heal Asnetha Sleep's tortured mind and body. I have dealt at length with him in his Christ-God-like role (I do not find the two [Christ/Apollo] mutually exclusive) and it is well of course to remember that the cross is a symbol of fertility (the fecundity of sacrifice).

In the same essay Frye sets forth the pattern of the tragic vision which he divides in terms of human, animal, vegetable, mineral and unformed worlds. Once more it is easy to draw parallels with *The Tilted Cross*. The human world is one of tyranny and anarchy, Queely is the individual and isolated man, the betrayed hero, whilst Rose Knight and Asnetha Sleep are easily recognized as harlot and witch. The tree of death of the vegetable world is much in evidence and so too are the rocks and sinister geometrical images like the cross of the mineral world, whilst it was across the seas of the unformed world, "across the last and iceberg-cluttered ocean, [that] night came closer yet to Van Diemen's land" (p. 91). The world of *The Tilted Cross* is the world of Northrop Frye's North, a world of darkness, dissolution and winter. Hobart Town is a grotesque town in a grotesque landscape, caught between "a height of stone and a depthless water" (p. 10). The dominant imagery is of desolation, cold, ice, water, sleet, rock and ocean. It is a world in which we find the triumph of the powers of darkness, the defeat of the hero and the return of chaos. In Porter's choice of place and time we once more have the antipodean reversal. South replaces north, Queely dies at Christmas which is summer not winter and we find an ironic fulfilment in the marriage of Asnetha Sleep and Dr. Wake, which will take place in the north not south.

At the winter solstice as at Christmas you have the new born light threatened by the powers of darkness and in the solstitial cycle of the year as in Christianity you have the eventual triumph of light over dark. But there is no such triumph in *The Tilted Cross*. Queely, the symbol of light, is overpowered by the forces of darkness and this defeat takes place at Christmas in Australia, not at the winter but at the summer solstice, which means of course that there will be increasing darkness. The question we

ask is : will this lead to never-ending darkness and chaos? Spring, of course, is intimately related to Winter just as Easter Sunday is to Good Friday. But will Queely's sacrifice bear fruit? Is there any indication in the novel that the regenerative forces will assert themselves?

This, we must remember, is the world of demonic epiphany, the dark tower and prison of endless pain, the goal of the quest that isn't there. But Frye argues :

on the other side of this blasted world of repulsiveness and idiocy, a world without pity and without hope, satire begins again. At the bottom of Dante's hell, which is also the centre of the spherical earth, Dante sees Satan standing upright in the circle of ice, and as he cautiously follows Virgil over the hip and thigh of the evil giant, . . . he passes the centre and finds himself no longer going down but going up, climbing out on the other side of the world to see the stars again. From this point of view, the devil is no longer upright, but standing on his head, in the same attitude in which he was hurled downward from heaven upon the other side of the earth. ⁹

With the death of Queely the mouth of the Shades had shut and Campbell Street was empty. But for a fraction of a second only. For we are told

. . . there is always an end to cries, and to tears, the more the sooner. The mind must give over its delicious dream of eternal grief as of eternal love or eternal youth or eternal innocence. The body, that mind's wretched victim, does not care a whit for grief or love or innocence. Eternity is not for it. (p. 262)

"Campbell Street was empty. Campbell Street was empty for a moment" (p. 264). A shadowy figure is seen creeping along it, Judas Griffin Vaneleigh, creeping "away from this age of vulgarity, from the festering whispers, the smiling deliberate cruelty . . . from those with their veins filled with mud, those with the microscopic vision of the fly for filth, those crowding and squeezing and riding upon each other's backs, those cutting each other to pieces with squeamish bigotry" (p. 264).

And as he edges his way along the walls and fences of Campbell Street towards St. Mary's Hospital and death Queely's words echo in his mind : "*You must forgive them. They don't know what they say. They're 'appy. They mean no 'arm*" (p. 265). Vaneleigh muses on the "dark condition of blind humanity" :

Do we individually exist? he thought. . . Are we?
Or is matter nothing but an idea? This life a swoon of the spirit and the grave a waking?
I feel my personal identity annihilated . . . I am nothing

.....
Yet, even fire and water have sympathetic particles, and lie open to a sort of reconciliation . . . Can it be that . . . excepting the body . . . nothing, however subtle, evaporates during the transfusion and that, ere another hour, another week, another month, whenever I die, Judas Griffin Vaneleigh will have mingled with the past eternity and be flying on the swift wings of a new reputation to the north, the east, the south and the west? (pp. 265-266)

Is this the final message of the book? Is Porter indicating that the plunge into darkness though terrible is momentary and that "if we persevere . . . we shall pass a dead center, and finally" in true antipodean fashion "see the gentlemanly Prince of Darkness bottom side up."¹⁰

¹ Lionel Trilling, "On the Teaching of Modern Literature" in *Beyond Culture* (Harmondsworth, 1967), p. 34.

² Hal Porter, *The Tilted Cross* (Adelaide, 1971), p. 9. All further references are to this edition and will be included in the text.

³ In his introduction to *The Tilted Cross* (Adelaide, 1971).

⁴ A voluntary letter from an old settler, collected by Caroline Chisholm and first printed in Samuel Sidney, *The Three Colonies of Australia*, (London, 1852). Reprinted in *The Restless Years* (Milton : Jacaranda Press), pp. 28-29 (p. 28).

⁵ Thomas Keneally employs the same technique in *Bring Larks and Heroes*.

⁶ John : Revelation, VI, 8.

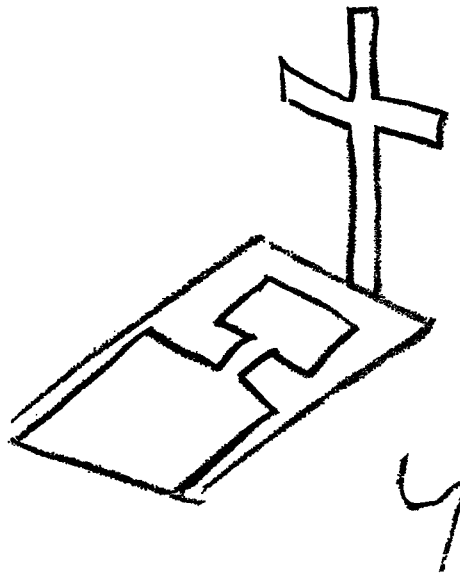
⁷ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York, 1969), pp. 238-239.

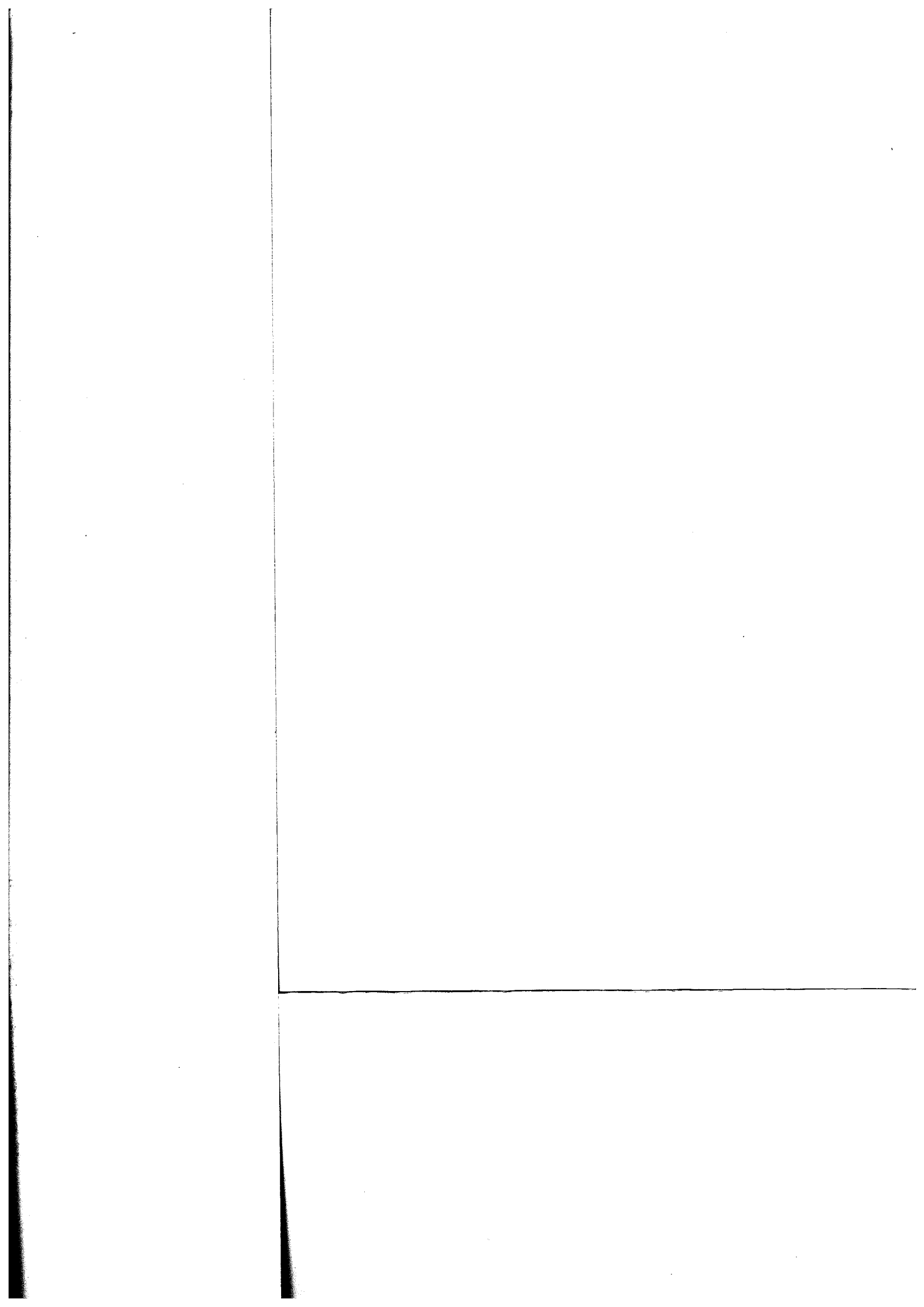
⁸ Northrop Frye, "The Archetypes of Literature" in *Fables of Identity* (New York, 1963), pp. 16-17.

⁹ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 239.

¹⁰ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 239.

Illustration by Sidney Nolan from the cover of the catalogue for an exhibition of his paintings at the Marlborough Gallery, London in 1972.





FORM INTO SHAPE :
HIS NATURAL LIFE AND CAPRICORNIA
IN A COMMONWEALTH CONTEXT

Robert T. Robertson

To show *His Natural Life* and *Capricornia* not as Australian but as Commonwealth novels means first that we have to construct a context in which their Commonwealthness may be perceived. In part that demonstration depends on pairing the two novels, on tracing similarities between them in order to argue that whatever they have in common may be common to an area larger than Australian literature but smaller than the novel as a genre—in other words, that they exhibit a Commonwealth similarity.

But it also depends on sketching or posing a preliminary Commonwealth context and hoping that the shared similarity of the two novels is also found (and thus validated as Commonwealth) in the tentative context. The argument of the paper is therefore both deductive and inductive, and it must be so because we cannot refer to a ready-made context of Commonwealth literature, an accepted concept of its being; we have to construct these contexts for each occasion, such as a conference or a course or a paper.

One such particular structure is a conference where the comparative play of constructs or hypotheses generally occurs between or among papers. In this paper three particular structures are used to propose a general hypothesis about the nature of the literature as a whole; they are an anthology of criticism (the papers of a conference), a Commonwealth course, and an anthology of short stories.

1. *Common Wealth* :

Three of the papers in Anna Rutherford's *Common Wealth* together give us our first triangulation or outline. In "The Southland of Antichrist" Randolph Stow argues that "the most rewarding approach" to the study

of Australian literature is the mythic: Australian myths will be mythic because they occur as self-contradictory pairs.¹ The pair he chooses is contained in the term "the natural jail"; this term is used by Clarke as the title of Chapter 20 in Part Four of *His Natural Life*: "A Natural Penitentiary." As myth it can be related to the ever-present New World myth of "The Garden in the Wilderness." This myth is clearly present in the difference between the original meaning of "Botany Bay" (what Joseph Banks saw there) and its later connotation, a summary term for all penal settlements.

In "Writer and Reader in the Commonwealth" Peter Quartermaine offered the only general or Commonwealth paper printed in *Common Wealth*. He stresses the role of the teacher of Commonwealth literature in the vitality of those studies, of Commonwealth literature not as a literary entity (as I think Stow suggests) but as a teachable entity.² My contention is that a successful course would have to be controlled by the teacher's vision of the central and sustaining myths of the literature in order to induce that mythic approach in the students, and that approach is necessary if students are to see every work they study as more or less part of a whole which is not a discrete collection offering a "survey" of Commonwealth literature.

Further support for the mythic approach is found in Wilson Harris's paper "The Native Phenomenon." His concept that "conquest is a kind of running amok" is most useful in seeing the similarities in the behaviour of characters in *His Natural Life* and *Capricornia* (the extremes of villainy and of frontier freedom) and hence in exploring Stow's suggestion about both novels.³ Wilson Harris posits that the result of this severe aberration is a pair of self-contradictory psychic states: it results in a death-wish (a resistance to the conception of universal host capacity) and a birth-wish (a creative immersion in the future).

