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and J. B. Wright.

Where have all the debaters gone? Our correspondence columns have in the past carried vigorous argument, but in recent years the controversialists have fallen silent. We hope that this issue offers sufficient challenges to rouse at least some of our readers again.

THE EDITORS

**'THE LANGUAGE OF THE CONQUEROR ON
THE LIPS OF THE CONQUERED IS THE
LANGUAGE OF SLAVES'***

by GUY BUTLER

This sentence was something of a sacred text in nineteenth-century Europe, much quoted by Slavs, Croats, Bulgars, Hungarians and other peoples subject to Austrian or other domination. Wherever a language group felt threatened, or seemed likely to submit to the prestige of a powerful political or cultural rival, this apophthegm would be used to whip linguistic collaborators into line — as with the Flemings in Belgium, threatened by French, or the Afrikaners in South Africa, threatened by English.

Dr. E. G. Malherbe tells of an inspector doing his rounds in the Free State during the Milner period of Anglicisation. He encountered a school where the English marks were abysmally low; so he sat in on the English class. The teacher began: 'Kinders, laat ons nou weereens met die vyand se taal worstel.'

Language was and is frequently used to identify and define the national group; and so a language struggle is likely to have important political aspects — not the least of which is territorial. To the nineteenth century there seemed to be a sacred equation between language spoken and land occupied; and the language usually gave its name to the land, and to its occupants, the nation.

This has had enormous influence in South African politics, particularly on Afrikaner political theory. It led to the Eerste and Tweede Taal Bewegings, and the ultimate establishment of Afrikaans as one of the country's official languages; and it has led to the Balkanisation of South Africa into several linguistically defined homelands.

There is one great difference, however. Whereas the Czechs, Hungarians, Croats, Bulgars and others had grown over centuries to a cultural awareness of their non-Germanic identity, and fought to preserve their distinctive traditions and languages, the Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana and other South African groups have had cultural identity thrust upon them before it was very high on their list of priorities. Has there been a popular struggle to preserve Zulu or Xhosa?

*A public lecture delivered at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, on 28th May, 1975.

There are two official languages in South Africa, both the language of conquerors. The conquered, whether in homeland or township, do not seem to feel threatened by either of them. To speak them does not necessarily make them feel enslaved. And they have expressed a clear preference for one of them for educational purposes: English.

So, in certain circumstances and for certain purposes, this conqueror's language, on the lips of the conquered, is seen as the language of free men; it can be an essential step to economic, cultural and political liberation.

I do not think English-speaking South Africans are sufficiently aware of the role which their language has played in Southern Africa nor of the role it seems destined to play during the last quarter of the twentieth century. I do not think educationists and academics spend enough time thinking about the strain that is being put, and is going to be put, on English. I can best demonstrate the nature of the challenge by attempting to answer the question: What sort of English is South African literature going to be written in? Because, whether English Departments like it or not, we are going to get a South African literature in English.

Let us look at the long-term implications of certain observable trends in current black writing in English in South Africa. By black writers I mean both Coloured and African writers. I need, however, to distinguish between them because of the different kinds of South African English they use. The young poets whose work I shall be discussing — in particular Mtshali, Serote and Sepamla — are all Africans. More, they are all urban or 'township' Africans.

The African community in the Republic can present an impressive solidarity; it can also be fragmented. For our purposes, the main divisive forces are linguistic.² Xhosa and Zulu (Nguni) speakers can understand each other, and Southern Sotho and Tswana (Sotho) can get along; but when Sotho and Nguni meet in the townships they have to resort to varieties of English or of Afrikaans — a point to which we will return. The major linguistic clusters — one hesitates to use the word nations or tribes — have powerful feelings of identity, tradition and rivalry. (It can be disastrous in certain circumstances to call a Zulu a Pondo.) But below these differences is a profound substratum of common African values and traditions; the bond of a common military defeat and, subsequently, economic exploitation by the white man; the bond of common aspirations for freedom, dignity and a juster share of this world's goods.

Among these unifying aspirations is a hunger for education, and for education in the English language. Homeland after homeland has opted for the early introduction of English as the medium of instruction in schools, and, within the Republic itself, black teachers and school inspectors are boldly asking for the same programme.

Many liberal-minded mother-tongue English-speakers are delighted that this should be so. Here, it seems, in spite of Bantu Education, apartheid and nationalist rule, is a genuine victory for English. All that is best in the British tradition, all the treasures of its magnificent literature, will be open to those who learn the language of Shakespeare. But why do Africans want to learn English? So that they may absorb the British tradition and study its great books? I doubt it. I doubt it very much. They want English primarily because they need a lingua franca which is also a world language. They want English because, thanks mainly to the missionaries (whom it is now popular to sneer at), it is the traditional language of education. They want English because it is not the language of the political party that imposes apartheid. They will learn the language to serve their own ends; and those ends may well change the language itself.

Some of us, once, a long time ago, might have imagined large numbers of blacks learning to master English, becoming completely acculturated, and contributing to the Great Tradition. I suspect that if ever that was a real possibility it was effectively closed by Dr. Verwoerd's destruction of the missionary and liberal influence in black education (overwhelmingly English) in the 1950s. Moreover, at the very time that the English bias was being eradicated from the old elite black educational institutions, an ever-increasing number of new schools were being brought into use, where there were no mother-tongue English-speaking 'models' on the staff, and where instruction was given by teachers whose command of the language was comparatively poor. While the numbers of blacks receiving schooling has increased, and is increasing rapidly, the quality of written and spoken English has declined.

If we glance at a random list of South African black writers (including Coloured) we must be impressed, I think, by the verbal sophistication (in the good sense of the word) of 'the older generation' who had the benefit of long association with 'English' English teachers (usually in mission schools and old 'church' foundations like Adams College and Fort Hare) and by the difference between them and those who have never been brought into close cultural contact with such devoted and usually enlightened white educators.

No-one acquires an effective idiomatic command of a learnt language in a social vacuum. 'The older generation' aspired to this fluent command of idiom; many modelled themselves on nineteenth-century masters like Scott and Tennyson, not always with happy results, as the works of pioneers like Sol T. Plaatje and Herbert Dhlomo show. Of later generations, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Peter Abrahams, Nat Nakasa, Dennis Brutus, Richard Rive, Adam Small, Arthur Nortje and others achieve a confident, supple English style. All have had protracted periods of close contact with good English-speaking 'models'; most of them are university men; their standards tend to be British and metropolitan. While someone like Peter Abrahams goes through an important period of discipleship to American negro poetry, he remains essentially a 'British' writer. A generation later Arthur Nortje (living for periods in Britain and North America) will develop a style remarkable for its extraordinary fluency. There is no trace of 'Cape Coloured' English in it, nor do I detect any American negro influences. He has mastered the medium, and found a distinct voice.³

If we now turn to the new black poets, such as Mtshali and Serote, we experience something of a shock. It seems that they have not enjoyed prolonged educational exposure to good 'English' models. They have acquired their English at work in Reef firms, from the newspapers, and from their own reading. For good or bad, they have not been subjected to *Palgrave's Golden Treasury* or any other anthology; their verse contains few, if any, literary echoes. They display little interest in stanzaic verse. They give the impression of being unaware of the main stream of poetry in English. They may, however, be writing according to a manifesto, such as: Black Art must be for the people, by the people, from the people. That is to say, it must be functional, collective, and committing.

Poetry is seen as a public ritual act, which is significant only when the writer's self-expression and the community's interests and aspirations meet.

It seems that, up and down Africa, poets are struggling to break away from the Western image of the poet as a lonely social exile, suffering, and articulating his highly individualised intuitions, in individualised and complex speech. So Michael J. C. Echeruo, a Nigerian poet, finds himself being driven by the Biafran war to write a new kind of poetry: 'My new poems . . . are not about me now nor are they about my world. And I do not speak for myself only, or even in my own voice, but with a communal voice because these new poems are about a more general ex-

perience — the war — about my fatherland and my responses to the recent events . . .”⁴ Another younger Nigerian says: ‘I believe African writers should help to give their people confidence in themselves, in their thoughts, their feelings, their customs, their traditions . . . we should . . . try to give our society a real push.’⁵

Mtshali, Serote and Sepamla are not (so far) men of letters in the sense that Mpahlele and Nortje are. They are, rather, public speakers on behalf of their people. Their verse should be declaimed before a crowd, not read in silence by single readers. The titles of their volumes are significant: *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum* are not for isolated recluses; *Yakhal’ Inkomo* (the cry of cattle at the slaughter house) is heard from afar, and by many; while *Hurry Up to It!* is an urgent, public imperative.

There have been influences, of course. Probably most powerful is their own indigenous African rhetoric. It seems to me that their very lack of formal instruction in European eloquence has left them freer to employ African modes of expression. This dearth of revered models may well be an advantage. Certainly, when one compares their work with that of Herbert Dhlomo, one perceives how that remarkable pioneer was hampered by regular scansion patterns and bewildered by rhyme.

Another influence is, I believe, American negro poetry of the militant kind. Tennyson has gone down before Langston Hughes; and for very good reasons. American negro poets have infinitely more in common with our black poets than British poets have. They share black grief and aspiration; also, perhaps, a visionary continent called Africa, which did not exist in anyone’s mind until Europe polarised it into existence.

This negro-influenced South African poetry has a distinctive rhetoric. The vocabulary is simple, the syntax uncomplicated. The effects are broad, the strokes bold, and emotional rise and fall the main determinant of the free verse forms. One of its most refreshing qualities is its lack of self-consciousness. Why should a man *not* wear his heart upon his sleeve? The paralysis of ironical self-awareness has not set in. These voices are in a sense innocent and unbroken.

And they have a certain generic similarity. Their themes are ‘protest’; poverty; pity. Their material is industrialized South Africa’s assault on the black man’s family, his dignity, his pastoral traditions. Their images come from several main sources: the heartless, ferro-concrete, electronic city of Johannesburg; the vast, terrifying, crowded, violent, dormitory townships of Soweto and Alexandra; nostalgic echoes from the tribal past and the rural present; powerful biblical references, frequently ironical; and,

most moving of all, the human archetypes: man, woman, child, family.

But they have simply not got the mastery of the English sentence that the previous generation of black writers has. How should an academic and an educationist react when confronted with poems displaying grammatical imperfections side by side with undoubted talent?

This raises a conflict between two concerns of many thoughtful South Africans, neatly formulated by my colleague Professor W. R. Branford: (a) the importance of a controlling sense of membership in an international English-speaking community; (b) the need for adapting an old language to the needs of a new continent.⁶

Another linguist, Professor L. W. B. Lanham, of the University of the Witwatersrand, who is perhaps better informed than anybody on the present state of African English in our educational system, has with characteristic boldness grasped the nettle, in a paper entitled, 'English as a Second Language in Southern Africa since 1820':⁷

There is a certain ambivalence in our attitudes towards African English which is illustrated in the following quotes from a recent review in a Johannesburg newspaper of the published writings of one of our major African poets. On the one side the poet is praised as 'the most gifted, original and intense of the Black poets . . . who penetrates the South African situation in a way which I think is quite new in our literature'. But he is criticised for the several kinds of mistakes that flaw this book. Some poems are said to be obscure (for African readers I wonder?); there are grammatical errors: *went* for *gone*, *worst* for *worse*, and punctuation is erratic. The critic praises the poet for the line 'and I hold my heart in my right hand like a jacket', but criticizes him for sentimental metaphors. Finally and most revealing is the statement: 'For what the mistakes cannot obscure is that Serote really is a poet'.⁸

Should Serote, and writers like him, be excluded from schools because of their divagations from standard English? Lanham thinks not:

I sometimes wonder whether we have either the right or the resources to demand our English from the Black pupils in our schools. If we were prepared to set a certain cut-off level

(determined mainly by intelligibility) below which we allowed African English to find its own form without the stigma of 'error' or 'mistake', then African English in education could find a new strength. I am suggesting that many turns of phrase in African English and certain standard deviances in grammar and pronunciation be accepted. This means the acceptance of a new variety of English, and, as with all major native and non-native varieties of English, the interpretation of it will have to be learnt by users of standard English. But interpreting a new variety of English is not an uncommon experience, providing it is sufficiently well-formed to be interpretable. As regards the 'mind' behind the words, I draw attention to the fact that, largely beyond our borders, we already have available a well-formed coherent African English, brazenly confident in what John Spencer has called 'rule-bending creativity'. This variety of English casts African idiom and images in English words and is found in many recent novels of African authors in English literature studied extensively in universities overseas.⁹

He goes on:

Should we not perhaps cut our ever-mounting losses and offer a possibly richer learning experience by exposing pupils to the thinking and writing of African authors in English? Here they will find much more that is relevant to their experience and a common substratum for their English. I believe that imaginative writing in schools would take on a new meaning if African English is accepted as a variety of English.¹⁰

Is this the thin end of a wedge which will produce two sorts of South African literature in English? Will writers be compelled to choose between a style which is acceptable to 'the international English-speaking community' and a style which increasingly 'adapts an old language to the needs of a new continent'?

The question is not as academic as it might sound. Wopko Jensma, a versatile young protest poet of Dutch descent, has so successfully imitated our black poets as to be mistaken for one by careless readers. He writes what he thinks is their kind of verse, employing a somewhat naive recipe: e.g., like R. M. Ballantyne a hundred years ago (*The Settler and the Savage*), he believes that bad spelling is an authentic indicator of a speaker's blackness. So he mis-spells key words: e.g. 'brudda', 'brudder' and 'brotha' — take your choice. (Mtshali and Serote are content with

'brother'.) The point is this: African English has already become a political symbol in his, and no doubt, other minds — a means of identifying with the oppressed. *Per contra*, standard English may soon be the badge of the oppressor, the white bourgeoisie.