If we relate this pair to the contradiction between the garden in the wilderness and its inversion in "the natural penitentiary," we can see a New World extension of the contradiction inherent in that basic myth of the Old World: the Creation and Fall of Man in the Original Eden. The New Eden of the New World can be both "a natural penitentiary" where Man may be transported "for the term of his natural life"—that is, until death—or the garden of "a creative immersion in the future." Australian novels are particularly rich in this ambivalence towards the New World because of the duality in the history of Australia, but the double aspect of the natural world—as a place of death or the place of the future—runs through all Commonwealth literature, and may be summed up in the term "the Once and Future Garden."

Here we touch on the theme of this conference—the relation of Commonwealth literature to the modern world: the literature rewrites the original myth of the modern European world. The New World version of the Old World myth of Eden is, in fact, an inversion of it: in the New World the Fall precedes the Creation of Man as an individual; thus Richard Devine

must in *His Natural Life* "fall" to the condition of Rufus Dawes before he can be recreated as Tom Crosbie, and in *Capricornia* the child "Noname" becomes the boy Norman.

2. *A Commonwealth Course* :

To what extent can such a controlling myth help to hold together the texts taught in a Commonwealth literature course as a teachable entity? This is a second Commonwealth context.

I use the example closest to hand, the course I teach at the University of Saskatchewan. The central section of the course begins by talking about themes but translates that rapidly into "structures" because the narrative structures of the fictions illustrate in diverse ways the ambivalence of the central structure or myth of Commonwealth fiction, the pairing of contradictory myths of death and birth, of fall and creation. The most interesting aspect of this ambivalence is the honest struggle of the novelist to reach a third alternative, some valid harmonizing of the hero with his community; Clarke achieved it by fictional means at the end of *His Natural Life* but abandoned that in the later and shorter version, *For the Term of His Natural Life*; Herbert found it impossible in *Capricornia* beyond a certain limited measure.

3. *The Two Novels* :

In a brief demonstration of their similarity it is best to concentrate on the principles underlying the narrative structures; in both novels these exhibit the pairing of self-contradictory myths which Stow proposed.

In *His Natural Life* the pairing takes the form of a concept of convict life as an epitome of the division between two contiguous worlds; the novel is based on a duality which results in both structural and verbal irony because although it reaches at length its intended resolution or harmony, it is inherently ambivalent, perhaps a reflection of the state of mind of Clarke himself, an English exile in Australia. The novel exists in two versions with different titles and different names for the heroine; certain characters are paired to show opposite sides of one structural element (Captains Frere and Vickers, the Rev. North and the Rev. Meekin); there are references to both *The Count of Monte Christo* and *Robinson Crusoe*, Old and New World fables of imprisonment; Dora's daughter, Dorcas, is a replacement of the former's role in the process of regenerating Rufus Dawes.

The duality is structural in the shift from the first beginning of Australian history, the convict system, at the end of Part Five to the second beginning in Part Six. The System, as it was known, was the eighteenth-century imposition of an enlightened and rational order on the wilderness; one of its effects is the reduction of Gabbett to cannibalism and its whole effect is to give Australia in its first frontier a slave period commensurate with

that in American history. The second frontier is the settlement of the hinterland stimulated by the second beginning, the gold-rushes. This is a nineteenth-century concept which is also the original structural element in *Capricornia*. Where the guiding idea of the first frontier was to freeze the transported society into the mould conceived in European councils, that of the second is to admit the changes enforced by the new land itself. The first frontier exhibits a provincial condition of *status quo*; the second is a colonial situation and inherently ambivalent in all its aspects: if the imported dictates of Home cannot be obeyed absolutely, how are they to be modified by the dictates of the new home or milieu?

The most interesting aspect of this shift in both the early and later Parts of the novel (and hence its illustration of the colonial situation) is the frequent attempt at metamorphosis, as in the impersonations of the principal characters: Richard Devine becomes Rufus Dawes, and then becomes Tom Crosbie when John Rex becomes the false Richard Devine. A change of status is the motive for the mutiny in Part Two (the first Part of the shorter version); there is a play of contrasts between the two chapters entitled "Good Mr. Dawes" and "The Notorious Dawes" in Parts Three and Four; the former is the true view of the character, the latter is the perverse (or antipodean) view of the convict society composed of the two worlds of master and slave.

This theme is announced in the first incident of Part Two (the opening incident of the shorter form) when Dora's ball crosses the barricade into "the wild beasts' den" of the convicts on the transport; when Dawes returns it to Dora he is knocked down by Frere who is then repulsed by Dora. The twin possibilities that in a "natural penitentiary" Devine (Dawes) will be reduced to an animal state by Frere or redeemed to his original guiltless condition by Dora are pursued throughout the novel, leading to the harmony of death in the Epilogue to the shorter version and to the fictive resolution involving Dorcas in the longer version. The two versions illustrate the three different resolutions of the hero's dilemma when plunged into the New World—that is, into its basic duality, a clash of cultures New and Old; he can escape by death, as Okonkwo did, or by flight, as G does in *In the Castle of My Skin*, or he can achieve some reconciliation with the Old culture, as Margayya does in *The Financial Expert*.

But it is not the catalogue of possible resolutions which makes *His Natural Life* most interesting; it is the means by which the resolutions can be achieved—that is, the metamorphoses. Although Clarke brings Richard Devine through the near-death of Rufus Dawes and the material success of Tom Crosbie to the moment when his long-lost wife will recognize him as Richard Devine, there is a considerable strain (as well as inordinate length) imposed on the narrative by the encyclopaedic delineation of the three possible resolutions. This is balanced by the total effect of the mass of that delineation; Dawes is transferred from one convict settlement to another (in Parts Three, Four and Five) to show Clarke's idea that the

enforced and prolonged metamorphosis is in fact a condition of inversion which allows a number of possibilities to emerge: the pious Kirkland is treated as a woman and raped, then flogged to death; two children commit suicide; Gabbett eats his fellows; John Rex becomes Richard Devine; Dick Purfoy kills his father, Maurice Frere. Conquest is indeed "a kind of running amok," but the aberration is so severe as to be an inversion, and out of the inversion comes a hard-won third alternative: Richard Devine must become "the notorious Dawes" in order to become the wealthy and respected Tom Crosbie.

The inversion is perhaps better thought of as a polarization (as in a camera lens) where the conditions at one pole are posited as existing in an opposite and inverted state at the other pole. The sensation of Home conditions being inverted in the New World, familiar enough in Commonwealth literature, is so strong in Australian literature as to deserve to be called the "Antipodean Inversion." As Mr. Meekin discovers from the least expected source, the virginal lips of Dora, he lives in a world where wives can order their husbands to be flogged (if one is free and the other a convict); he also hears from her a very Antipodean opinion about the inherent nastiness of *Paul et Virginie*.

Clarke's problem, abandoned in the later and shorter version but resolved in the original, is to find the third alternative which will have to exist at right angles to the line between the two poles. He begins by rejecting the Home pole, by verbally mocking the "fine old English" behaviour of Maurice Frere and then exhibiting its inherent viciousness once Frere is in the New World; he maintains this attack by exhibiting, generally by contrast with characters who are not inverted (Sarah Purfoy, Captain Vickers), the perverse results of a rational system on the frontier which changes men into beasts in a God-given natural penitentiary. In the two versions he permits Richard Devine two ways of escape from the polarization—by death in the arms of Dora (the Epilogue to the shorter version) and by metamorphosis into Tom Crosbie in Part Six of the longer version. In the latter he then sets to work on the second metamorphosis, the third state of Richard Devine, in order to bring the novel back to its starting point. He does this by means of his controlling but concealed symbol of the inherent worth of Richard Devine which had in the Old World precipitated his first metamorphosis into Rufus Dawes. This symbol (Clarke calls it an "emblem") is the original diamond discovered in the last chapter by Dorcas inside the lump of black charcoal in the alchemical apparatus which was to have transformed the old diamond into its new and larger form.

The symbol of the diamond in charcoal accumulates considerable power by its place in the plot structure of the novel and more in the context of Commonwealth literature. In the former it at last reveals the motive for Devine's descent into Dawes, and allows Dorcas (the result of the union of Dora and Frere, and the representation of the original redemptive power of the child Dora) to contradict Devine: where he sees his life as wasted

and useless like the charcoal, she argues that the original diamond has at last been released from the charcoal crust concealing it from view for thirty years. In the latter context it concludes the circumnavigatory or circular journey of Devine by suggesting that the original diamond cannot be transformed in the Old World but can be metamorphosed in the New World into Dorcas, the real treasure Devine found there, and the sign of his redemption into human society.

This resolution means that what Clarke was coping with in his major work was a sense that the New World could redeem the Old by purging it of one pole of its duality, by allowing its inherent viciousness full play and eventually neutralizing it by opening a third possibility through a second metamorphosis or second errand into the wilderness. That Clarke could only make this point by returning his hero to the Old World is a sign of the colonial situation in which he was writing. A colony is a first metamorphosis from the state of being a province of empire; a colonial can move in one of three directions once he is aware of his state of inversion: there is the living death of remaining in the colony; or the escape back to a provincial status at Home, the other pole; or there is the "creative immersion in the future" of the colony as a nation or, in literary terms, as a self-sufficient literary region.

There was no Australia as a formal name for its inhabitants until after Clarke died; in 1900 the colonies were transformed into the Commonwealth. Herbert was born an Australian in 1901. As a native and a man of the twentieth century he is much more aware than Clarke of the mythic nature of his materials in *Capricornia* and uses them more overtly but he is hardly more successful in harmonizing the pair of self-contradictory myths in the resolution of his narrative. The depth at which he is working, however, enables us to see how that harmony was to be achieved both in fictional and mythic terms in later Commonwealth writers.

Herbert's central symbol is not a diamond but Capricornia itself, the name he gave to that part of Australia north of the Tropic of Capricorn but principally the area south and east of Darwin which corresponds to the map prefacing the novel. Capricornia has only two seasons, diametrically opposite in nature—the Wet and the Dry. The relationship between them—their pairing in that locale—is the governing principle of Capricornia expressed in the emblem on his map, the zodiacal sign of the Goat. There are three connotations for this animal, first introduced when a flock of them block the arrival of the train: the goat is stupid or "silly" and the billy-goat is highly sexed—both characteristics are shown amply by the characters of the novel, especially the males. But the goat also stands for caprice (or the capriciousness of stupidity and sexuality) and it is this meaning which is central to the novel just as Port Zodiac is the recurring centre or fulcrum of its narrative.

Unlike *His Natural Life* there is no discernible system in *Capricornia* because it is under the sign of the apparent absence of system; although

there is a rhythm of alternation between the seasons, they appear to be simply alternate inversions, equally unpleasant—when it is the Dry you long for the Wet, and vice-versa. In *His Natural Life* Devine always had the alternative of losing his vision of Dora's belief in "good Mr. Dawes" and descending to the animal state of Gabbett or of holding to it and eventually "passing" as Tom Crosbie, a free man; in *Capricornia* the inversion of the seasons holds sway and there is no choice under them.

Norman, the central character, is the product of a capricious liaison by Mark Shillingsworth with a lubra and becomes the adopted son of Mark's brother, Oscar, by a set of equally capricious circumstances. A long train of apparently casual accidents converts Norman from Nawnim (No-name), an abandoned half-caste in a native camp, to Norman, the nephew and adopted son of Oscar and the probable heir to Red Ochre station, all in chapters three to seven. Norman then largely disappears from the novel until he returns from some years spent down south fully believing Oscar's story—that his mother was the daughter of a Javanese sultan; the second half of the novel is occupied with Norman's at last learning the truth about his origins and then learning to live with it. The truth about origins is concealed in *His Natural Life* until the last chapters; Tom Crosbie eventually confesses to Frere that he was really Rufus Dawes (Frere is killed by his own son before he can act on the information) and Frere then learns that Dawes was really Richard Devine; these revelations occur in the last chapter of Part Eight, which is filled with other revelations—that Arthur Vern is really Arthur Devine, that Dick Purfoy is really Richard Frere, that Dorcas Crosbie is really Dorcas Frere, and so on.

His Natural Life is obviously full of Dickensian concealed identities and it is strongly Dickensian when it uses lawyers, and occasionally so in its type names. *Capricornia* is equally Dickensian in its type names and its lawyers, but although it uses concealed identities, its plot is not based on them. The metamorphoses of *His Natural Life* are signalled by a change of name; in *Capricornia* the metamorphosis of Nawnim into Norman is accomplished early in the novel, then slowly accommodated to the real facts of his origins. The difference between the two novelists in their attitude to the possibility and importance of metamorphosis is partly a difference of time which amounts to a natural lessening of the influence of Dickens on Herbert. Where Clarke faithfully imitates the plotted mystery novel, Herbert's model is the extended yarn stemming from the oral tradition in Australian literature after the nineties, an apparently casual or wayward or capricious model.

Both novels are long and encyclopaedic; their mass is evidence of their author's attempts to resolve the polarization and consequent inversion in which their characters are placed. Just as *His Natural Life* is largely set in Australia but continually referred to the larger world of Britain and Europe, so *Capricornia* exists at the end of a supply line from the south; Norman can only explain his skin colour by reference to nearby Java. Ex-

aming the structure of Clarke's novel clarifies the long and involved circular journey which eventually brings it to a conclusion; there are journeys back and forth through Port Zodiac and some further afield in *Capricornia* but the Port is the scene of the arrival of the Shillingsworths at the beginning of the novel and of Norman's acquittal of the charge murdering Frank at the end of it. There is no escape from Capricornia to the "Home" country, and Norman does not die at the end of the novel. There is no metamorphosis possible because it has occurred at the beginning of the novel; Norman is a representation of the third alternative, a half-caste, and he has to live in that fate-ordained condition under the sign of the Goat. There are no dramatic final revelations to reverse the metamorphoses, but there are other personifications of the third alternative condition of being a literal half-caste in the characters of Ket and Tocky; one is bad, the other good, and both die. In the final scene Norman discovers the bones of his wife, the quadroon Tocky, and of their child, almost an octaroon. The discovery and the death of Ket seem to signal that there is no further metamorphosis of black into white possible in Capricornia; the half and half condition persists; there seems to be no possible creative immersion in the future for Norman.

The difference in the use of metamorphosis in the two novels indicates that they were written at different stages in the development of a national literature: Clarke returns Devine to his starting point; Herbert leaves Norman in stasis because he was unable to find any symbol as powerful as a diamond to release him from that condition; he tried a number of ways out: discursive passages about the way the aborigines harmonized with their country, lyrical passages about the beauty and variety of Capricornia, idyllic scenes in the bush. But in spite of this inability to rescue his characters from stasis (which has led critics like Vincent Buckley to discuss his "anarchic" vision), he, unlike Clarke, had found the formal key to a working out in valid New World terms of the third alternative. That key was the inset narrative or short story. There are few of them in *His Natural Life* because nearly every incident is bent to the demands of a plot based on concealed identity; but the twin stories of Kirkland and Peter Brown (the child suicide) stand out in the whole novel as extreme examples of the work of the System, and could be considered encapsulations of Clarke's central idea, a brief narrative equivalent of the emblem of the diamond.

There are many of these inset narratives in *Capricornia*, generally in the interwoven or serial stories of characters like Tim O'Cannon, who is crucial to the discovery of Tocky (and hence of Norman's meeting her) but who is given such detailed treatment that his story seems to be independent of the casually conducted history of Norman. The extended yarn form of Herbert's novel is an easy vehicle for any number of picaresque digressions and any one of these is capable of being moulded from a yarn into a fable which will encapsulate the meaning of the whole novel. Herbert is reluctant to do this either because it would destroy the extended form

(although he can do it in short stories such as "Kaijek the Songman"), or because he is incapable of seeing the whole in the part, but probably the soundest reason is that he was writing a novel and not a short story. The short story, in the hands of Commonwealth writers, is sometimes cast in the form of a fable, and that fable often contains a ritual or other magical element which can release the protagonist from the polarization which causes the state of inversion, and free him into the third position, at right angles to the polarization, as envisioned by the writer.

This can be demonstrated in the third Commonwealth context used to frame a comparison of the two novels—*Commonwealth Short Stories*, edited by Anna Rutherford and Donald Hannah.

4. *Commonwealth Short Stories* :

Patrick White defines the vision for himself, his readers and Commonwealth literature in his two central statements, both quoted by Anna Rutherford in introducing "Down at the Dump," the story that follows Narayan's in the anthology. "I wanted to discover the extraordinary behind the ordinary," says White in "The Prodigal Son."

White was able to "discover" the love of Meg and Lummy in the town dump; his second important statement (quoted by Anna Rutherford) is a reworking of the first: "Common *forms* are continually breaking into brilliant *shapes*. If we will explore them" (my italics).⁴ Explore them for what? Admittedly, White is saying what every artist says, but if we argue that the object of the discovery or exploration is the vision which will provide the third alternative, we can suggest this is the distinctive feature of Commonwealth literature. The vision itself has the power of the fabulous, of fable, because it incorporates or enunciates a mythic process or ritual which is itself magical in its power of release. Hena Maes-Jelinek remarks of Wilson Harris's vision: "Whatever is asleep can always be awakened" and Wilson Harris's paper to this conference suggested how that awakening of the vision of the extraordinary in the ordinary might be achieved—the mechanism of the vision; Mr. Harris was concerned with the difference between linear thinking (which by its nature tends to fork into opposed alternative or inversions, rather like the binary notation of a computer) and composition by field. It suggests for the purpose of this paper that if and when we have enough fables (or fabulous short stories) which contain the writers' attempts to break the polarized inversions by finding a magical third alternative (the "creative immersion in the future"), then we can compose those *forms* into the *shape* of the urmyth of Commonwealth literature. This paper has proceeded by arguing that something extraordinary lies behind the ordinary structures of *His Natural Life* and *Capricornia* (their mythic properties) and that this can be released by composing by field—that is, by composing Commonwealth contexts in which their extraordinary meaning can be seen.

¹ Randolph Stow, "The Southland of Antichrist," *Common Wealth*, ed. Anna Rutherford (Aarhus : Akademisk Boghandel, 1971), p. 160.

² Peter Quartermaine, "Writer and Reader in the Commonwealth," *Common Wealth*, p. 14.

³ Wilson Harris, "The Native Phenomenon," *Common Wealth*, p. 148.

⁴ Anna Rutherford, *Commonwealth Short Stories*, ed. Anna Rutherford and Donald Hannah (London : Edward Arnold, 1971), p. 12.

DEATH AS THE GATEWAY TO BEING IN JANET FRAME'S NOVELS

Jeanne Delbaere-Garant

...finally there is no Out or In; all is one territory, Out is merely the place where a man is afraid to go, a place that he therefore denies exists, but it is there, in him; it stays, as the sea and the land stay, though the sea may be kept in control by the building of a wall, a temporary token agreement.

(Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room,¹)

For Janet Frame as for Heidegger or for Rilke of whom we find frequent echoes in her novels² death is the other side, the "lining" of life. She often represents it metaphorically by the sea, the complement to the land, by the antipodes, the other side of the earth—the "antipodean room" is the grave—or by North Island, the contrasting and complementary companion piece of land to South Island in the geography of her own country. Besides being the most decisive "existential" of man's structure, death is also the place for his breakthrough to being and as such the key to an adequate understanding of his own essence. The uttermost potentiality of man, it unites all other potentialities and binds him together in the totality of his existence. Usually people ignore death. They dismiss it as someone else's, see their own demise as a future reality not yet real, stop the fissure which the death of others has opened in the order of things and go on living quietly inside the protective barriers which they build around themselves. When faced with their own annihilation, however, all men give up their conventional attitudes and become their authentic selves.

Janet Frame's characters fall into two main groups, distinguished from each other by their different attitudes towards death: the authentic, on the one hand, the inauthentic or "adaptable" on the other. The former have achieved what Heidegger calls "Freedom-towards-Death" (*Freiheit-zum-Tode*) and have abandoned all worldly illusions. Aware of their relatedness to being, they live in constant watchfulness, never for a moment relaxing their attention or letting the false values of the world and the deceiving tricks of everyday language hypnotize them into forgetting the "enemy." They hold themselves open to change because they know that they are unfinished and will not be completed before death, to guilt because each of their

choices necessarily excludes all others, to anxiety because their ultimate possibility is extinction. Unlike them the "adaptable" are fixed in a single attitude. They preoccupy themselves with their prosaic and familiar surroundings, see death as the terminal point of the lifeline, use language to muffle awareness, and reduce guilt to temporary and redeemable transgression and permanent anxiety to fleeting moments of fear.

Read from the vantage-point of Janet Frame's later work, the description of the rubbish dump in *Owls Do Cry*³ is more than a simple image of happy childhood: it is a metaphor for authentic *Dasein* in its relation with being. Delimited by the "gold tickle of toi-toi around its edges," a temporary agreed boundary, it *is there*, under the ripples of the sky, shining like a big jewel in the brilliance of the sun, open to the voice of the wind. It contains not only past, present and future but also—"living and lived-in wound"⁴—death, the outstanding locus of the self-revelation of being. It is indeed from the rubbish dump that the unforgettable vision of Francie's accidental death in the fire arises. As a symbol of authenticity and completeness the rubbish dump is the standard by which the children are measured when they reappear in the second part of the novel after becoming authentic or inauthentic adults according to the attitude they have assumed towards it.

Chicks embodies the false attitude. Settled "up north" she spends her whole life trying to forget the "vision." Significantly, her new house will be built on the very spot where the rubbish dump used to be. She conceals the "wound" under refrigerator and washing machine, lets the meaningless babble of the mass media muffle the true voice of being and imprisons time within clocks and calendars. In her world everything is divided, chartered, wrapped up. The true vision is prevented from shining lest it might upset the routine of everyday living. Chicks is the first of Janet Frame's "adaptable" characters. She feels that "an adult has to adjust himself to a complex society," dislikes Toby's fits and gives full support to the projected lobotomy on Daphne.

Unlike her sister, Daphne lives in the south and is truly authentic. It is immediately after Francie's death that she shows the first symptoms of insanity, this being the worldly interpretation of her newly achieved "Freedom-towards-Death." Far from covering the vision she lets it expand until it blinds her and alienates her from the world. She is sent to the madhouse to be cured. Living in full awareness she is able to envision existentially all of her potential self, to understand the meaning of being and the transitoriness of all beings. She serves as a link between the two parts of the novel and between the members of her family. But since she has renounced the meaningless babble of everyday language, her family do not understand the italicized messages she "sings from the deadroom" any more than the adults understood the fairy tales or the poems they threw into the rubbish dump when she was a child. She is forced back to sanity by means of an operation on her brain which turns her into a "normal" adaptable person, able to work

at the local mill. She is then offered a watch with three diamonds inside it : time is safely caged again and the diamond-shaped vision reconverted into the counterfeit of the world.

Toby occupies an intermediary position between his two sisters. As an epileptic he has a natural disposition to pass from one territory to the other. His fits—little deaths—force the recognition of being on him but he is hardly aware of it. Again this is measured by his reaction to the “wonder currency” of the rubbish dump : “Toby carried it backward and forward across continents and seas,” Daphne sings from the dead room “and does not understand it though it glitters and strikes part of the fire in him” (p. 162). That is why he makes an unpleasant impression on people like Chicks who immediately seal any crevice that opens in their world, or like his Aunt Norma whom he visits when he reappears as a character in Janet Frame’s third novel, *The Edge of the Alphabet*.⁵

The death of his mother, which leaves him “with one wall of himself torn away” and “the wind blowing permanently from the continent of ice,” (p. 223) sets Toby on his way to the antipodes in search of life, the “lost tribe” and his own identity. On the other side of the world love has the same effect on Zoe Bryce, the English schoolmistress who goes overseas to forget her unrequited love. After being forced to face the “light” when an unknown sailor kisses her—the first kiss in her life—aboard the ship, she goes the whole way back to her death.

Here too a voice sings from the deadroom. The novel is interspersed with poems and reflections by Thora Pattern, a lonely creature awaiting her death on the edge of being where the dead are as real as the living. She imposes her constructive order—“Pattern”—upon the world and upon the novel : shows that Toby and Zoe, though geographically apart, are in reality brother and sister; makes the New Zealand epileptic run away from death towards life, the English schoolmistress run away from life towards death; and shows that in the end the result is the same and that people go to the antipodes in search of what can be found “in the next room or, closer, in the lining of their skin” (p. 93). Thora Pattern sings the dead, the living and the dead-in-life. She includes them all in her “marginal dream” living as she does in the constant and familiar presence of death, aware of the “terrible Hoover at the top of the stairs” which sucks people’s individual particles of dust into its steel tube until the bag contains them all.

Faces in the Water, the second novel, is the story of Istina Mavet’s peregrinations from one mental hospital to the next. Like Daphne and Thora the protagonist-narrator is both “in” and “out,” familiar with the normal world outside as well as with the snow world of those who are dead to the society of mankind. Images of snow and ice are frequent in this novel which seems to take place “in an everlasting winter season” (p. 167) with a thick layer of snow covering everything and obliterating all distinctions. There is no past, present or future. All outlines are blurred, all boundaries have vanished. Walking like Orpheus—one of the books she reads in

hospital is Rilke's *Sonnets to Orpheus*—in this country of the dead where the frozen faces embedded in the ice stare at her “with a rigid bloodless gaze” (p. 229). Istina is able to record her experience with the double vision in mind. This double vision is inscribed in her very name which is probably written in the “icy spelling” familiar to Godfrey Rainbird in *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room* and contains words like *anima*, *vita* or *est*, a further indication that she encompasses the whole network of existence.

Janet Frame chooses one of these frozen faces as the protagonist of *Scented Gardens for the Blind* and she shows that Vera Glace, a hopeless case of schizophrenia in the eyes of the outside world—*Glace*: “something to do with ice” as one of the other characters says (p. 139)—is also, when seen from inside, as close to the complete understanding of being as a human creature can possibly be—*Vera*: true, authentic. Though Janet Frame had equated authenticity and madness before, she had not done it as clearly as she does here. Indeed in the last pages of the novel the reader is suddenly aware that the three characters, Edward the husband and father, Vera, the mother, and Erlene, the daughter, have never existed except in the mind of Vera Glace, a mute spinster of sixty who has never had any family, has never left her native town and has been an inmate of the mental hospital for thirty years.

The three “selves” in which her personality has split are strangely reminiscent of the three structures of Heidegger's *Dasein*: *thrownness* or *already-being-in-the-world*, embodied in Edward, the father, who is turned towards the past and obsessed with time and change, his two enemies; *existence* or *being-ahead-of-itself* embodied in Erlene the daughter turned towards the future and obsessed with death and language; and *fallenness* or *being-with*, embodied in Vera herself. Because she is also Edward and Erlene, all the past and all the future, Vera Glace no longer has any identity of her own. Like the mad keeper of Waipapa lighthouse, the central image of the novel and a metaphor for herself, she dwells in the blinding light of being, waiting in a permanent state of guilt and anxiety for the flash in the sky that will reduce the whole world to ash.