Now, what are those of us, of whatever group, who try to write sympathy English to do? Most of us are, like Jensma, heartily in sympathy with many black aspirations. Should authors start translating their own works into African English, to make them more accessible to rising millions of black South Africans? Or are we to become Mandarins?

It is necessary to revert to a key sentence in Lanham's recommendation:

I am suggesting that many turn of phrase in African English and certain standard deviances . . . be accepted. This means the acceptance of a new variety of English, and, as with all major native and non-native varieties of English, the interpretation of it will have to be learnt by users of standard English.¹¹

It is therefore a trifle misleading of him to jump straight to 'a well-formed coherent African English' already available beyond our borders, in which 'many recent novels of African authors' have been written — novels which are prescribed in universities overseas. The main point about such novels is, surely, that British and American readers find little difficulty in reading them, so close are their brands of African English to standard English. In South Africa, Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* has recently been prescribed by the Joint Matriculation Board — a body which examines candidates from all groups.

To put the matter in sharper focus. The language in which the three young black poets referred to write is not 'township' English. They have worked hard to get it as correct and idiomatic as they possibly can. I do not believe that they are consciously trying (like J. M. Synge) to develop the full potential of a dialect; they are aspiring to master an international language.

When they read their poems, they declaim them with great feeling and with great care. At the Poetry 74 Conference at the University of Cape Town in February last year, Sydney Sepamla ended his readings with two atypical, but possibly prophetic poems: 'A! Bafashi Bafashini!' and 'Come Duze Baby'.¹² They were not in the deliberate idiom which we have come to think of as typical of recent poetry in African English. One was in township English, and the other in township Afrikaans.¹³ Sepamla's manner changed

as he read them. He was no longer the angry oracle, or the eloquent prophet using a hieratic, special speech: he was enjoying himself with phrases, words, intonations that he could treat with loving familiarity and playful contempt. The stiffness was gone, the utterance was lively, gay, sharp and personal. Of the two poems, I find the one in township English the more difficult to understand. I ask, is this an indication of the variety of English we must expect to learn?

The answer will not lie with white writers or white professors, or white directors of education. The decision will be made by black leaders and black writers. Will they accept Lanham's double standard? African English up to the middle school perhaps, standard English thereafter? Much depends on the level of English proficiency of the leaders themselves. Most of the present leaders were educated under the old, pre-Bantu Education system. Will the new leaders have the same affection for the language?

There are several other questions:

Are we to have a similar Indian-English for Natal, whose Indian community is rapidly losing its Indian languages?

Once our society achieves a greater measure of justice and sanity, will not the literary pressure be taken off English? Will not a future Mtshali want to write poetry in Zulu? A world audience is fine for certain purposes, particularly for great causes, but it is not satisfactory for local pieties; and most of us still live and die in fairly small-scale environments.

Or, to take an even longer view, are the African languages doomed to decline and wither? Is the future language of the subcontinent being created in the townships at this time? To indulge in a fanciful medieval analogy: is English merely a factor, as Norman French was, in the creation of a new language? It seems not; that role goes, I believe, to Afrikaans. English, as the international lingua franca, may find its role as the 'dog Latin' of Africa. The basic structure of the patois most in use in the townships derives from Afrikaans, not English.

My colleague, Professor Branford, has kindly made the following comments on this paper:

If the language of the townships is based on Afrikaans rather than English, how does one account for the fact that so many Blacks read English newspapers rather than Afrikaans newspapers?

Frankly I don't know. It may be that the black reader finds the content of the papers in English more to his liking.

I must make a further admission. It is not clear to me whether the 'Tsotsi-taal' of the Reef townships is used in Natal townships, or the townships of the Cape, which may be unilingual Zulu or Xhosa. But it does seem to me that the black trend-setters are on the Reef at present.

Professor Branford's other point is this:

I have only one major query: it is very difficult to see what the prestigious models of language and behaviour in the last quarter of this century are going to be. The significant international models may be Eastern or Western, but they are very unlikely to be South African. And they'll have a very strong pull on the writer, however handicapped the latter may be by township or homelands background.

I do not question this statement at all, but point to West Africa, where pidgin English is a very widely used market language, and the medium of a growing popular literature. It would not surprise me if we were to get a popular black South African literature in pidgin English or in pidgin Afrikaans — of which Sepamla's poems may be a foretaste.

We live in a country in which our language is under various and increasing pressures. It is of great importance to produce many mother-tongue teachers and scholars prepared to work in the field of English as second language.

You may well laugh, and with justification. We are a community which for many years has failed to produce enough teachers for its own children. And we are in the midst of another teacher shortage. But I suspect that there are at least *some* young people who might become teachers if they felt they were joining an outward-turned, onward-moving profession — a profession not concerned with maintaining or defending a bastion of English culture, but one taking the English language to those who want it and need it — Afrikaans speakers, Indian speakers, and Bantu speakers; and, by so doing, getting deeply involved in the creation of the new African culture which is in process of emerging.

We are in danger of becoming culturally tentative and defensive. I believe, of course I believe, that standards must be defended and maintained as they have to be, even in those lucky unilingual lands, England, Australia, New Zealand or the U.S.A. But we are not in a unilingual country. We cannot, dare not, turn a blind eye to what is happening to English beyond our small, white, middle-class enclave. We need to move out of it. We need to think of ways and means of modifying, developing, implementing

a somewhat wistful suggestion made at the end of Professor Lanham's seminal paper:

If policy allowed us the way, and English South Africans showed the will, we should be able to reconstitute the old mission tradition with its authentic, sustaining context for English teaching which is an essential component of the learning situation.¹⁴

*Rhodes University,
Grahamstown*

¹ This lecture is based on 'Which English?', a paper presented at the African Studies Centre, University of York, 5 April, 1975.

² Xhosa	3 780 000	} Nguni — 66,0%
Zulu	3 480 000	
Swazi	360 060	
S. Ndebele	230 000	
N. Ndebele	70 000	
S. Sotho	1 212 000	} Sotho — 28,1%
Tswana	960 000	
N. Sotho	1 200 000	
Tsonga	408 000	— 3,4%
Venda	300 000	— 2,5%
	<hr/> 12 000 000	

Estimated total of speakers for 1970, from Hammond-Tooke, *The Bantu-speaking Peoples of Southern Africa*, London: Routledge, 1974, Table 3.1, p. 59.

³ See Nortje, Arthur, *Dead Roots*, Heinemann, and *Lonely Against the Light*, New Coin, Grahamstown.

⁴ 'Interview with Michael J. C. Echeruo' in *Dem Say, Interviews with Eight Nigerian Writers*, African Studies and Research Centre, The University of Texas, Austin.

⁵ 'Interview with John Munonye' in *Dem Say*, op. cit.

⁶ William Branford, 'A Dictionary of South African English as a Reflex of English-speaking Cultures of South Africa.' 1820 National Monument Foundation, Grahamstown, July 1974, p. 5.

⁷ 1820 National Monument Foundation, Grahamstown, July 1974.

⁸ *ibid.*, p. 15.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 16.

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 15.

¹² *Contrast* 33, Apr. 1974. Vol. 9 No. 1; also Sepamla S. S., *Hurry Up to It!*, Donker, 1975.

¹³ Township Afrikaans, sometimes called 'Tsotsi-taal': a patois used in the African townships — vocabulary predominantly Afrikaans, with heavy admixture of Zulu (Nguni); syntax distorted, many words changed beyond recognition; widely used as a lingua franca in certain situations, and for preference by the young jet-set, for whom it is a sign of being 'with-it'.

¹⁴ Lanham, op. cit., p. 17.

IDEAS OF HUMAN PERFECTION*

by D. G. GILLHAM

My present object is to put in perspective certain ideas about perfect human beings as they appear in literature. I emphasise that my field is the discussion of these ideas as they appear in literature because it is in literature that ideas of the perfectibility of man are put forward with propriety — this for the reason that it is only in imagination, in fiction, that man is perfectible. One need not take the cynical view of a Machiavelli, the distasteful view of a Hobbes, or the disgusted view of a Swift to concede that (godhead aside) the perfect man has no existence. We may come near perfection, we may achieve it at moments, we may glimpse it among a good deal of imperfection in the lives of the saints, our more heroic neighbours or even in ourselves; but it is only between the covers of books that we find the real (or unreal) thing, and by definition to be perfect is to be without any flaw whatever.

Perfection is an ideal, a fiction, a state beyond the grasp of imperfect man. The ideal is clearly an important part of our thinking — if it were not it would not reappear so frequently and persistently in our records — but it is not to be deliberately achieved. As we shall see, the impossibility of making a programme for it is a necessary condition of the state of true perfection. A state which may be desired, which may act as a challenge to our imperfect achievements but which we must always fall short of is, paradoxically, more likely to act as an incentive, less apt to discourage us when we fail, more likely to leave us in a condition of humility and hope than any practical, limited programme which is bound to fail anyway and leave us frustrated.

I should like to deal briefly with practical programmes for human perfection and outline some of the reasons why they are unsatisfactory, though it may be necessary for us to attempt them. First, however, it is necessary to draw a distinction between deliberate social engineering with its theoretically constructed programmes, and the sorts of programming we are all subject to, those which come from tradition, religion, cultural pressures and so on. Though these have their quota of theory, and are made articulate in various ways and to some degree, they are, properly speaking, not programmes but a test of our humanity — it is up

*A public lecture delivered at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg on 20th August, 1975.

to the individual to make something of them. They are the materials with which he constructs his life rather than set conditions which will rightly determine his responses and personality.

Some of the objections to deliberate pieces of engineering for the improvement or (optimistically) the perfection of man are that they can never be well enough conceived, they are usually the work of the crank or the fanatic, they are unlikely to stand up to the test of application, existing circumstances are usually reluctant to give way, the task is too big for any one man or set of men to undertake, other schemes are at variance with them, and so on. The deep-seated and ineradicable danger in all programmes for improvement, however, is not that they go wrong on the way or have to be varied or even that they have unpredictable results. The real difficulty is that we do not know and cannot know, except in the most superficial way, what we would like to become — improvement! but improvement for what and in what direction? We know we would like to see everyone well fed, in good health, well housed, but these are conditions of improvement in the circumstances of living contributing only the first essentials of improved human life. I was going to add to good food, good health, etc., the need for a good education, but then realized that unanimity on what constitutes a good education could not be got. Some answers might be safely given, but one is now on the borders of a question that has occupied all the theologians, the philosophers, all the thinkers on any humane topic ever since thought began: what is it that constitutes the good human life, what is one to educate towards? Needless to say, the exponents of different schools of thought have been most emphatic in presenting their answers: Plato, Epicurus, St. Paul, Hobbes, Bentham, Marx — to sprinkle a few names about — but the very diversity of the answers given only serves to confirm one in the opinion that no final answer has been found and none is likely to be found. Not that goodness is not to be discovered in human life, and not that Plato, St. Paul, Bentham, etc., are so many windbags speaking nonsense (they each have a glimpse of the truth in their way). It is simply that diversity, individuality, freedom of choice, variety, are of the essence of human goodness. The good human life differs in some degree from age to age and from person to person, is too varied, too much integrated with personal circumstance, too much subject to individual potential, to be strictly formulated. Any programme or plan which aims to improve human beings is probably fairly harmless if it confines itself to an improvement of the material circumstances of man, but once it attempts interference with

the mind, soul or spirit of man the results become more complex: it may do good if well based and well conceived but is bound to do some harm simply because it is a programme. It may liberate our energies in some directions (good or bad), but must restrict them in others (bad and good). The best programmes of all (if they may be called programmes), such as the Christian programme, are successful because, though they provide some moral precepts, they attempt to work by arousing a sense of personal responsibility in the individual, though even such systems may be abused — may be reduced to a 'Jesus loves you' sticker on the rear window of a motor car.

Like the Christian tradition, our cultural tradition is, if properly used, formative of personality and influential in determining conduct without it being possible to call the tradition a programme — it should challenge our energies; we should individually make what we can of the challenge; it offers a diversity of approximate answers to our problems, but we are left to find our particular solutions. A very large part of our cultural heritage is embodied in literature (I refer to our fiction, drama and poetry) and literature has its effects on us in a number of different ways at different levels. I assume the traditional critics are right, that the object of literature is to edify (even if only negatively by presenting objects that are manifestly unedifying), and, this being so, the writer is frequently obliged to present us with examples of human goodness or (by the marked absence of examples) with ideas of goodness. Even though all great literature is moral — though it takes goodness as its theme — it cannot, except in ways to be described, deal with perfection. The first-class literary writer, the man of imagination, is too much aware of the complexity of human nature and needs, too much aware of the complexity and variety of the answers to the question 'what is human good?' to attempt to provide any comprehensive answer of his own. A certain class of literature, meant for the consumption of children, purports to present impeccable heroes and heroines of an immaculate uprightness, but mature literature for mature persons presents life in its complexity, its heroes and heroines are perplexed human beings struggling with problems they cannot see all the way round. Such works act on our moral sensibility, not by presenting us with god-like creatures or providing god-given formulae for a successful life, but by inviting us to give thought to the situation depicted — and indirectly, perhaps, by inducing in us the habit of strenuously thinking about our own circumstances. No panaceas, no ideal human being, no moral clichés are offered — indeed, they are specifically excluded.