Vera Glace's silent expectation is repeatedly associated with that of the scholar gypsy. But here the fire is not the fire of love but of destruction and the individual vision is transcended. As Janet Frame's extreme and quintessential version of authenticity, Vera embraces the all-comprehensive horizon of the total world view. She understands not only her own individual life in its relation to being but the whole historical era to which she happens to belong. Death is not simply her own death but the extinction of the whole modern age of technology threatened by the atom bomb. When the true message from being finally passes her lips at the end it rises “out of rock and marshland; out of ice and stone,” (p. 252) denying cities and people and language and civilisation altogether and announcing a new stone or ice age in which everything will have to be done all over again. The desperate conclusion reached in this novel and the extraordinary *tour de force* it

represents from a technical point of view seem to have had a therapeutic effect on its author, for after giving aesthetic coherence to these abysmal depths in alienation Janet Frame turned again to a more ordinary if not more authentic humanity.

The Adaptable Man is indeed the first novel from which the Daphne figure is completely absent. The book deals with various degrees of inauthenticity which culminate in Alwyn Maude, the "adaptable man" of the title. Unlike Edward this young student wants to be at peace with time and change. If he flies it is not, like Icarus, in a desperate attempt to transcend his human condition but as a modern man using modern conveniences. His guilt is not existential; it is not, like Vera Glace's, a constant disposition, but a momentary state depending on a momentary act: he kills an unknown Italian and seduces his mother, thus focalizing his guilt so as to get rid of it more easily.

The people who surround him have little understanding of what there may be beyond the closed circle of their routine lives, beyond the edges of Little Burgerstatham, the East Anglian village threatened by the advance of progress and electricity from which, significantly, the noise of the sea cannot be heard. Some of them, however, have had some vague intimation of another side of life: Vic Baldry has been to the antipodes, Muriel his wife has drunk wine with a poet, Aisley's illness has set him on a quest for God, and Greta, seduced by her own son, is shaken out of her security by the unexpected child which now invades her body. When the current is laid on in the village these four "elect" are roenited under the big Venini chandelier which Muriel had long hoped to see lit up. When she finally does so the "vision"—not red and gold as they expected but grey like their own lives—is brief: Muriel has hardly time to notice the change from delight to fear on Aisley's face when the chandelier crushes down on herself and her guests. These little people's understanding of being is almost simultaneous with their own death: Aisley's delight at the recognition that each individual bulb is part of a larger whole is immediately followed by dread at the premonition that all distinctions will be obliterated in a heap of broken glass.

Janet Frame again chooses two such "little people" as the protagonists of her next two novels. Both Malfred Signal in *A State of Siege* and Godfrey Rainbird in *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room* are ordinary people living in restricted awareness until a sudden confrontation with death forces understanding of being upon them and makes them revise their views. Now that her mother is dead Malfred Signal, a retired art teacher of fifty-three, decides to open her sealed third eye and to explore "the room two inches behind the eyes," which, for lack of time and opportunity, she had left locked so far. She goes North, renounces the world, gives up human attachments, settles in a lonely house overlooking the sea and decides to turn sight into vision. But it takes more than determination to turn a house near the sea into a beacon. Malfred's house is at best an image of her

wasted and empty body, which is now besieged by the dead and by an unknown "element" knocking uninterruptedly on the closed door.

This "element" associated with the wind and the sea is of course being itself, the great whole to which she belongs but which she has kept safely outside. It forces itself brutally upon her at the end of the book when a stone breaks the glass window of her withdrawn self. The language written on the newspaper around the stone is unfamiliar to Malfred who only understands the word "Help" scribbled in red across the message. All her efforts have been misdirected: there is nothing in the "room two inches behind the eyes," no immutable essence at the core of her life because man's essence is precisely his relation to being. Malfred has spent her life behind a locked door like the fierce-looking beetle with a beautiful amber colour which as a child she kept in a matchbox and which, when she finally ventured to open the box, had turned into a shrivelled dry shell. At the moment of her death, with the window broken and the "element" finally let in she understands the true meaning of existence: the petrified fire around her leaps into life for a brief moment just before she is reunited with the great whole for ever.

In the next novel, *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room*, the opposite and complementary nature of land and sea translates in poetical terms the inseparability of life and death. After being pronounced dead Godfrey Rainbird awakens from what was merely a deep coma and reintegrates himself with the world of the living. The accident had occurred near a piece of reclaimed land by the sea which becomes a metaphor for Godfrey himself. He too has been engulfed and is now uncovered, trying to reclaim his territory in the world of the living. His name identifies him with the rainbirds or marshbirds which have "nowhere to nest and live and breed" (p. 231). Having been so far "in" he now comes to realize that there is no Out or In but only one territory, and that a moment comes in man's life when "the agreed boundary becomes the place not for repelling but for entering, admitting the unknown" (p. 200).

Godfrey's excursion into the country of death has turned him into a different man. It has liberated him from his inauthentic relationship with his wife, children and neighbours. It has made him aware that routine work and television are only a protective coat concealing the truth; it has enabled him to get "inside the lining" of words and thus demonstrate that language cannot be trusted. Transposed into the "icy spelling," words are less reassuring than they look: stars can also be "rats" and Rainbird "Brainrid." From now on Godfrey is on the watch all the time with the noise of the sea ever present in his mind so as not to be taken by surprise again. Forced by circumstances to live on his piece of reclaimed land between life and death this ordinary little man has come to see everything in a truer light and finally to achieve authenticity of a kind.

Intensive Care is a long and ambitious work full of echoes of the preceding novels. It covers a long period of time from the first World War to immediately after an imaginary third World War. All his life Tom

Livingstone, the furnace man in the factory of Waipori City, has kept alive in his heart the flame for Ciss Everett, the nurse who attended him in an English hospital during the first World War. His daughter Naomi in turn remembers her "Dear First Dad" who used to light the Guy Fawkes bonfires for her when she was a child.⁶ The book deals with the repetitive pattern of history; the alterations of time and the permanence of the flame of love which links one generation to the next. This is symbolized by the pear-tree in the Livingstone garden, which lets in the wind and the birds and serves as a link between the Livingstones in the first part of the novel and those who go on living in Waipori City after the third World War. "Hung with pears as a chandelier is hung with light" (p. 216) it also suggests a link between *Intensive Care* and *The Adaptable Man*, in which the Venini chandelier had, on a smaller scale, the same unifying function.

The last torchbearer of the whole line is Milly Galbraith, the village idiot, a "watching and waiting person . . . in the country of the simple-minded" (pp. 248-249). What Milly is waiting for in watchful anxiety is Deciding Day, on which a large experiment to clean up the human race is to take place in New Zealand. The Computer will decide who is human and who is not and the latter will be eliminated. Aware of the menace to herself, Milly writes her diary in her "special spelling" under the Livingstone pear-tree. But the Super-Adaptable Man she invents for herself as a fiancé and the crash-helmet of modern adaptability which she chooses in the abandoned shop will not suffice to save her. One night one of the branches of the pear-tree crashes under the weight of snow and the tree has to be cut down because it has become a threat. This only foreshadows Milly's own fate: after Deciding Day she too, like the pear-tree, is forever silent.

I hope that this brief survey has convincingly brought out the importance of death in Janet Frame's work. By acknowledging the presence of death in his own existence and by recognizing it as the other side of life, man can become his authentic self; he accepts the boundaries of his identity as "a temporary token agreement" of which he tries to make the most before merging into the great undifferentiated whole. This is what happens with Daphne, Istina, Thora and Vera in the early novels. Linked together by the reference to Orpheus⁷ who, like them, knew the world of the dead as well as that of the living, and whose song had the power to bring all creatures together, they culminate in Vera Glace, the most truly authentic of them all, which for Janet Frame also means the most completely alienated from the world.

This high degree of authenticity, usually reserved to the poets, can be emulated by more ordinary, though also marginal, people whose smaller-scale vision likewise unifies and brings together: the little shape which Zoe Bryce creates in the silver paper of an empty cigarette packet links for a while the prostitute, the would-be painter, the young sailor and the solitary tramp; Muriel Baldry's Venini chandelier makes four lonely souls aware that they belong to a larger whole of which they are only a small transient

part; Milly Galbraith's Livingstone pear-tree unites several generations of people and links the past with the present. In their own small-scale way Zoe, Muriel and Milly have run forwards to their own supreme potentiality, thereby achieving some understanding of the existential potentialities of others.

Unlike those more or less authentic characters, modern adaptable man refuses to see death as inherent in human existence. Convinced that he is the unlimited master of all beings he considers death as something negative because he is unable to control it. But by denying the reality of death he is also disloyal to his true and proper essence and reduces man to mere human material which can be disposed of without further ado. Man is no longer unique among beings, he is denied existence and reduced to the status of an object. Here too there are various degrees of adaptability, ranging from Chicks's support of the lobotomy on Daphne in *Owls Do Cry* to Alwyn Maude's murder of the Italian in *The Adaptable Man* and finally to the genocide in *Intensive Care*.

Colin Monk, the quintessential adaptable man, counterpoints Vera Glace, the quintessential authentic *Dasein*. The latter is an incurable schizophrenic, the priestess of Orpheus, the guardian of the lighthouse, of language and of the race-memory; the other is an intelligent mathematician, the guardian of the Computer, which, instead of unifying, "digests everybody in a magnificent feast of bits" (p. 253) and coldly eliminates from the world those who do not conform to its criteria. The fires of Waipori City at the end of *Intensive Care* remind us of the fires in the rubbish dump of Waimaru in *Owls Do Cry*. But here the cast-offs are human bodies and the fires are a lament for all the weak and sick and handicapped who have been sacrificed to the cleanliness of the human race. And there is no Daphne left, no Naomi, no Milly to keep the flame alive and pass on the vision.

¹ P. 199. All references are to the following editions: *Owls Do Cry* (New York: Braziller, 1957); *Faces in the Water* (New York: Braziller, 1961); *The Edge of the Alphabet* (New York: Braziller, 1962); *Scented Gardens for the Blind* (New York: Braziller, 1963); *The Adaptable Man* (New York: Braziller, 1965); *A State of Siege* (New York: Braziller, 1966); *Yellow Flowers in the Antipodean Room* (New York: Braziller, 1967); *Intensive Care* (New York: Braziller, 1970).

² For Rilke too "death is the side of life which is turned away from us, not illuminated by us" (*Letters from Muzot*) and for Heidegger "it is death that touches the mortals in their essence and so sets them on the way to the other side of life and thus to the whole of the pure network" (*Holzwege*).

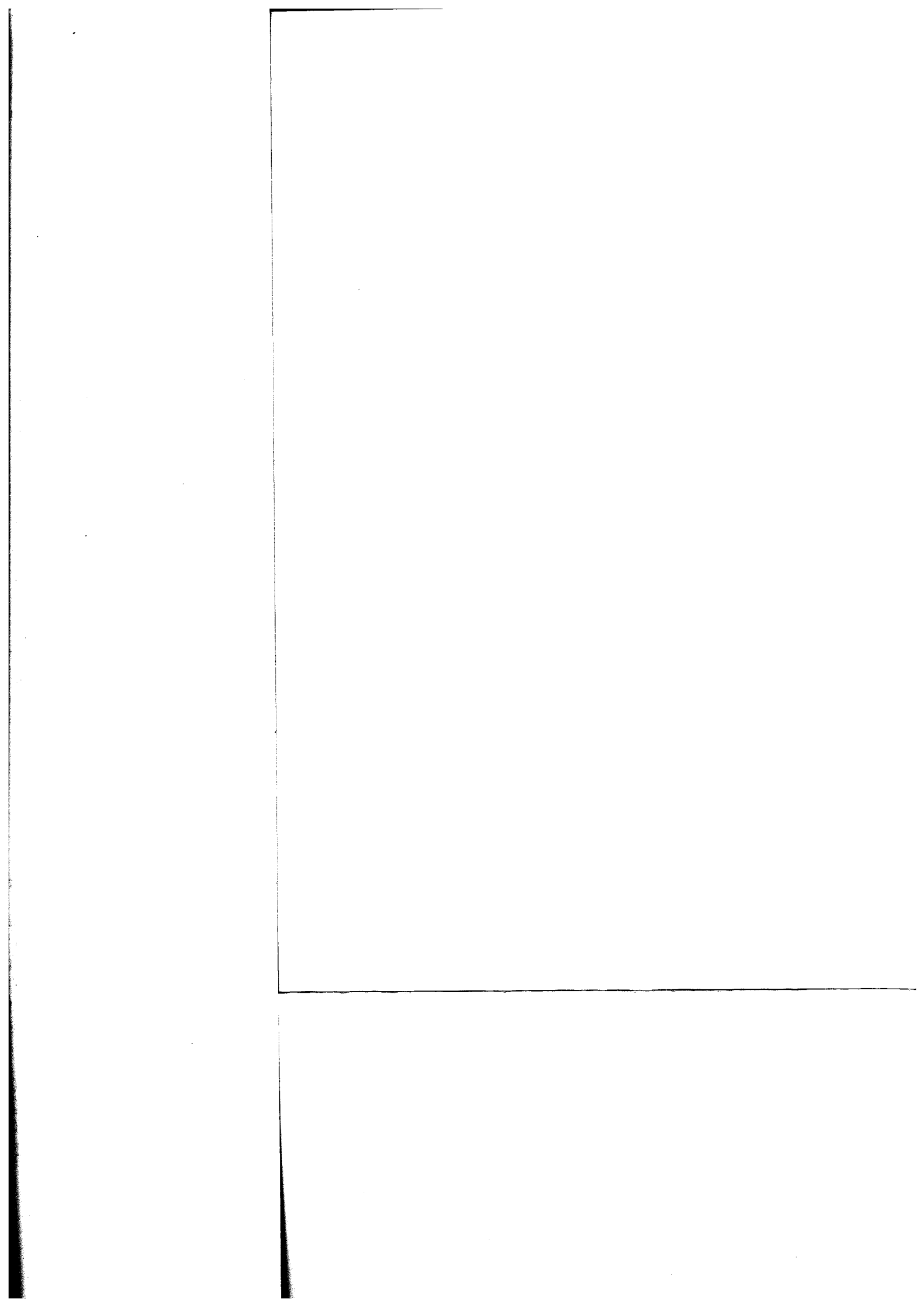
³ "The place was like a shell with gold tickle of toi-toi around its edges and grass and weeds growing in green furs over the mounds of rubbish; and from where the children sat, snuggled in the hollow of refuse, warmed sometimes by the trickling streams of fire that the council men had lit in order to hasten the death of their material cast-offs, they could see the sky passing in blue or grey ripples, and hear in the wind, the heavy fir-tree that leaned over the hollow, rocking and talking of itself saying firr-firr-firr, its own name, loosening its needles of rust that slid into the yellow and green burning shell to prick tiny stitches across the living and lived-in wound where the children found, first and happiest, fairy tales" (p. 13).

⁴ Heidegger calls death "the wound in *Dasein*."

⁵ Toby gives her "a sense of gaps and holes and torn threadbare linings that made her want to take her needle and thread ... and sew day and night to make pockets safe once more, clothes warm and buttoned, and even to secure the sky tightly to the edge of the world, with no drafts and flapping fringes" (p. 20).

⁶ Naomi is a late version of the Daphne figure which had vanished from Janet Frame's novels after *Scented Gardens for the Blind*.

⁷ See my article "Daphne's Metamorphoses in Janet Frame's Early Novels," to be published in *Ariel*.



JANET FRAME'S BRAVE NEW WORLD :
INTENSIVE CARE

Victor Dupont

I have not yet read Janet Frame's latest-born, *Daughter Buffalo*. But with *Intensive Care*¹ she reaches an advanced point in her development from the psychological towards the didactic, social novel. In the first two parts, modern society appears not only as a significant background but as a conditioning factor at work on the individual. With the third part, the centre of gravity shifts in such a way as to illuminate the whole design. It is here that the disturbing question of the nature and duties of civilization and of the future of humanity is stated. The characters, rounded and three-dimensional as they remain, now assume added significance. In fact the last 130 pages of the novel (out of a total of 342) describe an anti-utopian vision of the future.

Now, utopian fiction is the most extreme and uncompromising form of the novel of ideas. In it the social picture is of primary importance and with this goes the discussion of social matters, all the rest providing, as it were, the sugar that makes the didactic pill more palatable. According to etymology and usage, the Utopia itself, not only describes a fictitious, "nowhere" country but also is held up, as a model, to our admiration for its eminent superiority to the world we live in; a model desirable and, it is implied, attainable, a myth meant as an incentive to action. Obviously, this double-barrelled definition (unreality and perfection) excludes both satirical transpositions of the existing order such as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* and likewise satirical denunciations of false or dangerous ideals, misleading dreams of so-called progress that utopists, revolutionaries, scientists and technocrats have occasionally put forward for our approval : Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is one of the best illustrations of these "mock-utopias" or "counter-utopias" as they may be termed. These make use of the literary

methods of utopian fiction the better to combat undesirable utopias: feigning admiration for some utopian dream, they are in effect denunciations that exhort us to return to morality and reason. They may also, and indeed often do, appear as warnings to leave the track on which contemporary society and civilization are moving in the name of progress. Such counter-utopian visions are satires of the choice man seems to have made for his own future.

Counter-utopias in England were written as early as the eighteenth century but it was in the second half of the nineteenth century that the genre began to flourish. And of course the turn of the century was marked by H. G. Wells's counter-utopias and his utopias (*The Time Machine* [1895], *The First Men in the Moon* [1901], and *The Food of the Gods* [1904] among others). Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and his horrifying *Ape and Essence* are also counter-utopias.

Janet Frame may not have read all these, nor Wells's *The Country of the Blind*, nor again Grant Allen's *The Child of the Phalanstery*. But like causes produce like effects and she too was moved by the problems and menaces of her time to write, in *Intensive Care*, her own tale of a frightening future.

This novel is partly the story of the Livingstone family, a name descriptive of the human condition and suggestive of the huge rock-statues of Easter Island with blind faces staring into some irrevocable past or unattainable dream. The two antithetical themes of War and Love, or rather Violence and Loving, provide the binding cement. All through the book a recurring symbol is that of "Dear First Dad," borrowed from Auden's poem *Winds*: "Dear First Dad" is a mysterious entity that stands for Adam before the curse of Adam and Cain, for Man first created with love and for love, before he had been stained with hatred, cruelty and murder. The central character (at least from the beginning until late in the second part when he is replaced by his brother Leonard, another veteran from the Great War) is the thrice-frustrated Tom Livingstone. Tom is at first seen as a boy of eighteen only just married and sent out to Europe with his fighting unit, then later as

A returned soldier with remnants of gas in his lungs, shrapnel in his back, and a passion for Cis Everest alias the War, the first person he had seen on waking from his drugged sleep. . . . (p. 4)

The time is that of the two World Wars and the characters belong mainly to the two generations that came of age (soldiering age) at the time of the two wars: the second generation has been nurtured, even in peace-time, on war recollections, and the adults are haunted for the rest of their lives by memories of their fighting days, visions of battlefields and burnt-earth landscapes, nightmares of murder, violence and decaying corpses. For Tom Livingstone has brought home not only "a remnant of gas in his lungs and shrapnel in his back" (and his old gas-mask kept as a souvenir) but also dire

memories of violence and youthful love, which, ambiguously, he cherishes. So for him and everyone like him "all dreams lead back to the nightmare garden."

Tom and other characters move in and out of hospitals and recovery centres. For this same society, which organizes wholesale slaughter and destruction, nevertheless looks after its sick, aged and disabled. As a matter of fact these pictures of medical and surgical establishments, whether they are places where patients have organs and limbs amputated, then are nursed and returned to life as "empty shells," or whether they are antechambers of death provided for the hopeless cases, in reality stand as a derisive image of the perfunctory institutionalized medical assistance supplied in New Zealand and elsewhere.

Tom Livingstone, after dreaming about her for forty or fifty years, finds Cis Everest again in one of these hospitals; she has become a horrible caricature of his image of her ("an old tart" wearing a blonde transformation-wig over her bald skull, an old bed-ridden patient slowly dying of cancer, "a lifesized doll mechanized to cry in pain every few minutes" [p. 19]). Seized with sudden rage as he becomes aware of the final death of his long-cherished love-dream, and of the implacable passing of years, he stifles her with her coverlet. But he seems to take this murder in his stride and makes no more ado about it. The strain of violence runs in the family where successive generations are marked with violent death. And after all, is he not the product of the Great War which trained him into (patriotic) killing, society's response to the fear and violence that inhabit his heart?

Thus the same ambiguous logic of love and non-love rules over the collective body and the individual alike. In those so-called nursing-"homes" intensive care is lavished on the bodies of the inmates. The organization is exemplary: the medical and nursing staff are competent and efficient and even, in their own impersonal way, kind; everything is done that can be done *materially*. But the patients are treated like "cases" and objects, no human warmth soothes their fears or breaks their solitude; the whole system is mechanized. And this is where our own world, evoked and represented in the first two books of the novel, links up with the third book and with the imagined society of the future.

Under the new welfare-state this depersonalized solicitude for humanity in the abstract and these perfected methods of mass-treatment have developed to their logical outcome. Ever since man forgot the love "Dear First Dad" received from God there have been:

... wars and wars and wars, and old men reliving them, and searching for them as they would search for long-lost loves. (p. 214)

Such has been the repeated history of mankind. The same man-appointed course has been followed once again, and Janet Frame's counter-utopia takes us into the century or so following the Second World War, when an atomic one, we gather, has taken place. Lands have been devastated on a

huge scale, the human refuse left from the conflict encumbers the earth and "progress" has developed along a predictable line.

The post-war civilization is positivist and utilitarian, materialistic and technocratic (happiness depends on gadgets and better domestic appliances), scientifically-minded, divorced from Nature and freed from supernatural beliefs. All the same :

There had to be something . . . to ease the agony of the loneliness of beings separated from animals and vegetation and earth and the forces and guardians they had named Gods . . . nothing yet to fall down in worship of; nothing to strike in revenge against; a human forest of beheaded uprooted trees still kept mysteriously in green balance by the winds blowing from eternity to eternity, from nowhere to nowhere. (p. 220)

And so, as a remedy to that sterility, in the devastated areas of Scandinavia the ravaged cities have been replanted with plastic trees and plastic grass! ² Except for a few freaks such as some University wives who have abandoned machines and reverted to old-fashioned ways of housekeeping, to spinning and weaving wool for the family clothing, this mode of life seems to meet the general desire. So, apparently, does the political regime. The "Western World" appears to be placed under the authority of some omnipotent super-state. It is located somewhere in North America, and a Council composed of technocrats makes the decisions that matter : everything, of course, is done in the name and under the cover of a democratic concern for the general good.

Even so, a new step is to be taken to perfect still further the regimentation of society. The operation decided on by the technocrats then in power, after three years' careful consideration, aims at improving both the material standard of living and the intrinsic value of humanity itself by ridding it of its misfits : the maimed, the wounded, the old, the disabled, the war invalids, the unproductive generally and the "abnormal" : all those, that is, who, according to certain tests, do not come up to the required average of intelligence. In this way a superior human type may be obtained and those that have survived the purge can enjoy ever more material goods and commodities. The decision has been tactfully baptized "The Human Delineation Act" (H. D. for short). The purge is to be started first *as an experiment* in New Zealand, and then, if a success there, extended to other countries. The local Government chimes in with agreement. This is the Prime Minister's speech to his countrymen :

Think not of the human race in the abstract, [an unexpected point in the argument!] think of the people you know have struggled for years under the handicap of being human and who would be eased of their distressed life by this new legislation. Moreover you may think of their fate . . . without guilt as the decision has been taken out of your hands. And those close to you who may be suffering in other ways—mental defects, gross physical handicap—and whom you love, love, love and wish to remain near to and fear to lose, think of it only as an advance of death, think of their los

patriotically as a gesture to your country on their and your behalf. For are we not at War, a declared war against human customs and accepted morals? For how many years have we tried to mend, to recover and care for broken bits of humanity without realizing that disposal, with other waste, is the solution? And is not this legislation a form of conscription that must be adhered to in order to give us future freedom to enrich, purify our country and its people, bring a new phase of humanity? Let it never be said that we do not lead the world in social legislation.⁸ In a year's time, our country . . . will be thriving with its new industries and customs in a reality of economic prosperity. . . . There will be no more prolonged dying, no prolonged recovery, no need to turn away at the sights made unbearable by one's compassion for others . . . while the sacrifice of those who are deformed, diseased, handicapped in any way, whose strangeness has been accepted over so many years, is a necessary price to pay for the continued survival of whole, normal, intelligent [*sic*] beings. I will use the phrase *a Clean Sweep*. It will be an objective process. No concessions will be made. (pp. 250-251)

This is a fine piece of humbug, in which rhetorical accumulation culminates in menace. And as the speech goes on, it becomes clear that one of the after-effects of the Third World War is the problem of getting rid of the unfit (there can be no pretence, this time, of building a world fit for heroes to live in) :

And, remember, packs of maimed in their hallucinatory guise as jungle animals did not roam the streets fifty years ago as they do today, haunting and terrifying with their unintelligible cries. Some of you may remember your city as it was last century with people living out their ordinary human lives, even after having known two World Wars. All that is changed. There is no longer room anywhere in building or heart for those members of our population who are more clearly animal than human . . . (p. 251)

The new order does not, after all, disown humanitarian principles : it only gives them a new application. Bentham's famous phrase has become : "The greatest good for the strongest members." The new malthusianism will now proceed by elimination of the living instead of birth control. The philanthropic hospitals formerly known by Tom Livingstone, dehumanized and dehumanizing though they were, still had tried to save lives and in their own way had ministered to the sick and the old; but their disregard of the value of the individual *person* is now shown to end in human sacrifice as a measure of simple expediency. Compassion, eugenics and the requirements of a sound economy are invoked in turn to justify mass-execution. Can we not discern in the whole process *the equivocal working of a terrible dialectic?*

Now, according to the rules of the genre, though the main body of a utopian or mock-utopian novel is necessarily descriptive and discursive (a static picture of the imaginary country and discussions of its merits in essay- or dialogue-form), the narrative element can still assert its rights in a twofold way : in an internal plot involving some individual characters that belong to one or the other world (for instance the opposition between "The Savage"

and civilization in Huxley's brave new world), and, almost inevitably, an initial account of the voyage of discovery either in some region of the earth or somewhere in planetary space (if the Utopia is space-located) or as a historical survey of "How the Change Came" (if located in time, generally in the future). In *Intensive Care* the account of the changes that led from the old to the new state of things takes up almost the whole of Book III. It has three main characters (Colin Monk, Milly Galbraith and Sandy Monk) and events are seen, felt and told by each of them in turn, mainly from Milly's diary and Colin's written retrospective account of the terrible times. In short, D. Day and the preparations for it are perceived through their several reactions.