There is a class of literature, nevertheless, that does present perfection, and it is to this class that I wish to turn my main attention. The truthful artist cannot present his persons as perfect — he would not know how to set about describing a being who is non-existent — yet most artists, or many artists, have a vision of perfection that they wish to put forward, and not only do artists have this urge but men have it in general. We want an idea of what it is like to be perfect and we want to put it in concrete, not abstract form. We cannot normally find it in ourselves or our companions, we might not always know what to do with it if it were surprisingly there, and we might even find it an uncomfortable phenomenon in a form that reminds us too much of ourselves. The solution is to present perfection, to relate it to the human, but to place it at a safe distance where it may inspire us perhaps, where it convincingly does exist in tangible form, but where it does not shock our credulity by pretending to be an inhabitant of quite the same sphere as ourselves.

To take them in chronological order, then, here are some of the ways in which perfection has been imagined. First, there is the myth of an unfallen Adam and Eve, a man and woman like ourselves inhabiting a world like ours, but a paradisaical world without imperfections. The myth of the golden age exists in classical and other literatures, as well as in Genesis, but the Hebrew account is the most interesting because it incorporates a description of the fall from perfection. Secondly, there is the idea of a perfect man, somewhat translated from the usual condition of mankind, as a saint. I say 'somewhat translated' because such men have supernatural abilities or are in touch with the supernatural. Very often they withdraw from the workaday world. The third projection of perfection is made onto men leading a very simple life: the noble savage living in a remote paradise, or the rustic living in primitive rural contentment. Fourthly, there is the idea of the child who lives in innocence and occupies a world of his own, of which the adult has no clear memory. Fifthly, there is the inspired man: the artist with a special gift of seeing more and seeing better than his fellows. The sixth projection is onto the animal living in a simpler relation to his world than we do. All six modes of description exist in literature, and they succeed one another in the order I have given, one mode displacing a predecessor that has lost favour. Not all modes are of equal interest, the least interesting being that of the inspired man, a notion put forward from time to time but much favoured by the later Romantics. Shelley expresses the notion clearly in his *Defence of Poetry*. On the whole, this is a rather second-rate

conception which has given rise to some second-rate verse. I do not propose to deal with it. The notion of the saintly man, to some degree abstracted from this world and in touch with the divine, is similar to that of the inspired man and is not, on the whole, a literary idea; it remains confined to the annals of religion, and when it escapes into literature the human qualities and so the human imperfections of the subject come into prominence. I do not propose to deal with this idea either. The only successful treatment of the notion that I know of occurs in Dostoevski's *The Idiot*, which presents a Christ-like man who, like the martyrs, is eventually destroyed.

This leaves us with the notions of unfallen man, primitive man, the child, and the animal, all very much more satisfactory figures for putting forward the idea of perfection, for several reasons: the subjects are further removed from us; it is easier to suspend disbelief when confronted by them; they represent states that are ideal, not attainable; yet they do not quite present impossibilities, as we shall see. Of the four, the ideas of unfallen man and the child are the most interesting to students of English literature because they have given rise to great written works. It is at some of these that I want to look — at Milton's account of Paradise, and at Wordsworth's account of childhood.

In *Paradise Lost* Milton depicts two persons living in the same place and doing the same things before and after an event which throws them off balance so that there enters an element of self-consciousness and self-seeking into what they do. One may put it this way: they become obliged to pretend to be what they are. They can no longer afford to live thoughtlessly in harmony with a world which they unhesitatingly accept, but must think of everything they say in terms of some selfish consideration. To take an example, here are Adam's unfallen words spoken when Eve offers him the forbidden fruit; he has no illusions about the consequences, but decides, nevertheless, to eat the fruit because he must share Eve's fate with her. The decision is made in love of Eve:

Some cursed fraud
Of enemy hath beguiled thee, yet unknown,
And me with thee hath ruined, for with thee
Certain my resolution is to die;
How can I live without thee, how forgo
Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined,
To live again in these wild woods forlorn?

(IX, 904)

Adam speaks these words to himself; he makes no parade of his decision to die with Eve and he utters no word of reproach to her. After the fall, however, he changes his attitude towards what he has done and towards Eve; he is prepared to view his deed in an heroic light and to do so in order to reproach his wife. In answer to her accusations he says:

Is this the love, is this the recompense
Of mine to thee, ungrateful Eve, expressed
Immutable when thou wert lost, not I,
Who might have lived and joyed immortal bliss,
Yet willingly chose rather death with thee . . . ?
(IX, 1163)

And so on. We have left a world of beings living together in harmony to enter one in which each individual is highly aware of his or her separate identity and determined to assert it at the expense of others. This highly self-conscious state, this state of isolated opposition, is the essential characteristic of the fallen Adam and Eve as it is the characteristic of the fallen Satan. All three of them have left the state of perfection which involves being part of the community of the universe — they have lost an innate sense of belonging and dependence. Adam, Eve and Satan have grown up, if you like, have left home to make a lonely way in an antagonistic universe, and even their Father becomes the figure who must thwart their independent aims. The unfallen Adam and Eve are child-like in their ways, but they are not childish — indeed childishness is characteristic of their fallen state when they bicker with one another or are sullenly assertive with God. I should like to look at their child-like qualities by taking some extracts from their morning hymn before the fall:

These are thy glorious works, parent of good,
Almighty, thine this universal frame,
Thus wondrous fair; thy self how wondrous then!
Unspeakable, who sit'st above these heavens
To us invisible or dimly seen
In these thy lowest works, yet these declare
Thy goodness beyond thought, and power divine.
(V, 153)

The prayer is curious in that, though it is fifty-six lines long, only these seven lines are spoken to God, and even these are indirect, addressed, as they open, to the creation: 'These are thy glorious

works, parent of good'. Adam and Eve require nothing of God and they ask for nothing; they show humility in that they do not pretend to know anything whatever about God except that he is the Creator — they have no theology. God is 'unspeakable', he is 'above these heavens', 'invisible or dimly seen/In these (his) lowest works'; and the remaining forty-nine lines of the hymn are addressed directly to the lowest works, not God. They address the heavenly bodies, commencing with the morning star:

Fairest of stars, last in the train of night,
 If better thou belong not to the dawn,
 Sure pledge of day, that crown'st the smiling morn
 With thy bright circlet, praise him in thy sphere
 While day arises, that sweet hour of prime.

(V 166)

The sun, the moon, the planets are each called on in their turn to praise God, the elements are asked to 'let your ceaseless change/Vary to our great maker still new praise', and next in turn the same invitation is extended to mists, clouds, winds, trees, fountains, birds and beasts. Here is a sample:

His praise ye winds, that from four quarters blow,
 Breathe soft or loud; and wave your tops, ye pines,
 With every plant, in sign of worship wave.

(V, 192)

It is in simply being what they are that winds and pines praise God, but it is the wind that waves the tops of the pines, of course, and the point made here implicitly is that it is in being together in nature, in being part of the same interacting harmony, that winds and pines render up their praise; the wind is invisible and pines cannot move themselves, but together and in community with all other things that feed them and stir them they manifest the work of God. Adam and Eve do not subscribe to the pathetic fallacy; they do not suppose that stars or mists are articulate, though they say something that sounds very close to this at the end of their prayer. They address the animal creation:

Ye that in waters glide, and ye that walk
 The earth, and stately tread, or lowly creep;
 Witness if I be silent, morn or even,
 To hill, or valley, fountain, or fresh shade
 Made vocal by my song, and taught his praise.

(V, 200)

The fish and beasts are asked to bear witness to Adam and Eve's speaking, and the speaking of Adam and Eve does two things which are the same really: it makes hill, valley, fountain and shade vocal, that is, causes them to speak; and it teaches them God's praise. The bond between Adam and Eve and nature around them is close; fountain and fresh shade are made vocal, made to join in with the hymn; they are doing the same thing as Adam and Eve, just as the stars, mists, trees and winds are doing the same thing — speaking praise. The words 'speak' or 'praise' or some close synonym occur twenty-one times in the fifty-six lines of the hymn, only once applied to Adam and Eve who are the only articulate beings mentioned.

Adam and Eve are the least fanciful and least stupid of beings; they do not utter their hymn in childish ignorance, and certainly do not impute intelligence and a vocabulary to inarticulate things in order to gain a second-rate poetic effect. The points made by their hymn are: first, their close affinity with nature and their harmoniously belonging to it; second, their lack of an isolated self-consciousness so that they know themselves to be participating with other things with different qualities, but to the same end; and third, that praise, and even speaking, are not functions separated from the rest of one's being as if praise were only a matter of words, speaking a matter of cerebration. Adam and Eve enjoy the gift of language, but they pray by accepting their life and their lot in a spirit of gratitude and so are at prayer at all times, simply by existing, by breathing, eating, participating in the creation. In this respect all creation is at prayer — cannot avoid being so because simple acceptance is prayer, and in this respect the praise and speaking of Adam and Eve is at one and in harmony with the praise of all things. It is only after the fall when Adam and Eve fail in sincerity towards themselves, and place themselves at a distance from God and the creation, that speech and prayer become broken-off and isolated activities.

It should be clear that unfallen perfection is an artless state, spontaneous and not deliberately entered upon — indeed, self-consciousness and self-seeking are the basis of fallen imperfection and so destructive of perfection. If you positively desire unspoiled innocence then you cannot have it, simply because the condition of wanting it excludes it; if you are actually in a state of unspoiled innocence then you are hardly aware of enjoying it — not at any conscious level — because you are fully occupied by being it.

Is there any consolation for the fallen then? Presumably the Paradise myth is not simply an historical curiosity, but has its

appeal to us because we see possibilities within ourselves that lend colour to the concept.

Milton was content to accept the idea of original sin: men are born fallen, though something may be effected through the operation of grace. But Milton was writing at a time when the framework of thought was changing, if not its structural materials; theology was being displaced by moral philosophy, religious notions were giving way to related humanistic ones. The idea of an innocent perfection, so central to all man's thinking, was kept up, but the context was altered; innocent perfection was taken out of the garden of Eden and placed in some tropical garden or in the nursery. By the time Rousseau had written and been assimilated, the noble savage or the child had succeeded Adam and Eve as exemplars of an original excellence. Savage and child had much in common with the biblical pair: they lived in a simplified world; they were unself-consciously at one with that world; they had not learned to be devious with others or with themselves; they were contented, grateful for what they had and capable of affection; they were able to know they were dependent without feeling gratitude as a burden. Their knowledge was limited and their reasoning simple, but they exhibited an ability to go straight to the heart of things not possible to the complicated or perverted mind of the civilized or adult human being. They were representative of qualities that we lose as we fabricate the vast mass of experience that goes to make up our lives; they were not yet fallen, though a fall was, at some time, inevitable.

The noble savage and the angelic child are, like pre-lapsarian Adam and Eve, ideal beings. All three ideals can be matched up to realities we know — Adam and Eve to their descendants, the savage and the child to examples we might encounter — and we may find that the real thing disenchants us. What one does notice is that all three ideals take us back to a beginning: to the first man, to primitive man, to the start of life. We like the idea of a fresh start, placed as we are in the midst of our own experience and the midst of history; a fresh start would unmuddle it all — which is the grand, if mistaken, revolutionary idea. The fact is that fresh starts, if possible, would merely leave us in more of a muddle than before. The savage, the primitive man, at all events, is very much of a muddle — far too muddled for the reality to stand up to scrutiny, and as an ideal he soon disappears from the scene. He persisted rather weakly for a century or so, but did not inspire any first-class literature and very little writing of the second rank; primitive nobility is a philosophic or pseudo-philosophic notion rather than a literary one. The ideal of the

child was more persistent, probably because it is better founded, and while it was in vogue in England inspired some great works in poetry and prose.

An early, if undistinguished, exponent was Traherne, writing at the same time as Milton in the late seventeenth century, but it was over a century later that the ideal came into its own, in the poetry of Blake and Wordsworth. During the next century it finds its way into prose, the important exponents being Dickens, George Eliot and Henry James.

The most interesting exponent of an unfallen perfection, after Milton, is William Blake, who explicitly renounces Milton's theology, who brings the fall into the midst of our experience, but acknowledges Milton as the inspirer of his ideas. The state of perfection, for Blake, is a condition that can be reduced to no formula and is not limited to any particular category of being. It is the condition of being fully and selflessly a part of things, as with Milton, and for that reason it will vary with the individual involved, with the circumstances of the moment and the history of the occasion. The innocent is engrossed in the moment, brings everything relevant to the moment and nothing irrelevant, is fully intelligent in the sense that he is fully aware of what goes on and fully intelligent also in the sense that he brings the most of his inner self to bear on the occasion. He is, as we sometimes put it, lost in his occupation. He uses his senses in order to come alive to, and not to regularize, his world; he is capable of a sympathy that catches up the whole of his attention; he does not suppose that he can isolate his perceptions, appetites, intelligence or feelings from the rest of his being; he respects other creatures and has no desire to meddle with them.

Many of Blake's innocents are children or rustics, but not all of them are. Simple persons find it easier to maintain the poise of an innocent perfection; older persons and persons who carry the complex knowledge of their education find it more difficult to have all brought into balance. Indeed, this balance may occur very infrequently, and that is why we look to the child as our exemplar of innocence. But if the occasion is less frequent in the older person, it is more valuable when it does occur — more is brought into balance. We all have our self-forgetful and engrossed moments when our attention is spontaneously and satisfactorily caught, though such moments may be infrequent as we mature. It is our memory of such times that lends substance to the ideal of innocence; it is an ideal because we cannot have it for wanting it, but it is not beyond us. On this view of innocent perfection, the fall is not a once-and-for-all event of pre-history

but a continuing condition in every man's life. Each moment and each occasion is a challenge to accept it in innocence; and every failure is a continuation of the fall which goes on through life.