On that day it will be known for certain which of the New Zealanders are to be allowed to survive and which are to be done away with and buried in mass graves on the Taeri plain or, better still, utilized as "primary product" in the newly-built factories, or again kept for experimentation in "cages which [vary] from pits like ancient bear or snake pits to gilded bird-size cages in which [will] be folded, contoured to fit, the animal children" (pp. 214-215).⁴ Meanwhile Classification Centres have been arranged in districts and boroughs so as to count the unsuspecting population, and University people have been commandeered for "the coding of human and animal characteristics, borderline percentages, physical data, I.Q. results" (p. 276) so as to feed the local computers. But for the whole region *it is the Central Computer* in Waipori City, South Island, *that is to make the final decision as to which human beings are to be spared or "deathed."* Colin Monk, a University man and mathematician, has been appointed "Guardian of the Great Computer"⁵ described by him as "the aristocrat among the machines" (p. 218). He himself, enraptured by "the purity and beauty of numbers and forms of calculation" (p. 219) which blind him to any other consideration, no doubt is representative of those irresponsible scientists for whom science—abstract, fundamental or applied—becomes an end in itself and a toy instead of a means in the service of men for their enlightenment, for the betterment of their condition and for the attainment of higher purposes.

On the other hand, both Milly Galbraith and Sandy Monk are to be exterminated and know it. Sandy is in reality a figment of Milly's imagination, come alive to her alone, the companion of her solitude, conceived by her as the "fraternal twin or shadow" of Colin. In his own words Sandy is a hero of World War III, a "Reconstructed Man with the mechanical memory, the golden skin, the implanted glossily dead eyes, the Brand X penis" (p. 247); in short, he is the supreme achievement of organ grafting. This veteran and product of the War, this ex-airman who "learned to kill by remote near control" (a decided improvement on Tom Livingstone's more elementary methods), brought down in flame, worked upon by surgeons, this "Midas man" has been more thoroughly mutilated than the mentally deformed Colin. For in his remaking there was no surgeon in attendance

to renew his supply of love, no Cis Everest or Peggy Warren, that is no Miss War I or Miss War II. More utterly destroyed than Tom Livingstone had been, Sandy no longer rages, no longer cares, no longer bleeds. As a matter of fact, his human self has already been used as a primary product and disposed of. For this reason and because it needs not robots but live humans to feed the robots it already has, Utopia will have no use for. Sandy people like. He realizes it and accepts his fate, like everything else, with indifference.

Not so Milly Galbraith. She also knows she is to die, having been numbered from the first among the "dull-normal" (*doll-normill* in her own language). At times, sudden waves of terror sweep over her. Yet she also speaks frequently about it in an unconcerned, almost light-hearted way, for the fateful day will coincide with her 26th anniversary, which she looks forward to with glee, anticipating in childish fashion a party and the presents and joys of an ordinary birthday. This spontaneity of hers, the genuineness of her feelings, her simple, cheerful acceptance of her lot, of life, of herself such as she is, her loving understanding of animals and trees, make her the one wholly lovable character in the book. She is an undergrown little creature, a child-woman whose face is already marked with age, mentally undeveloped, and her reasoning often runs along unconventional channels. What she may lack in intellect she amply makes up for in powers of imagination and feeling, and there is real charm about her. "I'm Milly Galbraith," she once says to Colin Monk, "I'm mature but just past doll-size and my brain is doll-size." And Colin, recalling the incident, notes: "She was mocking me! She was speaking for all her kind we had condemned. I looked at her clear violet-colored eyes. If one perceived intelligence in the eyes one perceived it here. She seemed to be playing a role expected of her" (p. 224). She is a woman with a woman's ordinary aspirations for home and family, a treasure, as Mrs Monk calls her, something precious, "borrowed from the earth."

Innocent as they may have been of all sadistic motives, and convinced of the philanthropic value of the Human Delineation Act, its promoters could not but feel some misgivings as to its acceptance by their contemporaries. They foresaw the dangers that some scientists might irrationally refuse to co-operate, that the "animals" should outnumber the "humans" and revolt, or even that the "humans" should go mad with horror.

To provide against the risk of such regrettable misunderstanding, the water supplies are doctored with tranquillizers while a new police arrives "in planeloads from the United States of America." The date chosen for Classification Day is that of the first day of Spring so as to make it tally with the mood of the season and thus favour a "Wordsworthian approach" to the business. But there is no general rebellion, only some attempted bribery; there are remarkably few attempts to hide the future "animals" or to flee and seek refuge in the mountains. It is on the whole gratifying to see how those designated as victims accept their approaching fate, how

readily their kith and kin become reconciled to the contemplated loss of their dear ones (resignation, it is true, being made easy by the confident feeling that one personally will escape destruction). Maybe some parents burdened with a mentally defective, diseased, deformed child are not even sorry "to have their secret desires given official approval" and their affliction forcibly relieved. As to appeals to the responsible people (Colin Monk) on the ground of friendly intercourse or of human companionship, they are sternly met with annoyed refusal and a sound lecturing: "In pity all drown, in despising, the strong are rescued" (p. 230). Moreover, euthanasia is practised, proof that "the necessary division of man and animal has not annihilated the compassion of man for man" (p. 227).

The letters of such as have applied for it, mostly elderly people requesting an early merciful death before the horrors of Classification Day, are handed over to the Humane Department qualified to deal with the matter:

The Humane Department and its Early Disposal Unit had almost a festive air with the bright-blue station wagons drawn up at the entrance, and the old men and women in their best clothes, the women with flowers in their grey hair, waving and singing ... cheerfully as the passengers traveled to their lethal picnic. (p. 228)

This description of the macabre masquerade and obscene flirtation with death reads like some parody of a past still present to our memories, of the gas-waggon and gas-chambers where Jews were exterminated by the million. However, when the last moment is close, the "proud willing surrender" and self-deceit of men and women who had agreed to die for the general good, collapse, and the death-waggon "might have been filled with birds, the way these people clawed and struggled to retrieve life" (p. 228).

As for the scientists forcibly enlisted for the carrying out of the great humanitarian scheme, they all speak against it at the conference and are at first overcome with horror: some go mad and the Director of Education kills himself and his wife and three children after the first Committee meeting. But the others are "encouraged to think more kindly ... of the 'plan'" by being forced to submit to "Sleep Periods" and other approved methods of brainwashing. For their protection, their respective Universities are equipped with armoured cars. Stimulated both by professional enthusiasm and the intoxicating effect of the power put into their hands, the scientific intelligentsia are reduced to so perfect a degree of conformity that they can no longer even understand their initial reaction of revolt. Colin Monk says:

I was in charge of a weapon, a delicate axe that would choose and fell people, moral and ethical codes, habits and conventions ... as if I were helping to stamp the earth about the roots of a new humanity... I was freed from guilt... I found it hard to remember why I had had such objections to the Human Delineation Act. The moral arguments against it had been so overgrown by the arguments for its expediency, its convenience, and in a civilization and age of convenience these held much weight. (pp. 220-222)

And further :

I believed in happiness as an expansion of being, not in the prolonged painful contraction that had been man's condition of heart as he suffered and was suffered by the exiles, the outcasts, the pitifully deformed, diseased, inefficient; the idiot pools that gave back no reflection to the searching sky. (p. 231)

This hair-raising allegory does not show the likely development of our present civilization of convenience—mechanized, materialistic, dehumanized—under all of its aspects; but, by laying the stress on the theme of the elimination of the unfit, it implies all the rest. The novel remains at bottom a psychological as well as a social novel. It shows how social degradation goes hand in hand with mental corruption in the individual, and it does this by probing into shamefaced motives to show how social crime is in reality rooted in the selfishness, cowardice, and power-lust that lie forever in wait for opportunities to assert their hold on the individual conscience. True, this imaginary world resembles the dream of a doctrinaire rationalist and fanatical technocrat gone mad. But only with the complicity of all can Society repudiate and mutilate Nature, impose arbitrary norms that make light of the rich diversity of creatures and of the essential values of common humanity, scheme to eradicate by violence and brainwashing all affective responses, and reduce man to the narrow dimensions of the intellect, to the condition of a producing, consuming machine.

Behind all that is done, it is implied, lies a doctrinal medley of utilitarian and evolutionist theories further confused by unmistakable scraps of the Nietzschean philosophy of the Superman. It is by no means suggested here that Janet Frame consciously worked from definite ideological data, still less that she made a study of Bentham, Malthus, Darwin, George Sorel, the Count De Gobineau or *Mein Kampf*. But some ideas are in the air, some have become part and parcel of our generation's mental make-up. They belong to our received legacy of thought and experience that goes by the name of culture. Their insidious resurgence cannot be denounced too often.

Some of the horror of the picture is due not only to its author's imaginative power and mastery of expression (including, as this does, her sinister, Swiftian sense of humour, often akin to despair though curiously whimsical), but also to its dreadful plausibility. In the world in which we live, the weight of State-power and group-pressure is felt more and more heavily by the individual. Machines and officialdom threaten to reign supreme. Spiritual beliefs and ethics are on the wane, technocrats and economists wield power in many lands, irresponsible scientists play with their dangerous toys. Brainwashing is a recognized method of indoctrination which aims at standardization of thought, and this principle is at work everywhere in the new mass-media. Not long ago Nazism associated genocide and eugenics. Compulsory euthanasia in "civilized" countries is within sight. Atomic warfare is a possibility.

In brief, the human race has "bravely" taken its fate into its own hands today. "And what can God do," Janet Frame in her turn seems to ask, "against the wicked stupidity of man?"

When at last the actual time comes for selective extermination in Janet Frame's Land of the Future, though the operation takes much longer than had been foreseen, even then the enforcement of the Act creates no serious disturbance: only, in a few cases, some "struggles" and . . . screams not so much of terror but of rage at the imagined injustice"; for, curiously enough, it is finally "the sense of justice, the respect for the agreed law, strong after so many years of democracy, that ensure[s] the successful enforcement of H.D." (p. 340).

The author does not indulge in the description of heart-rending scenes. The mass-execution is not presented. Here again the indirect approach is the method used. Of course Milly is by now dead, and with her Sandy Monk; but so are her parents, who had felt so confident they would survive her. At a later stage Colin's wife and children, whom he had thought so safe, join them. Of the principal characters he alone is left to sit at home behind doors and windows closed against the sickly smell of burning corpses, to talk with some official friends over a glass of whisky, or go over in his mind the terrible times in Waipori; and, as a final irony, to "see the hangman, when it comes home to him!"⁶

For like his fellow-murderers, Colin Monk now lives in fear for his life: for the process of elimination once started has to be kept going, and when he has flu or a cold in the head, who knows what the Great Computer will make out of it, if it is recorded on his individual perforated card? He must be guarded in his words, trust no friend as "it [is] unwise to have close friends" and in public "smile, smile, smile to appear joyful in [his] share of survival" (p. 332). At that price and with some cunning he might still live many years of fulfilment in the new world. But in reality the survivors carry in their hearts "a lament for the lost human condition, a nostalgia for the weak, the sick, the eccentric who had time to stare and judge and give their usual diamond-shaped views, the challenging distortions of our assumed completeness" (p. 333). Now this again provides the clue to the "message" of the fable: a protest against all abstract, restrictive definitions of the human "norm," a plea for the individual and for non-conformity.

The human desire for life and the desire to care for living things cannot be frustrated for long. After some time, almost every home in the old Eagle Street, where Tom Livingstone once resided, evidently unsatisfied with the civilization of plastic grass and leaves, "keeps a flower, like a pet, for company and diversion," and the young trees of a replanted orchard "already are standing firm against the prevailing southwest wind" (p. 341). More than this:

In spite of the Classification and the Sleep Days the animal in man could not be subdued, and had the Government kept to its original plan the so-called human race might have been exterminated. Such has been the

desperate need for survival at any cost that the conditions of the Act have become less restrictive... And now so deep is the nostalgia for that called—miscalled—animal, that the deformed, the insane, the defective, the outcasts, the unhappy have become the new elite. (p. 342)

In Aldous Huxley's counter-utopia, the Savage, the symbol and would-be upholder of outdated values in the new, materialistic and hedonistic civilization, is finally defeated and hangs himself in utter despair. Not so here, where the old order again asserts its rights and obtains reparation. And so, after all, Janet Frame's novel would seem to end on a note of optimism and hope; only seem, however, for the page continues :

I have known a man, these past few days, break both arms, deliberately, so that he, intelligent, healthy, declared human, may escape sentence of early death; while I, of course, am crushed in the confusion, and find that my only hope is to proclaim myself the twin-brother of Sandy, the myth, the Reconstructed Man. (p. 342)

This piece of nonsensical humour is pregnant with the same fearful implications as are contained in Wells's alarming tale, "The Country of the Blind." So the tables have been turned, the victims have risen to the top, and nothing has been learnt. What finally has humanity gained? Power has passed to the underdogs; yesterday's oppressed are today's oppressors and apply the same methods of excommunication and violence. Human societies must run the same hopeless round endlessly with no issue from the vicious circle, each of them imposing its own outlawry and its own particular form of tyranny and human mutilation. With every new revolution "Dear First Dad" becomes more remote. The age of innocence is forever gone and there can be no Millenium for man.

¹ Janet Frame, *Intensive Care* (London : W. H. Allen, 1971).

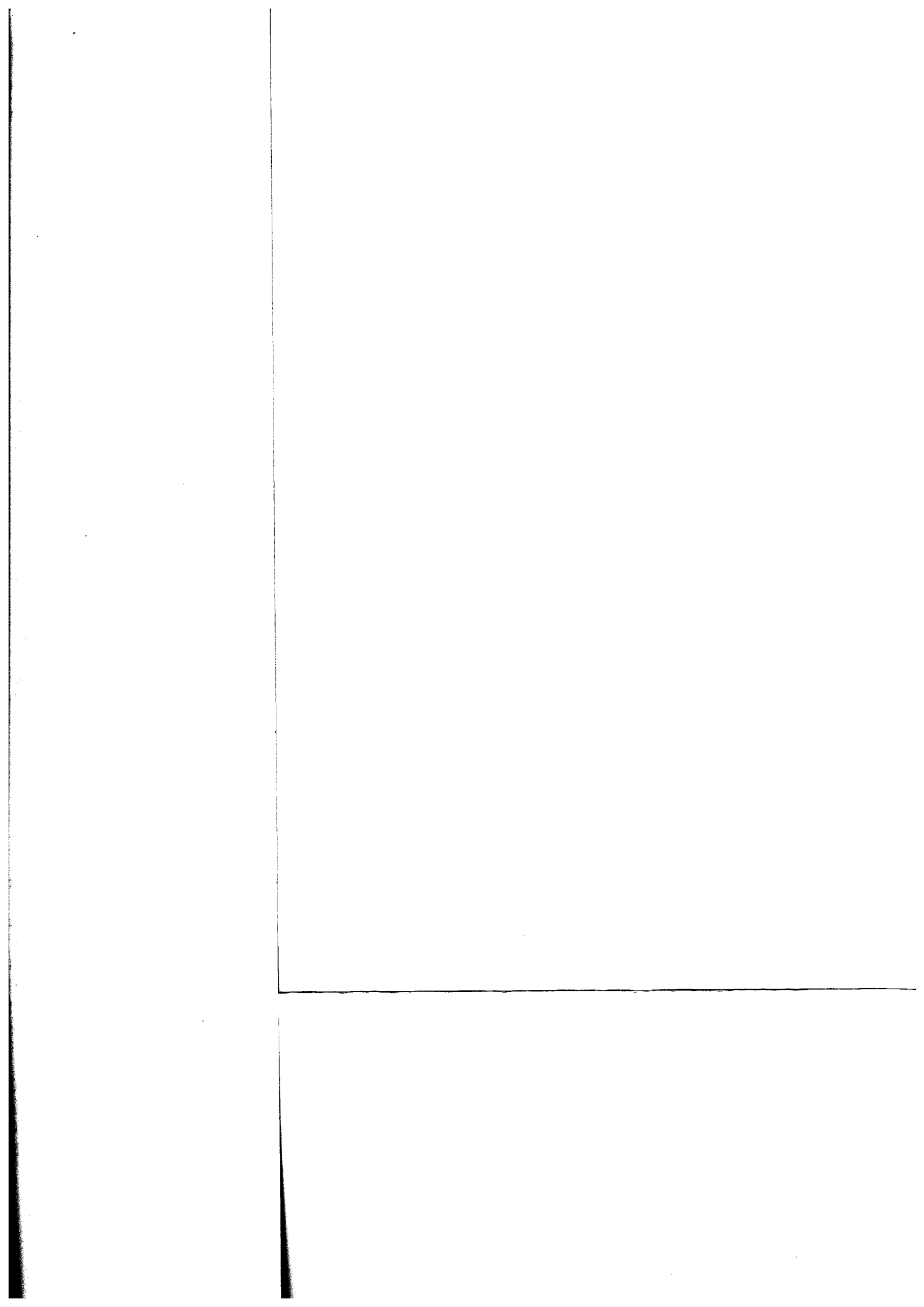
² This reminds us of the subterranean world, artificially sunned, artificially aired, in Bulwer Lytton's *The Coming Race*.

³ An ironical shaft at New Zealand, which could, and did for a long time, rightly boast of being in a leading position in matters of social welfare and social legislation.

⁴ Cf. the bottle babies in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* and the functional and psychological conditioning in H. G. Wells's *The First Men in the Moon*.

⁵ In Plato's *Republic* the highest magistrates, philosophers and warriors are "the guardians of the State." Here the intellectuals guard the computers.

⁶ Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge* (London : Collins), p. 625.



NEW DIRECTION IN CANADIAN FICTION

Hallvard Dahlie

In a perceptive evaluation of Canadian novelists since the 1960's, Donald Cameron argued that the enriched quality of much of our recent fiction derives in large part from its abandonment of literal realism. "The most striking quality of the new fiction," he asserts, "is its variety, the multiple lenses . . . through which [our writers] regard experience. The realistic novel, which has dominated Canadian writing for decades, has largely fallen out of favour. A deep interest in fantasy, myth, humour, history and politics marks the new fiction. Our writers are moving away from realism, perhaps because they no longer feel any more certain than the rest of us about what constitutes reality."¹

There is clearly a danger in attaching a simplistic explanation to something as complex as the development of a nation's literature, but there is no doubt that the fictional mode of the 1960's and 1970's reflects a radical departure from the prevailing realism of the first half of this century. Isolated examples of novels formally transcending the literal aspects of realism appeared before this time, it is true, and one thinks of such individual adumbrations of the surrealistic world as Ross's *As For Me and My House* in 1941, Grove's *Master of the Mill* in 1944, or Watson's *Double Hook* in 1959, all of which probe to varying depths beneath the surface literalness of the Canadian scene to discover ambiguous and uncertain facets of reality. But generally, Canadian novelists in the decades preceding the 1960's depended on the traditional possibilities of realism and naturalism, and an examination of the works of such writers as Grove, Callaghan, MacLennan or the early Richler reveals little that suggests the metaphysical uncertainties and experiments with form of the later novelists.

The change in the fictional scene since the 1960's takes a number of

forms, but essentially the impulse behind this metamorphosis seems to me to stem more from boredom with realism than with any necessary mistrust of it. It is manifested, as Cameron suggests, in an increasing emphasis on a re-examination of our history and culture—that is, of the literal content of our fiction, an examination that works through fantasy, satire, or allegory. The change also appears in a serious preoccupation with nationalism and national identity, and the exploitation of this new awareness by such neo-nationalists as Dave Godfrey or Scott Symons has resulted in an exciting formal experimentation which makes that earlier nationalist, Hugh MacLennan, read more like an essayist than ever, but is unfortunately made less significant by a triviality of content and narrowness of vision. In the best of these new writers, however, the metaphysical and aesthetic forces underlying their fiction are more psychological and archetypal than nationalistic, though an intense response to the Canadian scene is certainly a common quality of their works.

I am concerned in this paper mainly with Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Atwood, Leonard Cohen, Sheila Watson, and the writer I see as one of their literary progenitors, Malcolm Lowry, though quite clearly other novelists such as Hugh Hood, Alice Munro, and Rudy Wiebe also deserve examination here. Lowry was not only one of the first of our novelists to reject realism, but he was also one of the first to transform the Canadian landscape successfully into symbol and metaphor: except for *Ultramarine*, his only novel completed before his Canadian experiences, all his novels and his most powerful short stories demonstrate this talent. Lowry's forest paths, his mountains and flowing springs, his ferry rides and his gulf islands, all evoke in the literal realistic sense a celebration of a geographical and physical purity that perhaps only a few nations like Canada can still provide. His lingering compulsion to maintain a splendid though agonizing isolation at the edge of the forest and water—in an Eden, as it were, threatened by perpetual eviction—underscores the limitations of man in such a world, and points to the polarities of "glory and the darkness" explored in such novels as *The Double Hook*, Kroetsch's *But We Are Exiles*, and Atwood's *Surfacing*.

Another aspect of Lowry that seems to have influenced many of these novelists is his belief in man's ability to accommodate himself to the shifting and contradictory realities that are revealed to him as his consciousness expands. This awareness is not unlike the concept of "west" that Professor W. H. New talks about in his book of essays entitled *Articulating West*, where it becomes in effect an idea in the mind of man, which changes constantly as the remote and the unknown are progressively revealed to him. This idea is elusive, ambiguous, and many-faceted—in short, it becomes synonymous with the endless fears and possibilities that have attended man throughout his long record of searching for the frontier. In Canada, of course, this meaning of the word corresponds in large part to its geographical counterpart, and Canadian literature in general has successfully exploited this rich conjunction of meanings. Speaking of works by Lowry, Kroetsch,

and Watson, New remarks that "the West is half-mad in its visions, but attractive as well," and recognizes the need for new forms of expression in communicating ideas about this irrational world "to a society still rooted in the empirical."² It is the development of these new modes of expression which constitutes one of the major accomplishments of these recent novelists; Kroetsch, for example, in *The Studhorse Man* imposes the dimensions of myth upon the social and physical realities of Alberta and comes up with a novel that is not only superficially a brilliant satire but also a meaningful allegory that compels us to recognize and acknowledge previously unperceived and startling aspects of our consciousness. Leonard Cohen in *Beautiful Losers* employs fantasy, film scenarios, monosyllabic dialogue, journalistic and advertising devices, and an interest in separatism, Jesuit hagiography and contemporary sexual perversions to effect a nightmarish junction of many of life's contradictions: beauty and ugliness, winning and losing, saintliness and wordliness. Dave Godfrey in a sense speaks for many of these novelists when he states that he is bored with plots in stories, and in this pronouncement he echoes Lowry's rejection of plot in his famous letter to Jonathan Cape.³ "I dream a lot of language now," Godfrey said in this connection, "just language, not character or background or narrative flow, just language."⁴

In a simplified sense, it is essentially the comic vision of Lowry that finds expression in these later novelists, the comic vision involving, amongst other things, the realization that man can handle his horrors with some degree of triumph. It is true that Geoffrey Firmin in *Under the Volcano* does not survive his horrors, but in his perverse way he acts as though they can be handled, in much the same way as Lowry throughout his tragic life never gave up the illusion that he could handle his. In Lowry's other works, however, and especially in *Ultramarine*, *Hear Us O Lord*, and *October Ferry to Gabriola*, the comic mode prevails, in spite of the uncertainties and calamities in these fictional worlds, and this duality in effect defines the contradictory aspects of Lowry's view of man: that on the one hand he is a lost, terrified soul, ultimately doomed by his own irrational nature and by the forces of the universe, and on the other hand that through his reason and feeling he is worthy and capable of beauty, love, and salvation.

In *Survival*, her recent thematic study of Canadian literature, Margaret Atwood offers skimpy evidence for this view of Lowry, or for the ascendancy of the comic spirit in Canadian fiction. She sees victims all over the place, though up to a point her political stance equates victimization with colonialism, and in her view political liberation will significantly reduce the head-count of victims. Her second novel, *Surfacing*, stands in a sense as a convincing manifesto of this belief, and it provides an effective illustration of what *Survival* designates as "position four" in her schematic portrait of victims. "This above all," her nameless narrator avows near the end of the novel, "to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing," and she thus opts to "re-enter [her] own time" (p. 191).⁵ On its narrative

level, *Surfacing* depicts the narrator's search for her father who has disappeared from his remote island home in the bush country of Quebec, but the literal aspects of this quest soon give way to a private and symbolic immersion in the elements of her ancestral sources, to which the artifacts left behind by her mother and father help to lead her. Gradually, the finding of her father assumes secondary importance, for she desperately wants to work out her own relationship—both in human and in physical terms—with a world reduced here to its original condition. The island is presented as a kind of last Eden, doomed to disappear through the intervention of man, either by flooding for power development, or through purchase by an American-based syndicate with the ironically ominous name of Wildlife Protection Association of America. So she begins a process of retreat from the civilized human condition back into her primordial self: she gives up her city friends and current lover, she foregoes garden implements to root for vegetables with her bare hands, and she finally sheds her clothing except for a blanket, which she needs, as she puts it, “until the fur grows” (177), and retreats into the wilderness to escape detection. “God, she really is inhuman” (154), her friend Anna had exclaimed when she refused to join their sordid rituals of infidelity, little realizing how accurately this comment applies in terms of the narrator's subsequent reversion to a feral state.

The enemy for the narrator here—as it was for Lowry—is not so much man as it is unfeeling man, and it is the predators of human sensibility as well as those of the landscape that Atwood lumps together under the generic name “Americans.” Her most recent lover, Joe, is in this sense the least “American” of her acquaintances, and though she has ceased to love him, she arranges for him to impregnate her in a setting beneath the trees that is as close to a primitive-animal level as she can find:

We go over the ground, feet and skin bare; the moon is rising, in the grey-green light his body gleams and the trunks of trees, the white ovals of his eyes. He walks as though blind, blundering into the shadow clumps, toes stubbing, he has not yet learned to see in the dark. My tentacled feet and free hand scent out the way, shoes are a barrier between touch and the earth. Double thump, clutched heart beat; rabbits, warning us and each other. On the far shore an owl, its voice feathered and clawed, black on black, blood in the heart. (161)

In imagery and language not unlike that which Yeats uses in “Leda and the Swan” to dramatize the awesome portents and consequences of conception, Atwood describes the almost instantaneous moment of resurrection: “He trembles, and then I can feel my lost child surfacing within me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it has been prisoned for so long” (161-162). The narrator's decision to re-enter the normal flow of existence results from a mystical-existential realization of her involvement with both her ancestral roots and the continuance of life, and it is significant that her final rejection of isolation and sterility is a human decision entirely, for she gains no moral guidance from her close association with primitive nature. “The lake is

quiet," she observes at this point, the "trees surround me, asking and giving nothing" (192).