I have given Blake very scant attention, but will leave him now because I would like to say a little about Wordsworth. Wordsworth's ideas on perfection are not as carefully worked out as Blake's — indeed they are rather unsatisfactorily stated when he sets them out in the abstract — but his insights into the condition of childish innocence are excellent.

It is in *The Prelude* that Wordsworth best uses the child to illustrate a relationship between the self and the universe that is immediate, spontaneous, perceptive, harmonious and creative, and in that poem his attempts at explanation are subordinated to descriptions that work by implication, not assertion; we are given an opportunity to be innocent as readers, that is to make our own creative contribution to the reading. I should like to consider two passages taken from *The Prelude*, the one concerning a child, and the other an adult (the poet himself).

In the first passage, which is well known, Wordsworth describes a boy who would stand by the lake of Winander blowing mimic hootings through his cupped hands and waiting for the owls to answer him:

. . . and they would shout
 Across the watery vale, and shout again,
 Responsive to his call, with quivering peals,
 And long halloos and screams, and echoes loud,
 Redoubled and redoubled, concourse wild
 Of jocund din; and, when a lengthened pause
 Of silence came and baffled his best skill,
 Then sometimes, in that silence while he hung
 Listening, a gentle shock of mild surprise
 Has carried far into his heart the voice
 Of mountain torrents; or the visible scene
 Would enter unawares into his mind,
 With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
 Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
 Into the bosom of the steady lake.

(V, 374)

Wordsworth says more here than that the boy hears the mountain torrents or that he sees the scene with its rocks, woods, sky and lake; the voice of mountain torrents is not simply registered, but is carried 'far into the heart' by a 'shock of mild

surprise'. The shock of mild surprise seems something distinct not his own response and, having come, it discovers its own recesses far within as though finding its own way. The boy is curiously absent; in fact he is listening intently for a response from the owls and aware, not of the 'voice of mountain torrents', but of silence, for that is what the direction of his attention allows him to detect. He is not seeking any particular communion with nature (no boy ever would), but he is, in this time of concentration and abstraction, very much closer to it and very much more within it than any effort of direct and deliberate observation could place him. He hears the mountain torrents and he does not hear them, he sees and he does not see. As in the case of Adam and Eve there is an unsought rapport and harmony with the creation. He receives the 'visible scene', it 'enters his mind', but it does so 'unawares'; the mind acted upon is not that brightly lighted surface of our consciousness we usually think of when using that term, but the whole faculty, intuitive as well as intelligential.

We see that an event is taking place, but the event transcends the elements that compose it: the natural scene and the boy who responds to it. The visible scene comes to the boy

With all its solemn imagery, its rocks,
 Its woods, and that uncertain heaven, received
 Into the bosom of the steady lake.

For a moment the line between boy and scene is blurred just as the line between Adam, Eve and the creation blurs in Milton. The boy hears though he is listening elsewhere, the scene is half dark and things take on qualities not their own, as is shown in the transference of qualities between heaven and lake in the last two lines. It is the heaven with its clear stars which is steady, but reflected — received into the bosom of the lake — it becomes uncertain (that is, wavering); and it is the lake in its valley — part of the solid scene in the dark below — which now seems steady, though it, in fact, imparts the wavering quality. The image used here gives more than the uncertain nature of the scene under conditions of twilight; we are given, also, the essence of the circumstances in which the boy takes part. The elements of the scene require their characteristics from each other and are blended into a whole: the sky acquires uncertainty from the lake, the lake its apparent solidity by reflecting the sky; lake and heaven together form a whole from which no part may be subtracted just as, for the moment, boy and nature are at one. Wordsworth conveys this poetically, though he makes no attempt

to explain it. Innocent perfection may be exhibited, but it defeats attempts at definition.

The state of perfection, as we have seen, is a selfless one in which the individual is able to take a good deal of colouring from beyond himself, though he is not merely a blank recipient — he must be able to contribute his own particular sparkle as well. For this reason, water imagery is particularly suitable for the poetic handling of innocence. In itself water is colourless and transparent, but its transparency and clarity allow it to take reflection and light. We recognize a stream or a lake by what it gives by reflection and transmission of other things (trees, sky, sunlight and so on), yet only water has the quality that reflects and transmits in the way that it does — it transforms the objects it reflects. The lake lends its unsteadiness to the reflection of the stars to serve Wordsworth's purpose in describing his boy. In Book IV of *The Prelude* a description of a man hanging over the side of a boat attempting to puzzle out what lies beneath the water of a lake is used to illustrate the experience of one who looks down into his memory; in terms of this metaphor, the past is what lies beneath the water, the present is represented by objects above the water:

As one who hangs down-bending from the side
 Of a slow-moving boat, upon the breast
 Of a still water, solacing himself
 With such discoveries as his eye can make
 Beneath him in the bottom of the deep,
 Sees many beauteous sights — weeds, fishes, flowers,
 Grotts, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more,
 Yet often is perplexed and cannot part
 The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,
 Mountains and clouds, reflected in the depth
 Of the clear flood, from things which there abide
 In their true dwelling; now is crossed by gleam
 Of his own image, by a sunbeam now,
 And wavering motions sent he knows not whence,
 Impediments that make his task more sweet;
 Such pleasant office have we long pursued
 Incumbent o'er the surface of past time
 With like success, nor often have appeared
 Shapes fairer or less doubtfully discerned
 Than these to which the Tale, indulgent Friend!
 Would now direct thy notice.

(IV, 256)

The 'pleasant office . . . long pursued' referred to is the task of looking over the past involved in writing *The Prelude*. What has taken place (the things below the water which 'there abide/In their true dwelling') may be discovered, but the task is complicated by the clarity of the flood in which the objects dwell. They may be seen very well:

. . . nor often have appeared
Shapes fairer or less doubtfully discerned . . .

but the perception is part of a wider activity from which it takes its life and sweetness. Glimpses of the present intrude and mingle with those of the past, together with objects that are fanciful reconstructions from both past and present:

Sees many beauteous sights — weeds, fishes, flowers,
Grots, pebbles, roots of trees, and fancies more,
Yet often is perplexed and cannot part
The shadow from the substance, rocks and sky,
Mountains and clouds, reflected in the depth
Of the clear flood, from things which there abide
In their true dwelling.

Awareness of the self and ideas of self also intrude to complicate the picture of the past, together with forces whose origin is not understood:

. . . now is crossed by gleam
Of his own image, by a sunbeam now,
And wavering motions sent he knows not whence,
Impediments that make his task more sweet.

The circumstance described in the extract — gazing over the side of a boat, or looking into the past — is an enjoyable experience, and the delight lies in the complexity of the task, a complexity that arises not from any confusion of the elements but the clarity of the impressions brought from so many sources, though the impressions are brief — shifting resolutions are glimpsed, only to disappear. As in the case of the boy listening above Winander, the attention is directed with great concentration and with a certain object in mind, and receives more than it had expected and, perhaps, more than it knows, though the adult mind working here has a more deliberate grasp of what is going on. We can recognize the source of the impulses that enter the ex-

perience, and the recognition or partial recognition adds to the enjoyment, but the elements derive from the whole experience rather than add up to form it. The present moment takes in past moments and present influences, but it has its value from what it is in itself. Like Adam and Eve, Wordsworth is sufficiently relaxed and at one with his history and his occupation to be enjoying it, and accepting it in all its complexity.

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NATAL'S FIRST BLACK CAPITALISTS

by N. ETHERINGTON

Most historians of early Natal have concentrated their attention on the interaction between white pioneers and romantic Zulu warriors. This narrow focus is understandable but it has obscured the fascinating story of Africans who left their traditional ways of life and tried to make their way in a white man's society on the white man's terms. In the long run, the experience of these black pioneers was quite as important to the making of modern Natal as the last stands of Langalibalele and Cetshwayo.

Natal's early settlers seldom grasped the magnitude of the changes in African life which were going on around them. They lived in fear of Zulu invasions or uprisings on the remote reserves, and suspected that the black servants who provided their chief contact with African life were more committed to the 'savagery' of tradition than to the evolving capitalist economy. Those evidences of new African ambitions which could not be ignored — the adoption of European styles of dress and accommodation — were ascribed largely to the influence of missionaries.

Settlers imagined that they could shape African economic activities to their own design and were surprised when their attempts at control miscarried. In the 1860s and 1870s big farms were sold as though they were baronial manors. *Schoongezigt* farm at Great Tugela was advertised as containing 'a Kafir Kraal on the spot from which skilled Ploughmen, Wagon Drivers and Farm labourers may be obtained at a fair remuneration'.¹ From another farm in Umvoti County 'any amount of Kafir labour' might be obtained; prospective purchasers were advised that 'to say the least of it, it will be a fortune for a Sugar Planter at a reasonable cost'.² At the same time, employers complained because labour was no longer available at the 'reasonable' rate of seven to ten shillings a month and struggled vainly to control the sale of alcohol to Africans by fining hapless hotel keepers.³

The tide of change in African economic life, however, was too overwhelming to be harnessed by the limited means at the disposal of the Colonial government. Indeed, the government soon realized that most of its revenue was coming from the import duties charged on goods purchased by African consumers. In the balance sheets of the annual Natal *Blue Books* the pace of change could be graphed by anyone who took the time to do a few simple sums. During the 1850s the chief revenue-producing trade goods destined for African consumers were beads, picks and blanketing. In the 1860s, there is a dramatic shift to made-up

blankets, surplus military uniforms, simple ploughs and tobacco. Where did the money come from to finance these new purchases? Discerning observers in touch with African life such as David Dale Buchanan, pioneer editor of the *Witness*, could see that the key to the new prosperity was the development of cash crop farming. He reported in 1869 that:

The progress made by the Kafirs in agriculture is fast giving them the lead in supplying local demand. They now grow forage extensively — a thing totally unknown in 1858. They have, during the last ten years, bought many hundreds of ploughs — indeed we might say, with truth, thousands. They all have a few oxen; they are adepts in breaking the oxen in; they can make their own yokes, yoke skeys, trek-touws, reins, neck straps, and, indeed, all that is necessary to set them up as ploughmen . . . Under present arrangements, and indeed under any equitable arrangement, the Kafirs must for many years to come make it impossible for white men, without capital, to get a living in ordinary agricultural pursuits in Natal; and perhaps in wagon driving. The white farmer must take advantage of this and use his superior intelligence in producing articles of export. This seems to be the only profitable way in which he can use his capital and skill.⁴

This development naturally put an end to the old settler pipe more European goods, pay their hut taxes and still remain on the English model. More important, it produced ripple effects which spread through the whole African community and opened still more avenues to prosperity. Wealth produced by the sale of crops to townsfolk and planters enabled Africans to consume more European goods, pay their hut taxes and still remain on the land. This, in turn, meant that settlers had to offer higher wages in order to attract labour. John Bird, as Resident Magistrate of Pietermaritzburg County, emphasized the spiralling cost of labour in his annual report to Theophilus Shepstone in 1863. Only a few years before, unskilled African workers had drawn wages averaging 5 to 7 shillings a month; now Maritzburg tradesmen were paying unskilled labourers one shilling to 2/6 *per day*, black wagoners received £1 per month, and domestic servants could not be found for less than 12 shillings per month.⁵ The average settler blamed wage rises on the excessive generosity of employers, on missionaries who spread dangerous ideas among their converts, or on the big native locations and polygamy which enabled African men to idle away their days without going out to work. The truth was, however, that African enterprise rather

than laziness had produced the upward movement in the price of labour.

In part, the new African prosperity created profitable opportunities for knowledgeable Europeans. Advertisements appeared in the Zulu language enticing African producers to sell their crops to white wholesalers.⁶ Farmers complained that scheming white entrepreneurs had organized black wagon drivers into companies which reaped excessive profits.⁷ And a Legislative Councillor drew attention 'to the great inconvenience sustained by persons bringing actions against natives, through their employing clever lawyers who always got them off'.⁸

In just as many cases, however, educated and ambitious Africans managed without white capital. An American missionary summarized the process which put black traders on the road to riches:

They get the spirit of trade and speculation in their small ways. You will find them with bundles of the skins of the wild cat or monkey, or blankets which they have probably purchased on credit, travelling through the length and breadth of this country and even those bordering on it, bartering for hides, goats, sheep, young cattle, and then selling these to each other or to the white people. After a few years some will succeed in obtaining a few oxen and a cart or wagon, when they will engage in purchasing mealies and take them to the towns for sale, or will draw sugar from the sugar estates to market, or perhaps transport merchandize [sic] from the Port to the upper districts, going sometimes as far as to the Dutch Republics or even to the Diamond fields or Goldfields five hundred miles distant.⁹

It was this spirit of commercial adventure that constantly surprised settlers accustomed to think of Africans as stone-age men. At the first public sale of Natal-grown cotton, the bales put up for auction were raised and ginned entirely by Africans.¹⁰ Sizeable accumulations of capital were put together by black entrepreneurs who had absorbed the lessons taught unwittingly by white businessmen. J. W. Akerman informed the Legislative Council in 1863 that some Africans had a very sound understanding of land values. 'He knew of a Kafir who offered £500 cash down for a farm, but the Magistrate would not let him buy it'.¹¹ By the early 1860s a significant number of Africans had acquired enough property in Pietermaritzburg to qualify as voters in municipal elections. On Greyling Street alone, five Africans held, in 1863, freehold property valued at £275, and an additional three were

listed as permanent occupiers.¹² It was in part the spectre of large numbers of black voters qualifying to vote by virtue of their property which inspired the 1865 franchise law which laid down special qualifications for Africans.

Statistics from the *Blue Books* and the scattered observations of knowledgeable eyewitnesses testify to the rapidity with which most sections of Natal's African community adjusted to the new economic system. But to get a picture of change at the level of individuals and families it is necessary to use the accounts of missionaries who were most closely in touch with the altered rhythms of African life. In many ways, the most successful mission station in Natal was the Edendale community near Pietermaritzburg. Edendale grew from the vision and experience of James Allison, a Methodist missionary who collected a ragtag band of followers from many different ethnic groups as he hopped from posting to posting across South Africa in the 1830s and 1840s. When he fled from Swaziland to Natal in 1846, he brought with him a congregation which included Afrikaans-speaking Griqua, Sotho speakers from the high veld, Swazi and Zulu. Because all of these people shared the experience of uprooting and a drive for prosperity and security, they were particularly ready to experiment with new techniques. Allison gave them an ideal opportunity by buying the Edendale farm in 1851 and subdividing it into £5 freehold plots. Missionary education, freehold tenure, and the proximity of Maritzburg all helped to accelerate Edendale's rise to prosperity.

Edendale leaders accused Allison of shady land dealings in 1861 and expelled him, but by that time the community had reached a stage of self-sustaining growth. New missionaries assigned to Edendale expressed continual astonishment at the material achievements of the people. At the time of Allison's departure the people had begun to build a teacher's residence at their own expense.¹³ The next year the community subscribed £700 for the building of a new chapel, which they insisted should have a slate roof. 'Although tiles do very well for a private dwelling house', their missionary was informed, 'they do not look well on the house of God.'¹⁴ Changes in personal expenditure and life-style paralleled the growth of these grand community projects. The missionary Charles Roberts complained somewhat meanly that at weddings Edendale people were 'so much taken up with what they shall eat, drink and particularly how they shall be dressed, as, in a greater or less degree, to interfere with their spiritual state.'¹⁵ By 1866, combines of Edendale men had been formed to buy farms in the Ladysmith district from which heathen

tenants were expelled to make way for the more intensive pastoral activities of the new Christian owners.¹⁶

Much of the Edendale drive for prosperity was concentrated in agriculture but there were a few dynamic individuals who raised their sights and aspired to become town businessmen. The first to make a considerable success was Hezekiah Daniel, an African Christian of obscure origins who raised enough capital through itinerant trading to start his own business in about the year 1862.¹⁷ An unknown white merchant subscribed a further sum of capital and Edendale land holders pledged their title deeds as security for the firm; Hezekiah Daniel & Co. was launched. Missionary encouragement appears to have played no part in the venture, which was begun in the period between Allison's departure and the posting of a new missionary in his place. The new company arose wholly as a result of African initiative.

During the next three years, Hezekiah Daniel became a prominent figure in Pietermaritzburg, determined to achieve respectability and quick to take offence at the slights of Europeans who challenged his right to rise in their world. In a letter to the Resident Magistrate, he supported his request for permission to own a rifle with proofs of his position as a man of property:

Sir,

Having received His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor's reply to my application for possessing a gun for my use, I have the honour to inform you that having bought land out of town, I propose residing there in the country, also that in following my occupation of Trader I am frequently placed in situations of danger, and respectfully request you will obtain His Excellency's sanction for my purchasing a gun as stated.

I have the honour to be

Sir,

Your Obedient Servant

Hezekiah Daniel.¹⁸

In October 1863 he was fined £1 for striking a white man who had accused him of selling a lame horse by fraudulent misrepresentation.¹⁹ The next year, however, the shoe was on the other foot, and it was Daniel who triumphed in a similar case.²⁰ Daniel had written to the *Natal Courier* to deny the widespread rumour that he had applied to the Resident Magistrate for permission to sell lemonade and sherry in contravention of a local ordinance. He had, he claimed, merely made a jocular remark to that effect. Subsequently, a white man named Edmonds met Daniel on the

street and called this letter a lie. Daniel rejoined that Edmonds was the liar, whereupon Edmonds beat him with an umbrella. Daniel sued for assault and was awarded 10 shillings plus costs.

Unfortunately, Hezekiah Daniel's descent from prosperity was even more meteoric than his rise. The commercial depression of 1865 swept Daniel & Co. away in a flood of unpaid debts and unsold goods. In April, 1865 Daniel was declared insolvent with £7 000 in outstanding obligations. His frantic Edendale backers, who had never envisaged the possibility of failure, now found themselves forced to raise £5 000 on short notice or lose the title deeds to their lands.²¹ By 1869 Hezekiah Daniel had sunk into indigence on a tiny farm in the Klip River District.²²

Methodist missionaries like James Cameron took a patronizing view of the affair, even as they held out hope for the future:

I was *diverted* as well as *grieved* to hear of the failure a Kaffir who had been carrying on a rather extensive business in Pietermaritzburg. His liabilities amount to several thousand pounds. Such instances prove that knowledge may be a power for evil as well as good. An educated Kaffir may by his knowledge of money, of banks, of bill transactions etc. first impress his countrymen with his cleverness, and then mislead them into their temporal ruin. The Kaffir in question took other Kaffirs into partnership with himself, designated their union a 'Firm', bearing his own name with Co. affixed, and doubtless thought to become a Merchant of the first water. But he had to do with Englishmen, some of them probably not overscrupulous about the means of increasing their substance, and now the game is played out to the destruction of the Kaffir Firm. The time may come however when such a firm, under better management shall stand side by side with the most respectable English firms, meeting its liabilities and securing its profits, as surely as they.

Cameron need not have been so condescending in his assessment. The tide which engulfed Hezekiah Daniel also ran over some of the most respected white pioneers in Natal. On June 2nd, 1865 James Archbell, the mayor of Pietermaritzburg appeared on the insolvents' list along with Ferreira the auctioneer; the following week Raw and Wilkinson went under.²³ Depression knew no colour bar.

Moreover, black enterprise soon bounced back from the reverses of 1865. In 1867, more than thirty Edendale families formed a

partnership and raised £1 100 for the purchase of a farm eighteen miles from Ladysmith; less than three years later they acquired a neighbouring property.²⁴ African Christians from the Berlin Missionary Society at New Germany bought a farm and hired a white school teacher to continue the education of their children.²⁵ During the 1870s, two more offshoots of Edendale appeared near Ladysmith, one on the Mlazi river and a fourth on the upper Mzimkhulu.²⁶ By the end of the decade Africans 'were forming companies and taking land' throughout the length and breadth of the colony; they could commonly be seen bidding 'publicly at sales of Crown Lands the same as white people'.²⁷

If this further spurt of business activity and capital accumulation had been confined to Christianized Africans, it could perhaps be passed off as the fruit of missionary teaching. The fact was, however, that the winds of economic change were blowing through kraals far removed from missions and townfolk. On the slopes of the Drakensberg, for example, Langalibalele's Hlubi people went through a minor economic revolution on the eve of their famous 'rebellion'. A German missionary, J. R. Hansen of the Hermannsburg Society, who had struggled in vain to break down the Hlubi hostility to Christianity, reported in 1873 that remarkable transformations had been taking place. The chiefdom, whose numbers had been estimated at 2 400 in 1856, possessed more than 15 000 cattle in 1873. The European plough had replaced the old Nguni hoe to the extent that three quarters of all the Hlubi's arable land was now cultivated by the plough. Other signs of Hlubi prosperity could be read in the clothing, pipes, horses and rifles which the young men brought back from the Kimberley diamond fields where they worked as diggers and wagon drivers.²⁸ It may well be that local settlers' fear of the Hlubi's new riches and Langalibalele's desire to defend them contributed substantially to the series of misunderstandings which culminated in the tragic war of 1873.

The white settlers of Natal were sharply divided on the desirability of African economic advancement. A large number of settlers would have agreed with the colonist who wrote to the *Witness* in 1874 to oppose 'letting them [the Africans] ride about as they do on horseback. Making them Squireens is scarcely the way to supply the labour market'.²⁹ Others worried that black competition was threatening the livelihood of white artisans and looked back fondly to the days of the Byrne immigrants when 'there were no Kafirs . . . to plough and ditch, to make bricks and build houses, to thatch and do carpenters' work and to forge iron and build wagons'.³⁰ They saw disquieting signs of an ominous

spirit of organization when waterside workers in Durban held Natal's first strike. The *Natal Colonist* reported on 17 February, 1874 that:

Yesterday a number of Point Kafirs struck for an advance of 6d. a day on their wages, and business was consequently partially stopped. They are at present receiving 2s. a day and their food, equal to another shilling, so that their demand is equivalent to 3s. 6d. a day. What next?

At the same time there was an opposing body of opinion which held that white prosperity could only advance in tandem with black prosperity and that Natal could not long survive divided into two economies, one backward and the other progressive. In some cases the profit motive alone provided a powerful incentive to promote a rise in African incomes. The influential Natal Land and Colonisation Company held for speculative purposes thousands of acres of good farming land which could produce income only through the rents of black tenants. Rising incomes in the 1870s enabled the company to raise rents. G. L. Townsend, an up-country collection agent sketched some of the possibilities in a letter to the company's manager:

I am confident that the Kafir rental will up country steadily increase, this year there is a general rise of 10/- and in two farms which I have just visited I have made a further advance which I estimate will bring in upwards of £40 additional for 1875 The collection is taking me longer, and the work more heavy as I am anxious to carry out your wishes where I see the Kafirs have large herds and plough largely [;] consequently I have to inspect the farms more closely and gather information from neighbours as I find . . . the natives are by no means so ready to tell anything as in former years

I have endeavoured as much as possible to keep Kafirs together but it is difficult to get them located close to each other owing to their cattle. I have also borne in mind your desire to settle farms entirely for kafirs and have often mentioned the subject to them, but it has never come to such a head as I thought it worth while to report to you, but I will on my return from collecting Upper Umkomanzi Division mention the farms now returning a good kafir rental, others likely to do so and which you might perhaps consider to be kept entirely for kafirs.³¹

For other settlers, self-interest was reinforced by principle. D. D. Buchanan along with other attorneys found that as more Africans became involved in trade and cash crop farming their need for legal representation increased. Buchanan regularly advertised in the Zulu language suggesting that Africans with legal problems should apply to his office. It is not surprising, therefore, to find Buchanan arguing that black prosperity was the answer to Natal's racial and economic problems:

Perhaps the most striking feature in the Kafir character is his energy and industry as a farmer. Wherever he has lived beside a farmer, who is industrious, and has shown how, by the use of the plough, he can raise large quantities of produce, and that he can find a market for them, the Kafir has eagerly imitated him, has bought a plough and wagon, and has discovered that he also can obtain a large return in this way. The thousands of acres that have been ploughed up by Kafirs, and the hundreds of wagons they possess, are conclusive proof of their readiness and fitness to become agriculturalists. And ethnology lays down as one of its fundamental principles, that a people which change a pastoral for an agricultural life, or adopt the latter along with the former, so as to become traders in the produce they raise, are susceptible of a considerable degree of civilization.

This progression, as far as Buchanan was concerned, was no idle theory; it had been proved already in Natal.

Why, then, did not the Africans who had achieved such dramatic advances in the space of a single generation go on to greater heights? Why was there no black Rhodes, and no black Hulettts or Campbells? The old simple answer would have been that Africans clung too tightly and too long to the traditional economy; this gave Europeans a long headstart in the race for riches and the gap was never closed. This answer will no longer do. Africans could and did break with tradition; within decades of the colony's foundation many Africans were doing well in free competition with Europeans. The failure of Africans to develop a middle class of prosperous farmers and businessmen was probably due to problems in the three crucial areas of land, law and leadership.

Land was plentiful in the early days. Besides the Reserves, there were thousands of square miles of crown land and unoccupied farms in the hands of absentee landlords. Whether they were buying, renting, or squatting, ambitious Africans found plenty of scope for money-making agricultural enterprise. As

Natal's white population increased, black squatters and tenants were gradually evicted from private lands. At the same time, the government acted to restrict access to crown land. When sections of Zululand were opened to settlement after 1887, Africans were not allowed to purchase.³² Crown lands in Natal where Africans had squatted since the foundation of the colony were permanently closed to potential black purchasers when the Lands Department was instructed to refuse all African bids in 1903 and 1904.³³ Even the mission reserves which Sir George Grey had established to encourage the growth of an African peasantry were closed to individual ownership in the 1890s. This left for the burgeoning African population only the reserves or locations under the Natal Native Trust, and without the possibility of freehold tenure it was virtually impossible for black capitalists to develop profitable farms.

Law was a problem because the long reign of Shepstonian paternalism bequeathed a dual legal system to Natal which placed irksome restrictions on black entrepreneurs. One of the intentions of Shepstone in supporting the creation of a separate body of 'Native Law' had been to protect Africans from the operations of an alien legal system which they did not understand. What was kindness for one generation became a burden to the next. John Kumalo told the Natal Native Commission in 1881 that he and his associates were 'men engaged in business upon which profit and loss depends, and we cannot come to the Magistrates Court, and stay eight or nine days without loss to ourselves'. And yet proceedings in the Native Courts were invariably lengthy, where the interposition of interpreters and other intermediaries between black plaintiff and white magistrate produced misunderstandings and resentments. Furthermore, the right to legal counsel was denied to Africans before these courts.³⁴ Theoretically, Africans could become exempt from the operation of Native Law by petitioning the Lieutenant-Governor in accordance with the provisions of Law 11 of 1864.³⁵ But by 1879, the Secretary for Native Affairs had clearly established that even exempted Africans were still subject to laws specially framed to control the non-white population. Some of these racially restrictive laws were merely embarrassing to black business men, but when the government acted to impose special taxes on Africans or to prevent land sales, the economic consequences of discrimination were severely felt.³⁶

The leadership problem arose partly as a result of the problems of land and law. It is significant that during the first few decades of British rule in Natal, Africans took very little interest in political controversies and the governance of church affairs. It

was in this period that trade and agriculture promised the greatest opportunities for material advancement. Before 1880, missionaries had great difficulty in getting any able Africans to become candidates for the ministry. The reason they gave was invariably the same: the low salaries paid by the church could not compensate with the attractions of farming and business.³⁷ After 1880, as secular opportunities dried up, Africans turned to the church as a field in which to satisfy their ambitions for leadership. When missionaries thwarted some of these ambitions, Africans founded their own 'Ethiopian' churches. In many cases the founders of new churches were the sons and grandsons of successful farmers and traders. Similar causes operated to produce an interest in politics. The men who came together in 1888 to form Natal's first African political organisation were particularly concerned to remove the bars to economic activity erected by the dual legal system.³⁸ As able Africans turned to the church and politics, they removed potential leaders from the sphere of private enterprise.