Lowry, in one of the short stories that make up *Hear Us O Lord*, remarks that "the conquering of the wilderness, whether in fact or in his mind, was part of his own process of self-determination,"⁶ and this observation applies as well to both the narrator in *Surfacing* and to Peter Guy in Kroetsch's *But We are Exiles*. In all three cases, the protagonists are embarked upon an obligatory mission of exorcising their guilt in a physical setting whose wilderness, though in the process of being conquered, is still pervasive. Lowry's wilderness is the most tenuous of the three, and Kroetsch's the most indestructible, but one element is common to all three, and that is the ever-present water which in turn reflects, submerges, and resurrects the causes of their guilt. Kroetsch used the MacKenzie River, ever-changing in its winding course and shifting shoals, but ultimately untamable by man, to lead Peter Guy on a mission of forgetting and expiation. But his tormentor and rival in love, Michael Hornyak, follows him, and drowns in a bizarre accident for which Peter feels morally if not legally guilty. During the ensuing search for his body, the river remains on the realistic level a navigational and physical hazard, and Kroetsch's skill with this element of the Canadian frontier is rich and precise. But he uses water and the river symbolically throughout this novel to synthesize the disparate elements of Peter's and Mike's consciousness, personalities, and experiences. During their wild, orgiastic trip across the prairies, reminiscent of Kerouac's *On the Road*, Hornyak was obsessed with the need to find water, but all signs of it were only illusions, and it was not until they reached the lakes and torrents of the Rockies that he was satisfied, "kneeling in the spring, trying to get closer," (144)⁷ and thus achieving rebirth. But it is not until Peter relinquishes Mike's corpse once again to the depths of the MacKenzie that they both gain their ultimate peace. Both Peter and the narrator in Atwood's novel, who dives beneath the waters of the lake to discover a shape of death, realize that it is the *surface* of the water—that is, the conscious or rational world—that ultimately must bestow the meaning to what lies both beneath and above, and it is this synthesis of the conscious and the subconscious, or of the realistic and the surrealistic, that constitutes such a significant achievement in their fiction.

As Lowry's Sigbjorn Wilderness in *Dark as the Grave* stood in a queue at the Los Angeles airport, he experienced an epiphany not unlike these revelations in Kroetsch and Atwood. "It was as if he stood on the brink of an illumination," he mused, "on the near side of something tremendous, which was to be explained beyond, in that midnight darkness..."⁸ This juxtaposition of the "glory and the darkness" constitutes one of the basic structural patterns in many recent novels, most obviously of course in its source novel, Watson's *The Double Hook* which, like Lowry's *Dark as the Grave* and *October Ferry*, examines man's possibilities in a kind of perpetual cosmic darkness—or at least in a world where, as Lowry put it,

"the elements follow you around." Watson's bleak world is ruled over by the trickster figure of Coyote, and this unpredictable cosmic "element," by his very unpredictability, can represent both destruction and salvation. The glory is ultimately salvaged from the dark subconscious of Watson's protagonist, James, and it is resurrected both by his own innate, instinctive recognition that he shares in the human condition, and by an irrational, incomprehensible signal from Coyote—comparable to the explanation Wilderness derives from "that midnight darkness." Watson does not deny the darkness, any more than Lowry or Kroetsch does, and indeed she recognizes that catching the darkness along with the glory is inevitable, since it is in the basic nature of man to fish with a double hook. Fishing with a single hook is more risky—one might catch *only* the darkness.

This comic, accommodating vision of experience, which enables one to handle darkness, horrors, or death, constitutes a strong bond between these novelists, and aesthetically, this vision can rarely be sustained within the limits of literal realism. "A novelist presents less of life the more closely he approaches what he thinks of as his realism," another Lowry protagonist states in *October Ferry*,⁹ and Kroetsch elaborated on this point in a recent interview. "I'm fascinated right now by the effects of moving away from realism—the kinds of freedom you get, and the kinds of truths you get at, by departing from the sterner varieties of realism."¹⁰ These novelists have in fact transformed historical, cultural, or psychological "truths" into mythical possibilities by exploiting situations and materials which, like the surface of Atwood's lake or Kroetsch's river, contain within them both realistic and surrealist dimensions. To achieve a synthesis of these elusive dimensions was the aesthetic principle that haunted Lowry during his uneven career, and it remains as the chief informing impulse behind the best of our novelists today.

¹ Donald Cameron, "Novelists of the Seventies : Through Chaos to the Truth," *Saturday Night*, July 1972, p. 10.

² W. H. New, *Articulating West* (Toronto, 1972), pp. xix, xxi.

³ Malcolm Lowry, *Selected Letters* (Philadelphia, 1965), p. 66.

⁴ Dave Godfrey, *New Canadian Writing*, 1968 (Toronto, 1968), p. 140.

⁵ Margaret Atwood, *Surfacing* (Toronto, 1972).

⁶ Malcolm Lowry, "Gin and Goldenrod" *Hear Us O Lord From Heaven Thy Dwelling Place* (New York, 1969), p. 204.

⁷ Robert Kroetsch, *But We Are Exiles* (Toronto, 1965).

⁸ Malcolm Lowry, *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid* (Toronto, 1968), p. 43.

⁹ Malcolm Lowry, *October Ferry to Gabriola* (New York, 1970), p. 61.

¹⁰ Donald Cameron, *Conversation with Canadian Novelists, Part I* (Toronto, 1973), p. 82.

WILSON HARRIS'S CONTRIBUTIONS
TO *KYK-OVER-AL* : 1945-1961

Reinhard W. Sander

Kyk-over-al is one of the most important literary magazines for the student of Caribbean literature. It was edited by A. J. Seymour from 1945-1961 in Georgetown, Guyana (formerly British Guiana). Wilson Harris was one of the regular contributors to *Kyk-over-al*. The following is a chronological list of his contributions—generic indications are given in parentheses. Unfortunately, *Kyk-over-al* has so far not been reprinted and to my knowledge the whole series is only available in Georgetown, Guyana.

- "Tell Me Trees! What Are You Whispering?" (Poem), No. 1 (Dec. 1945), 10.
- "Tomorrow" (Fiction), No. 1 (Dec. 1945), 30-34.
- "Savannah Lands" (Poem), No. 2 (June 1946), 8.
- "Words Written Before Sunset" (Poem), No. 3 (Dec. 1946), 9.
- "Studies in Realism" (Poem), No. 4 (June 1947), 7-8.
- "Fences upon the Earth" (Fiction), No. 4 (June 1947), 20-21.
- "Quiet's Event" (Poem), No. 5 (December 1947), 8.
- "Green is the Colour of the World" (Poem), No. 6 (June 1948), 7.
- "In Memoriam 1948" (Poem), No. 7 (Dec. 1948), 6.
- "The Guiana Book by A. J. Seymour" (Review), No. 7 (Dec. 1948), 37-40.
- "Spring Equinox" (Poem), No. 8 (June 1949), 5-6.
- "Palace of the Stillborn" (Poem), No. 9 (Dec. 1949), 19.
- "The Reality of Trespass" (Non-fiction), No. 9 (Dec. 1949), 21-22.
- "Review" (On Dennis Williams's Paintings), No. 9 (Dec. 1949), 32.
- "Art and Criticism" (Non-fiction), No. 13 (Year-end 1951), 202-205.

- "Orpheus" (Poem), No. 14 (Mid-year 1952), 38.
 "Other Dimensions" (Poem), No. 14 (Mid-year 1952), 39.
 "The Question of Form and Realism in the West Indian Artist" (Non-fiction), No. 15 (Year-end 1952), 23-27.
 "The Fabulous Well" (Poem), No. 15 (Year-end 1952), 48-55.
 "The Beggar is King" (Poem), No. 16 (Mid-year 1953), 148-151.
 "Bim No. 17 (Vol. 5, No. 17, Dec. 1952)" (Review), No. 16 (Mid-year, 1953), 195-198.
 "The Spirit of the Place" (Poem), No. 17 (Year-end 1953), 228-230.
 "Bouquet for Burrowes : II" (Non-fiction), No. 18 (Mid-year 1954), 8-9.
 "Banim Creek" (Extract from an Unpublished Novel), No. 18 (Mid-year 1954), 36-42.
 "Tell Me Trees! What Are You Whispering?" (Poem), No. 19 (Year-end 1954), 91-92.
 "These Are the Words of an Old Man" (Poem), No. 19 (Year-end 1954), 117.
 "The Chorus" (Poem), No. 19 (Year-end 1954), 128-129.
 "Savannah Lands" (Poem), No. 19 (Year-end 1954), 20.
 "The Sun (Fourteen Poems in a Cycle)," No. 20 (Mid-year 1955), 175-182.
 "Two Periods in the Work of a West Indian Artist" (On Dennis Williams's Paintings), No. 20 (Mid-year 1955), 183-187.
 "Poems by Leo I. Austin" (Review), No. 20 (Mid-year 1955), 205-206.
 "The Death of Hector, Tamer of Horses" (Poem), No. 22 (1957), 23-24.
 "The Stone of the Sea" (Poem), No. 22 (1957), 24-25.
 "Charcoal" (Poem), No. 22 (1957), 25.
 "Troy" (Poem), No. 22 (1957), 26-27.
 "Sun Poem XV" (Poem), No. 23 (May 1958), 7.
 "Greatness and Bitterness" (Letter to A. J. Seymour), No. 23 (May 1958), 23-26.
 "Spirit of the Sea Wall" (Fiction), No. 28 (Dec. 1961), 181-183.
- A. J. Seymour reviews *Fetish* by Kona Waruk (pseudonym for Wilson Harris), No. 13 (Year-end 1951), 248.
- A. J. Seymour reviews *Palace of the Peacock*, No. 27 (Dec. 1960), 142-144.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Joyce Sparer Adler was one of the original staff of sixteen which founded the University of Guyana in 1963. She is the author of "Attitudes towards 'Race' in Guyanese Literature," of a book for children entitled *Language and Man*, and of essays which have appeared in *The Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, *Caribbean Studies*, *Caribbean Quaterky*, *New Letters* and elsewhere. Her articles on Wilson Harris have largely contributed to the growing attention his work has received. In 1973 she lectured on his fiction at the Institute on African and Caribbean Writing sponsored by the University of Missouri-Kansas-City. She is completing a book on the role of war in Melville's imagination.

Wayne Brown was born in Trinidad in 1944 and read English at the University of the West Indies, Jamaica. His first collection of poems, *On the Coast* (André Deutsch, 1972), was a Poetry Book Society Recommendation and was awarded the Commonwealth Prize for Poetry. His biography of the Jamaican sculptor Mrs Edna Manley is due to come out in 1975. He is at present the Gregory Fellow in Poetry at the University of Leeds.

Tim Couzens was born in Durban in 1944. He has honours degrees from Rhodes University and from Oxford University. He is a lecturer in English literature at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. His publications include some fifteen articles, mainly on African literature.

Hallvard Dahlie was born in Norway and moved to Canada as a child. He has an M.A. from the University of British Columbia and a Ph.D. from the University of Washington. He is the author of *Brian Moore* (Toronto, 1969). He is at present Head of the Department of English at the University of Calgary.

Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, a graduate of the University of Liège, is now Professor of English literature at the Université Libre de Bruxelles, Belgium. She has published *Henry James : The Vision of France* (1970) and various articles on twentieth-century English novelists.

Victor Dupont, Docteur ès Lettres, Litt.D. Birmingham, was Professor of English literature and Head of the Department of English at the University of Toulouse 1945-1967. In 1967 he created in Toulouse the first "Centre of Commonwealth Studies." His books include *L'Utopie et le roman utopique dans la littérature anglaise* and *Les Paradis Perdus*. He has published extensively on Janet Frame and he now edits a yearly series called *Commonwealth : Essays and Studies*.

Michel Fabre, who teaches American and Afro-American studies at the Université de la Sorbonne Nouvelle (Paris III), describes himself as a "new-comer" in the field of Third World literature. He is doing research on the cultural relationships between Afro-American writers and the French-speaking world. His critical biography, *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright*, was published by William and Morrow (New York City, 1973).

John Fletcher is Professor of Comparative literature and Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of East Anglia and is the author of several books on contemporary literature, most recently *Claude Simon and Fiction Now* (Calder and Boyars). His general study of the novel, *The Essential Fiction*, is due to appear in the next year or two.

Albert Gérard was Professor of English and Comparative literature at the University of the Congo in Lubumbashi from 1956 to 1963. He is now Professor of Comparative and African literature at Liège University. He has been Visiting Professor at several American Universities including Harvard. He is the author of *L'Idée de la poésie romantique en Angleterre* (1955), *English Romantic Poetry* (1968); *Les Tambours du néant* (1969). His *Four African Literatures : Xhosa, Sotho, Zulu, Amharic* appeared in 1971.

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Eva Searl graduated from the University of Leicester in 1966. She subsequently gained an M.A. there with a dissertation on *Tristram Shandy*, and since 1970 has been *lecteur* in English at the University of Liège, Belgium. She has published on Wilson Harris's work in *Commonwealth Newsletter*.

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