By the turn of the century, then, opportunities for black capitalists and peasant proprietors had declined sharply. Restrictions on land tenure ended the movement to purchase and develop agricultural land on an economic basis, leaving only a heritage of scattered African farms which came to be regarded as anomalous 'black spots'. As ambitious men found satisfaction for their aspirations (but not for their causes) in other fields, business ceased to be an avenue to success.

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THE BROTHERS GRIMM AND THEIR
COLLECTION OF
'KINDER und HAUSMÄRCHEN'

by M. SCHMIDT IHMS

The stories now known as *Grimm's Fairy Tales* appeared in English translation during the nineteenth century as *Popular Stories*¹ or *Household Tales*.² These titles correspond closely to the original German *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*. When nowadays we refer to the *Fairy Tales*, or in German to the *Märchen*, we use a one-sided and inadequate term which applies only to a certain part of the collection (to approximately 60 out of 210 tales).

The men who recorded these stories, the brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, were just one year apart in age, and were particularly close to one-another from childhood. To understand their work, it is necessary to consider not only the men themselves, but also these bonds between them,³ and beyond that the social and political conditions of the times in which they lived.⁴

Jacob, the older of the two, was in appearance a little man, slightly built, but with an impressive head and a characterful clearcut profile. He did not find it easy to make contact with other people. He had no wife — and so he clung all the more to his brother Wilhelm who remained his loyal friend throughout. Jacob was an unusually gifted man with a bold approach to problems which he formulated for himself, thereby laying the foundations for the new discipline of Germanistics, which is the study of the development of the Germanic languages and their creations both in oral and written tradition.

He had started his studies at the University of Marburg in the Faculty of Law. He soon attracted the attention of a truly creative scholar, Friedrich Karl von Savigny. Savigny taught that legal science should be both historical and systematic, and opposed all attempts at codifying German civil law before the content of the existing law had been established through historical research. He appointed Jacob Grimm as his assistant, although the latter had not yet completed his studies with a university qualification. Together they went to Paris to search in the National Library there for medieval legal documents. That set Jacob on his way not as a jurist but as the founder of Germanistics. He concerned himself mainly with the systematic and critical study of the history of the Germanic languages and the ways in which their creative spirit manifested itself.

The list of his published works is formidable — too vast to be given here. All that can be offered is a glimpse of the range of his knowledge. He published a collection of ancient legal documents;⁵ he edited a number of older texts and added his own commentaries (e.g. two Anglo-Saxon legends,⁶ Latin poems of the tenth and eleventh centuries,⁷ and old Spanish ballads⁸); he translated Serbian folksongs and a Serbian grammar;⁹ and he wrote two volumes on German mythology.¹⁰

His main claim to fame, however, is based on his *German Grammar* which appeared in four volumes. The title is misleading, for Jacob Grimm concerns himself here not only with the German language but with a whole group of related Germanic languages.

The first volume¹¹ is dedicated to Savigny. It deals with the sound system and contains the principles now known as 'Grimm's Laws'. The first of these explains the difference between certain sounds in the Germanic languages on the one hand and the related Indo-European languages on the other. The second accounts for the differences within the Germanic languages between High German on the one hand and Low German and English on the other. It explains certain regular correspondences like: High German *Wasser* = Low German and English *water*, or High German *Pfeife* = Low German or English *pipe*.

The second volume¹² investigates word formation, one of Jacob Grimm's favourite topics; the third,¹³ dedicated to his brother Wilhelm, deals with gender; and the fourth¹⁴ analyses syntax.

Of greater importance than these details is the linguistic modernity of Jacob Grimm's approach. Through his careful analysis of the historical development of linguistic forms he revealed also the underlying structure of the history of society and of the mind.

His contribution to our knowledge of the development of German culture (mythology, folklore, law, language and literature) was such that many universities tried to persuade this self-made scholar to join their faculties, and honorary doctorates were bestowed on him by several universities. He was made a member of the French Legion of Honour and he was also one of the first to be decorated with the newly created Prussian 'Pour le mérite'.

His brother Wilhelm always had to stand in the shadow of Jacob. However, he never showed any signs of resentment or jealousy, and why should he? He led a humanly much richer life. He was an attractive man of impressive stature. It is said that Jacob was peeved that he was made to stand when the photograph (one of the early daguerreotypes) was taken for the

first volume of their *German Dictionary*, because the photographer was trying to balance the difference in height between him and his brother. Wilhelm easily made friends and led a happy family life with his wife and children in a comfortable home which provided shelter for Jacob too. And as far as academic achievement is concerned, he could hold his own. He had finished his university studies with a degree in law, but like his brother he had changed direction and turned to the new discipline of Germanistics. His contribution to knowledge was recognised. He was held in high esteem by his students. His old University of Marburg honoured him with a doctor's degree in philosophy.

He had his specialised area of research, and published a number of works under his own name, amongst them a collection of old Nordic epics, ballads and tales,¹⁵ a voluminous work on Runic characters (a form of Germanic script),¹⁶ and a history of rhyme.¹⁷ In addition he published critical and annotated editions of a number of medieval texts.

The careers of the two brothers ran absolutely parallel from their thirtieth year on. Before that, Jacob held several public offices where he could apply his remarkable legal knowledge and his command of foreign languages, notably French. But in the end he decided to become a librarian in Kassel, like Wilhelm, who by then had already held such a position for two years. Together they moved to Göttingen — still as librarians but also accepting teaching commitments at the university, Jacob as full professor, Wilhelm as associate professor. When, for reasons which will be explained later, they had to leave Göttingen, they moved together to Kassel, Jacob as exile and Wilhelm to be near him. From there they were called to Berlin to the University and the Prussian *Akademie der Wissenschaften*, and it was in Berlin that they died, Jacob outliving Wilhelm by almost four years.

So far not a single date has been mentioned, but if the social and political situation in which they found themselves is to be examined, dates become essential.

The brothers were born during the last decades of the eighteenth century, Jacob in 1785, and Wilhelm in 1786. There were six children in the Grimm family: five brothers and one sister. They spent their youth in Steinau, a small town in Hessen where several generations on their father's side had lived before them. Their grandfather had been a parson. Their father was a jurist; he held the highest administrative office in the area and was also a judge in the court of law. Their childhood was a happy one; they felt secure among people whom they loved and respected. The early death of their father came as a deep shock to them, and

although their mother succeeded in securing for them an education at school and university as was in keeping with the family tradition their place in society was no longer ensured by their father's position, and Jacob, particularly, reacted to the humiliations they encountered.

At the time when the brothers were born, Germany consisted of a number of small sovereign states. The political power was in the hands of the aristocracy. All the inhabitants — whether they were educated or not, whether they were rich or poor — were politically minors, 'subjects' of a higher Will. To quote just one example, Frau Grimm had to apply to the ruler of Hesse for permission to send her sons to university.

The call of the French Revolution for liberty, equality and fraternity was heard in Germany too. Even Napoleon's rule over the German lands to the left of the river Rhine brought a breeze of freedom. So it is not surprising that Jacob accepted a position with Napoleon's brother, Jérôme, who had become King of Westphalia. He first served him as a librarian, then as auditor and assessor member in the *Conseil d'état*. This, however, did not prevent him from joining his brother in donating the considerable proceeds from their edition of a medieval text to the cause of the freedom fighters of Hesse who took part in the wars of liberation (1813). For, while he appreciated the contact with individual, civilised, congenial Frenchmen, he did not approve of the domination of his fatherland by a foreign power, and he resented the oppression by the French army of occupation.

It is a little more difficult to understand why he and Wilhelm should have been so enthusiastic about the return of the Elector of Hesse-Kassel that they joined the crowds for a rousing welcome. For they knew as everyone else did how this princely house had sold their subjects as soldiers to England and had bled them dry with taxes and duties. But too firmly engrained in them still was the conviction that these rulers held their office by divine right and that their failings as human beings did not testify against the need for this God-willed order.

In 1813 Jacob became secretary of the legation to the minister for Hesse at Paris and later served at the Congress of Vienna. However, he resigned in 1815 and took on the humble and unpolitical position of librarian in Kassel. But, when it was necessary to make a stand, e.g. in the question of censorship, he proved himself to be a man with a marked sense of right and wrong and a great respect for individual freedom.

This became evident in particular when he and his brother Wilhelm joined five other professors of Göttingen in a protest

against the new King of Hanover. This king, Ernst August, formerly Duke of Cumberland, an ultra-Tory, had declared as invalid the existing — for that time relatively liberal — constitution of 1833. In his decree he replaced the acceptable designation 'civil servants' by 'royal servants' and demanded that they should be sworn in under the old reactionary constitution of 1819. This caused general concern and opposition but very few people had the courage to voice their protest. However, the seven professors signed a statement in which they rejected the action of the king on ethical and legal grounds. This they submitted to the university authorities, who were directly concerned as the professors belonged to the class of 'royal servants' who had to swear loyalty to the king and the constitution. The authorities advised caution and patience and suggested a withdrawal of the document. The seven, however, remained adamant; they were prepared to bear the consequences. And these followed faster and firmer than expected: all seven were immediately dismissed from office by the king; three of them, among them Jacob, had to leave Hanover within three days. But the way across the border was not very far — and the students of Göttingen, who by an order from above were forbidden to hire horses and vehicles, accompanied their professors' coaches on foot, and celebrated their exile in a rousing function on the other side of the border. The whole world took note, and funds were set up in and outside Germany to assist the professors and their families who overnight had lost their livelihood. That was in 1837.

In 1840 the brothers Grimm went to Berlin. There they joined other leading German scholars both at the University, which had been founded in 1810, and in the Prussian Academy, which had been in existence since 1700. Many of these men spent their energies in the pursuit of knowledge in various fields of specialisation because this was the only outlet they had in a political situation like theirs. However, in the end this led to a 'politicization' of what originally had been academic pursuits: law, history, language and literature, they all became political. What is meant by this can be demonstrated by the role that the brothers Grimm and Germanistics began to play in the political sphere.¹⁸

In 1846 the first '*Germanistentag*' was held in Frankfurt-am-Main, an old imperial city which was still politically independent. Lawyers, historians and philologists gathered to discuss problems of common concern which turned out to be political in nature. It was the same in 1847 when the professors gathered in Lübeck, another of the free cities. Jacob Grimm was elected chairman of both conferences. A third meeting, planned to take place in

Nürnberg in 1848, became superfluous. The revolution of March 1848 had led to the National Assembly in St. Paul's Church in Frankfurt. The delegates had been elected by the people to draw up a constitution for Germany. Most of the political professors — among them Jacob Grimm — found themselves members of this National Assembly. This was the highlight of Jacob Grimm's political life. That the *Professoren-Parlament* did not fulfil the high hopes men had set on it was hardly his fault, since after some active participation, he resigned his mandate during 1848.

Wilhelm was less active in politics and possibly also a little more conservative than his brother, but he shared Jacob's basic convictions. He would have subscribed to the preamble which his brother had suggested for Paragraph 1 of the new constitution: 'The German people are a free people. German soil does not suffer slavery. Such foreigners as are in bondage are liberated when they set foot on German soil'.¹⁹ It also casts some light on the political attitude of the brothers that — showered with honours as they were — they were never offered the elevation above their bourgeois rank to that of the nobility. Both Goethe and Schiller had seen nothing wrong in accepting the distinguishing *von* in front of their names — while the family of Wilhelm's wife had renounced the privileges of the aristocracy and dropped the trappings that went with it—like the *von* before the family name.

Against this background of private and public life of the Brothers Grimm, their collection of *Popular Tales* takes on a new significance. There are various reasons why they collected and published these *Popular Tales*, 'popular' meaning here 'of the people and liked by the people'.

First of all, there existed at that time among men of letters a general and lively interest in the poetic creations of the unlettered people of the lower classes. In the 18th century Bishop Percy had published *Relics of Ancient Poetry*, mainly old Scottish ballads. Then James Macpherson had mounted various traditional bits and pieces into a creation of his own and claimed that it was the work of a blind Gaelic bard from the third century A.D., called Ossian. Herder collected folksongs and published them; his collection became known as *The Voice of the Nations in their Songs*. Goethe kept a little book into which he entered ballads which he heard in Alsace.²⁰ In the 19th century Clemens Brentano and Achim von Arnim published their famous collection of folk songs. All this was part of a movement which had its philosopher in the Frenchman, J. J. Rousseau, who taught that only a turn away from civilisation and a return to nature would restore decadent mankind to new vigour and creativity.

The brothers Grimm shared this conviction and they began to look for what so far had not yet been collected and put down in writing, namely the stories which were told by the simple folk mainly in the rural areas where traditions tend to survive longer.

The term *Märchen* is a diminutive of the noun *Mär*. Martin Luther used this word for the good news of Christ's birth. Goethe still knew it in the sense of news, but in his time it began to take on the connotation of fiction, though not yet of fanciful fiction in which fairies and magic play a part.

The collection of the brothers Grimm consists of tales from the nurseries, the spinning rooms, the village inns. The stories were told in order to educate, to warn, to shock, to frighten, to escape from reality, to indulge in dreams, or to have a good laugh.

In making their collection, the brothers were also motivated by a certain kind of nationalism. They believed that in these folk tales, which were passed on from mouth to mouth and from generation to generation, the spirit of the nation itself had become creative and found expression. That is why they regarded it as urgent to write down these stories before they were forgotten. They hoped too that through this work they might make the German people aware of their common heritage and promote the spiritual, if not the political, unification of the whole nation. With these tales they hoped to reach across the artificial borders of the innumerable little sovereign states and break down the barriers between the sophisticated bourgeoisie and the simple people.

The prototype of the story teller was, for them, Dorothea Viehmann, the wife of a village tailor. That is why in the second edition of their collection her picture appears in the place which at that time was usually reserved for a portrait of the author. Dorothea Viehmann was, however, not the only person they consulted and amongst the others were some educated well-read women, one of whom was responsible for the inclusion of the tales found in *Les contes de ma mère l'oye* by the Frenchman Charles Perrault (1697).

As scholars the Grimms looked upon their collection as a contribution to knowledge, as a source for further investigations. History proved them right; even today, more than 150 years after the first appearance of their collection, there can be no discussion on any aspect of fairy tales without some reference to the brothers Grimm. Jacob undertook to write the commentary. He noted the name of the person who had told them a particular story, frequently also the place and hour of the recording. He made careful

comparisons between the different versions of the same story which they discovered in various regions inside and outside Germany. He revealed links with customs, legal traditions, beliefs and superstitions as they existed outside the world of the tales. Originally, his commentary was included with the individual stories but ultimately it was published as a separate third volume.

To safeguard the authenticity of the story, they set themselves the task of keeping close to the words of the story teller. If one considers that they had neither a tape recorder nor even shorthand, this alone seems a formidable task.²¹

A comparison of the manuscript with the final printed version reveals, however, that the brothers too took the liberty of the story teller by embellishing the story, by inserting a bit of verse here and there, by adding detail, by rounding off the story, or even by twisting the plot to give it a new ending. Wilhelm was particularly good at that, and this is possibly the reason why Jacob stuck to the more academic task of annotator.

By writing down the stories, Wilhelm Grimm created the classic style of the *Märchen*-language. Since the collection appeared in print in 1812 and 1815, the *Household Tales* have been read again and again with the same words and phrases, and the plots, having been fixed in the mind, resist attempts at changing. The impact and the influence became even greater when a selection of 50 fairy tales, especially prepared for children, became available.²² Then night after night in bourgeois homes all over Germany nannies and aunts, grandmothers and mothers read these fairy tales as bedtime stories to the children — and once the children had mastered their letters, they pored over the same stories in their illustrated copies or came across them in their school readers.

Nowadays the original language of the brothers Grimm has a slightly antiquated tone but also something almost sacred like the language of the Bible.

Translations into other languages are easier to modernise. In this connection it is interesting to observe that many of the translations into other languages are based on an English version. The Grimms' fairy tales are available in 70 languages from Afrikaans right through the alphabet to Vietnamese and Welsh, and also in Braille and Esperanto.

The men who have had this extended influence lived, as we have seen, in stirring political times; and one is left wondering what influence the political convictions of the brothers Grimm might have had on the stories, or at least some of the stories, which they wrote down. It has been suggested, for example, that 'Little Red Riding Hood' has very clear and obvious political

implications. I have in mind in particular an article with the title: 'Did Rotkäppchen wear a Jacobin cap?'²³ Well, did she?

To answer this question one must also consider two earlier versions of the same story: viz. that by Perrault (seventeenth century) and the dramatised version by Ludwig Tieck²⁴ which is a kind of skit on the political situation at the end of the eighteenth century. We find some striking similarities and revealing differences if we compare the three versions — 'Rotkäppchen' by the brothers Grimm being the third one. The main figures are the little girl with the red cap — Chaperon rouge in French, Rotkäppchen in German — and then the wolf.

The wolf tempts Rotkäppchen to disregard warnings about the big bad wolf because he is so suave and so convincing when he tells her of the beauties of nature. The little girl is punished for her naive trust in the wolf by having to end up in his belly. Perrault stops here — but he adds a few lines of verse with the 'moral': little girls must not trust wolves, especially not those who are suave, because they are the most dangerous; they follow the little *demoiselles* right into the house and into the *ruelle*, the narrow passage between bed and wall! One cannot help feeling that Perrault told the story for the children and wrote the 'moral' for the nanny.²⁵

Tieck added the hunter. However, he made him turn up too late and Tieck's Rotkäppchen finds the same end as Perrault's Chaperon rouge.

Grimm, however, lets the hunter succeed. He turns up in the nick of time, but he does not kill the wolf outright. He first rescues both Rotkäppchen and her grandmother from the belly of the wolf. Then the wolf gets his deserts — stuffed with rocks he cannot move and drops dead there and then. To prove that Rotkäppchen learnt her lesson Grimm relates a second incident. Another wolf attempts to enter the house where Rotkäppchen and her grandmother are. This time they need no hunter. They are able on their own to lure the wolf to his death.

Because of the interest the brothers Grimm took in mythology it has been suggested that the cycle of the seasons, of death and rebirth, is re-enacted here. Rotkäppchen's resurrection from the dark belly of the wolf is interpreted as the triumph of spring over winter. The hunter — in this context — would represent the sun or another life-giving force. 'Rotkäppchen' thus would fall into the large group of fertility stories which have been told by many nations since time immemorial.²⁶

While there is something appealing and convincing in such a reading of 'Rotkäppchen', there is also another possible inter-

pretation which in our context is of greater interest and relevance. We return to the question, did Rotkäppchen wear a Jacobin cap of liberty? We need not go into details of the signal character of the colour red. We all know that the red pointed cap of liberty was worn by the Jacobins as a sign of their revolutionary mood; we also know that the pole of liberty was usually topped with a red cap, and that there were some provocative and progressive German papers which included the word red in their names: e.g. *Das rote Blatt* (1791 Regensburg, 1798 Koblenz).

Less well known is the fact that at the beginning of the nineteenth century 'wolf' was not just another name for a powerful cunning enemy, but very specifically for the French under Napoleon. Tieck in his political skit calls the wolf *monsieur* wolf,²⁷ and Kleist,²⁸ a very well-known German dramatist of the time, also speaks of the wolf and the hunt of the wolf and means Napoleon and the French and the war against them.

If we now note that the brothers Grimm had been collecting these folk tales since 1806, and that the two volumes appeared in 1812 and 1815, then we realise that their version of 'Rotkäppchen' belonged to the period of the Napoleonic wars and the wars of liberation from the Napoleonic yoke. Within this framework it is possible, without straining credibility, to answer the question of the political significance of the red cap in the affirmative. The interpretation then would go something like this: Rotkäppchen represents Germany; like Rotkäppchen Germany allowed herself to be persuaded by the cunning wolf — the French revolutionaries — to seek the beauty of nature and the freedom of the forest. Like Rotkäppchen, she is lured to her doom in the belly of the insatiable wolf (the Napoleonic Empire). However, through the timely intervention of the hunter she ultimately is saved and able to help the hunter to send the wolf to his death. Far-fetched? — no. Ingenious? — yes, and very likely true, not in the sense that Wilhelm Grimm was consciously looking for a parable, but rather in the sense that while he set the tale down he allowed his own fears and hopes to shape it in the same way as the story tellers before him had done.

'Fear' and 'hope' are key words when one interprets some of the better known tales in the social setting of the times during which they came into being. The brothers Grimm were inclined to look upon these stories as relics of a past long gone by. In that they were mistaken — some of the stories were of relatively recent origin, reflecting the oppression of the common people by the aristocracy.²⁹ Just think for a moment of the main fairy tale figures: there is the frustrated youngest son who is always missing

out where his brothers just make it; there is the stepdaughter who is deprived of what is by right hers; there is the lad who appears to be a nitwit only because he has no scope to show his true talents. Nearly all of these are vindicated in the tales, mostly by magic intervention.

Is it unreasonable to assume that the Grimms, frustrated by their rôle as bourgeois, identified themselves to some extent with these fairy tale figures or at least sympathised with them? Were they not themselves in an unbearable position as permanent 'minors', never coming of age politically? Were they too not deprived of rights which they regarded as birthrights? Were they not in a similar situation to those who could not employ their talents fully in the society in which they were forced to live? And if that is so, would they not have noted with a sense of satisfaction how, in these folk tales, so often justice triumphs and the underdog comes out on top, while the oppressors get what they deserve?

As far as the moral of the story is concerned, there is nearly always a clear demarcation line — not quite as harsh and uncompromising as with Brecht and other Marxist-inspired writers, but still noticeable, namely a line that divides the lowly, powerless poor, who are basically good, from the high and mighty rich, who are basically wicked or become wicked in their positions of power.

There is one last question which must be dealt with, namely: why should these tales with their political, social and moral implications be of interest to children?

It was Wilhelm Grimm himself who became aware of the great appeal which these folk tales had in the nursery. Following the example of Perrault, who had addressed himself in the first instance to children, Wilhelm selected fifty stories and retold them with children in mind. Today these are available not only in beautifully illustrated books but also on discs and tapes with and without music; they are shown on television, and produced on the stage as seasonal entertainment at Christmas time. Why?

Here we can forget the political issues. The social aspects, however, seem to be very relevant, as much for the children of the period of the brothers Grimm as for the children of our own time. It is true that conditions have changed since feudal times, when some of these stories originated, and also since the times of the brothers Grimm, when they were retold. Modern children, growing up in towns in an industrialised society, are confronted in the folk tales with an unfamiliar world, in which there are figures which they will never come across in real life, for instance, not only

kings and queens, princes and princesses, but also woodcutters, millers, tailors and goose girls, most of whom are visualized only from the illustrations or from their costume on television and the stage. Nevertheless, the society in which they function is very simply structured and the underlying pattern is as easily grasped by a child as is the rôle allotted to a certain figure in this order.

The child's own world is much more complex. In the child's own experience society is organised as a hierarchy, children occupying the lowest rung of the ladder with the grown-ups right on top. There are all kinds of pressures from above — demands made by teachers and preachers, by parents and neighbours, by older brothers and sisters. So it is perhaps not really surprising that children, feeling helpless and sometimes inadequate in situations which they do not understand, should experience a vicarious satisfaction when, in the fairy tale world, the handicapped, the deprived and the frustrated ultimately get what is their due. That this comes about by magic does not matter. Because children do not see through the mechanisms of their own society they have learnt to accept the inexplicable with equanimity.

As far as the moral implications are concerned, children like the radical division between good and evil, and reward and punishment. They accept the cruel castigation of the wicked not with a sense of childish sadism but with a sense of satisfaction that justice is done fairly and squarely. They feel involved and identify themselves with the moral judgment of the story teller. If poor lovable Cinderella gets her prince then that is in keeping with her good and virtuous nature — and it is also the right compensation for the humiliations she has had to go through. If the wicked stepsisters, on the other hand, have their eyes pecked out by the birds, and if the witch is roasted in her own oven, they only get what they have brought upon themselves.

To the amazement of adults most children show no evidence that they fear something equally horrible might happen to themselves. Children are shrewd enough to realize that they never will be quite as good as the really good people in fairy land nor quite as bad as the wicked ones. Fairy tales may have been models of life, but they never were blueprints for life — they never called for action in reality. They served as safety valves: escapist in character in the past, they serve as such also in the present. In feudal times they did not pave the way for rebellion — and Little Red Riding Hood did not wear her cap of liberty in order to incite the Germans to fight the French.

It is in this connection that Marxist-oriented educationists offer their criticism of Grimms' fairy tales, calling them outmoded and

escapist.³⁰ They demand that modern tales should lay bare the underlying structure of our own society which, for the understanding of children, could be simplified by an unambiguous stratification: the capitalists, the rich oppressors on top and the poor oppressed labourers at the bottom. They claim that such stories would no longer be escapist but would give the child some understanding of the powers and mechanisms at work in its life and would motivate it for future action.³¹

In East Germany and in East Berlin attempts have been made to meet these demands, and quite a few books of this kind have found their way into West Germany.

However, none of these contemporary authors has so far been able to replace the brothers Grimm, either in East or in West Germany — and certainly not in the world at large.

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² *Grimm Household Tales*. Translated from the German and edited by Margaret Hunt, with Jacob Grimm's original notes and an introduction by Andrew Lang. London 1884.

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³ L. Denecke, *Jacob Grimm und sein Bruder Wilhelm*. Sammlung Metzler M 100. Stuttgart 1971.

⁴ F. Schnabel; *Deutsche Geschichte im neunzehnten Jahrhundert*, vols. 3, 4, 5. Herder Bücherei 205, 206, 207. Freiburg 1964, 65.

⁵ 1828

⁶ 1840

⁷ 1838

⁸ 1815

⁹ cf. M. Mojasevic, 'Jacob Grimm und die Jugoslawen', *Brüder Grimm Gedenken 63*, p. 333.

¹⁰ 1835

¹¹ 1819

¹² 1826

¹³ 1831

¹⁴ 1837

¹⁵ 1811

¹⁶ 1821

¹⁷ 1852

¹⁸ Katherine M. Briggs quotes from an essay on the *Household Tales*, written by J. Campbell: 'Those days', wrote Wilhelm, 'of the collapse of all hitherto existing establishments will remain forever before my eyes . . . The ardour with which the studies in Old German were pursued helped overcome the spiritual depression. . . . Undoubtedly the world situation and the necessity to withdraw into the peacefulness of scholarship con-

tributed to the re-awakening of the long forgotten literature; but not only did we seek something of consolation in the past, our hope, naturally, was that this course of ours should contribute somewhat to the return of a better day.' *Gedenken 1963*, p. 511.

¹⁹ Quoted by L. Denecke, *op. cit.*, p. 141. Translated by the author.

²⁰ *Volkslieder von Goethe in Elsaß gesammelt*, edited by L. Pinck, Saarbrücken 1935.

²¹ W. Schoof, *Zur Entstehungsgeschichte der Grimmschen Märchen*, p. 17f. Hamburg 1958.

²² 1825

²³ H. W. Jäger, 'Trägt Rotkäppchen eine Jakobiner-Mütze?' *Literatursoziologie. Beiträge zur Praxis*, vol. II, edited by J. Bark. Stuttgart 1974.

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25

Moralité

*On voit icy que de jeunse enfans,
Sur tout de jeunes filles,
Belles, bien faites et gentilles,
Font tres-mal d'écouter toute sorte de gens,
Et que ce n'est pas chose étrange
S'il en est tant que le loup mange.
Je dis le loup, car tous les loups
Ne sont pas de la même sorte:
Il en est d'une humeure accorte,
Sans bruit, sans fiel et sans courroux,
Qui, privez, complaisans et doux,
Suivent les jeunes demoiselles
Jusque dans les maisons, jusque dans les ruelles.
Mais, hélas! qui ne scaît que ces loups doucereux
De tous les loups sont les plus dangereux!*

(*Contes de ma mère L'oye*, Ch. Perrault, Les Editions la Bruyère, Paris, no date.)

²⁶ I. and P. Opie, *The Classical Fairy Tales: 'Little Red Ridinghood'*, p. 93 f. London 1974. H. W. Jäger, *op. cit.*, p. 159 and p. 176, refers to: H. Husson, *La Chaîne traditionnelle* (1874), A. Lang, *Perrault's Popular Tales* (1888), and F. Linnig, *Deutsche Mythenmärchen* (1883), as well as E. Siecke, *Indogermanische Mythologie* (1921), and P. Saintyves, *Les Contes de Perrault et les Récits parallèles* (1923).

²⁷ Scene 2: the hunter:

*Wenn ich den Monsieur Wolf nur packe,
So ist gewiß um ihn geschehn.*

²⁸ The most striking example, also quoted by Jäger, *op. cit.*, p. 164, is:

*Eine Lustjagd, wie wenn Schützen
Auf der Spur dem Wolfe sitzen!
Schlagt ihn tot! Das Weltgericht
Fragt Euch nach den Gründen nicht!*

Germania an ihre Kinder (1809)

This quotation, incidentally, also casts some light on the rôle of the hunter.

²⁹ L. Denecke, *op. cit.*, p. 74. D. Richter and J. Merkel; *Märchen, Phantasie und soziales Lernen. Basis Theorie 4*. Berlin 1974 p. 39 f.

³⁰ Richter/Merkel, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

³¹ Richter/Merkel, *op. cit.*, p. 119 f.

**THE PARLIAMENT OF FOWLS:
The Narrator, the 'Certeyn Thyng' and the
'Commune Profyt'**

by J. A. KEARNEY

Earlier critics in this half-century seemed content not to go very far in considering the relationship between the various parts of *The Parliament of Fowls*.¹ Though more recently critics such as D. S. Brewer, J. A. W. Bennett, Ian Robinson and Charles McDonald have argued from different points of view in favour of the poem's coherence, they seem to me still to have taken inadequate account of important facets of the poem. My purpose is to interpret the poem through a close examination of the narrator's role, his search for a doctrine of love (the 'certeyn thyng', line 20), and the concept of the 'commune profyt' stressed in his dream.

The narrator of *The Parliament of Fowls* is presumably seeking some certain knowledge in the sphere of love, since it's the wonderful yet rather frightening ways of love that he dwells on in the first two stanzas of the poem. The book he reads seems to offer very clear and certain knowledge of another kind, however:

Chapitres sevene it hadde, of hevене and helle
And erthe, and soules that therinne dwelle,
Of whiche, as shortly as I can it trete,
Of his sentence I wol yow seyn the greete. (ll. 32-35)

It provides a neat distinction between this earth and heaven: our present life 'nis but a maner deth' (l. 54) in comparison to the future life, while this earth is merely 'lytel' (l. 57) in comparison to the 'hevens quantite' (l. 58). Furthermore heaven is

. . . welle . . . of musik and melodye
In this world here, and cause of armonye. (ll. 62-63)

For these reasons Africanus advises Scipio

That he ne schulde hym in the world delyte (l. 66)

and that he should seek constantly to ensure that he will gain *heaven's* bliss. This involves having to 'werche and wysse To commune profit' (ll. 74-75), but what is meant more precisely by such an injunction, and how it is compatible with contempt for this world, are questions ignored by Cicero in this account.

At the end of his reading the narrator complains that he

hadde thyng which that I nolde,
And ek I nadde that thyng that I wolde. (ll. 90-91)

In other words he has a doctrine of eternal salvation but has come no closer to easing his anxiety about participation in love experience. What Chaucer intends to show through his subsequent dream is, I think, a way of putting the narrator's search for love into the same perspective as the salvation theory he thinks useless to him; this is achieved through an exploration in his dream of what the 'commune profyt' means in practice.² Unfortunately the narrator doesn't appear to understand what his own deeper intuitions offer him via the dream, so that he resorts to further futile reading when it is over:

I wok, and othere bokes tok me to,
To reede upon, and yit I rede alwey.
I hope, ywis, to rede so som day
That I shal mete som thyng for to fare
The bet, and thus to rede I nyl nat spare. (ll. 695-699)

Thus his activity in itself betrays his lack of realisation of what is meant either by the 'commune profyt', or by love. His blindness in turn alerts the reader to the necessity for personal insight and discovery in either field, though in fact these activities which are referred to separately at the beginning of the poem become virtually indistinguishable by its end.

The critic J. A. W. Bennett argues that the poem reflects the great medieval debate between the philosophy of plenitude and the philosophy of other-worldliness³ while Ian Robinson similarly sees the dream of Scipio not 'as a judgement of what is to come, but as a foil for it'.⁴ I would like to show that Chaucer is not so much involved in a tension between earthly plenitude and other-worldliness, but rather in the evocation of the plenitude of nature within the framework of God's total order, the two realms being united in the dynamic continuity of Love as in Boethius's philosophy.⁵

Just as the dream of Scipio offered a simple logical scheme for existence (natural and supernatural), so the narrator concludes that, having read Cicero's book, it's quite logical that his dream should mirror his preoccupation during the day. This is indeed as far as he gets in interpreting the dream! Not to heed his solemn explanation would be to miss the irony of its anti-interpretative standpoint, a prelude to his failure in understanding which is so

sharply enacted at the end of the poem. The narrator also takes the dream as a special sort of consolation: he has missed the rewards of love and therefore Africanus appears to him to reward him for his labour of reading. This self-consoling idea acts of course as the spur to his eventual return to reading — thus the one 'certeyn' thing in his life is the very preoccupation which prevents entry into fuller engagement with life. Further, his view of the compensation to be provided for his pitiable self seems intended to emphasise by contrast the kind of joy and reward revealed through Nature within his dream.

It's surely important that the *Invocatio* (lines 113-119) is to Cytherea, the Christianised version of Venus. The muse who must inspire this song is not to be identified with the Venus who reclines within the temple of the dream garden; if this distinction is not made, the later relationship between Nature and Venus can easily become subject to confusion.⁶

What is most striking about the entrance gates of the garden is that one cannot choose to enter through one half only; either one enters or one doesn't. Thus the entrance in itself is ambiguous as to the kind of state to be attained through experience in the garden. The utterly conflicting possibilities offered by the messages leave the narrator paralysed, engaged merely in his characteristic activity of reading:

These vers of gold and blak iwreten were,
Of whiche I gan astoned to beholde,
For with that oon encesede ay my fere,
And with that other gan myn herte bolde;
That oon me hette, that other dide me colde:
No witte hadde I, for errour, for to chese,
To entre or fien, or me to save or lese. (ll. 141-148)

The inability to choose is the root of his desire for certainty to be attained through scholarship: he cannot commit himself to Love because he can't be sure that he will be guaranteed happiness through it.

Africanus's speech after he has had to thrust the wretched scholar into the garden suggests the significance of the inscriptions on the gate:

'It stondesth writen in thy face,
Thyn errour, though thow telle it not to me;
But dred the not to come into this place,
For this writyng nys nothyng ment bi the,

Ne by non, but he Loves servaunt be;
 For thow of love hast lost thy tast, I gesse,
 As sek man hath of swete and bytternesse . . .' (ll. 155-161)

The garden is intended for Love's servants; in submitting themselves to Love they risk themselves totally, either for great happiness or for great woe. The error written on the narrator's face would seem then to be his inability to take this risk, to commit himself to Love. Frantic reading is the self-protection by which he successfully postpones involvement in love.

The narrator's delusion is that a 'certeyn thyng' can be found simply through scholarly exploration; the poem as a whole suggests that the only 'certeyn thyng' is the necessity of undergoing experience (i.e. of entering the gates 'for better or for worse') to discover the meaning of love. To take the first message as referring to joyous natural love and the second to courtly, artificial love⁷ is to miss the point that there is only one set of gates through which *all* Love's servants enter. Moreover the end of the *Parliament* doesn't make any neat correlation between natural instinctive love and happiness on the one hand, and courtly love and unhappiness on the other. That would be to replace the neat Ciceronian scheme by another that is equally artificial.

Until one reaches Cupid (l. 211) the garden is seen as mostly joyful, thus appearing to confirm the inscription above the first half of the gates. In particular I wish to draw attention to lines 204 to 210:

Th'air of that place so attempre was
 That nevere was ther grevaunce of hot ne cold;
 There wex ek every holsom spice and gras;
 No man may there waxe sek ne old;
 Yit was there joye more a thousandfold
 Than man can telle; ne nevere wolde it nyghte,
 But ay cler day to any manes syghte.

This passage seems to point to the possibility of eternal joy offered by nature, yet simultaneously to remind one that man is unable to maintain such a state, at least in his present condition:

joye more a thousandfold
 Than man can telle . . . (ll. 208-209)

The stanza listing the tree of the garden, however, acts as a warning that the garden does not contain unmingled sweetness and joy.

The varied functions of the trees suggest the greatly varied possibilities of life which range from the desire for stable construction ('byldere ok', l. 176), exhilarated freedom ('saylynge fyr', l. 179), and triumph ('victor palm', l. 182), to endurance ('hardy asshe', l. 176), suffering ('holm to whippes lashe', l. 178) and death ('the cipresse, deth to playne', l. 179).

What seems specially striking about this first part of the description is the emphasis on detail. Small creatures are given prominence: there are the 'smale fishes lighte' (l. 188), the 'litel conyes' (l. 193) and the 'bestes smale of gentil kynde' (l. 196). These creatures have their origin in the *Roman de la Rose* of course, but there the living quality of the creatures is merely sufficient to sustain the allegory; in Chaucer's poem the creatures seem to have a real life of their own, while still forming part of the scheme of the garden. This is the beginning of one's growing realisation that, for Chaucer, nature's plenitude is not in some sort of opposition to 'hevene' but suffused with it in such a way as, paradoxically, to possess its own very marvellous identity. After Africanus's perspective in which the whole earth is regarded as 'lytel', Chaucer seems intent on affirming instead the earth's utterly varied plenitude, while not denying its continuity with the 'other' world.

The music of the garden, furthermore, is such

That God, that makere is of al and lord,
Ne herde nevere beter, as I gesse. (ll. 199-200)

Such a claim seems to be meant deliberately to offset the stress on the music of the nine spheres in the summary of Scipio's dream:

And after that the melodye herde he
That cometh of thilke speres thryes thre,
That welle is of musik and melodye
In this world here, and cause of armony. (ll. 60-63)

Whatever the source of earthly music, Chaucer suggests, the wonder of its harmony deserves its own special attention.

As soon as the narrator reaches Cupid and his associated personages, the garden becomes more complex and ambivalent in suggestion. In any one of these stanzas it's impossible to tell whether the emphasis is more on joy, or distress and suffering; for example, one finds sitting side by side the two Dames, Pees and Patience:

Before the temple-dore ful soberly
 Dame Pees sat, with a curtyr in hire hond,
 And by hire syde, wonder discretly,
 Dame Pacience syttyng there I fond,
 With face pale, upon an hil of sond. (ll. 239-242)

The first figure suggests the tranquillity and privacy required for the enjoyment of love; the second, that even if these conditions are present, love may not bring the expected fulfilment: 'hil of sond' strongly expresses the possibility of disappointment and even sterility.

Charles McDonald points out in his interpretation of the poem that Chaucer has deliberately transposed the stanzas in Boccaccio's *Teseida* to make Priapus precede Venus. He argues that the change is to provide a contrast between Priapus who 'represents love and fertility at its most natural' and Venus who represents the 'sterility of the courtly conventions'.⁸ Though a contrast seems intended I don't find, as I shall argue below, that Chaucer intended Venus to be regarded with any sort of disapproval. The point of Priapus's precedence would rather seem to be a humorous recognition, free of moral overtones, of the forceful insistence of the male sexual impulse. Furthermore Priapus is given his own particular ambivalence: while on the one hand he is regarded as a grotesque figure,

In swich aray as when the asse hym shente
 with cri by nighte, (ll. 255-256)

on the other his vitality is worthy of continual celebration:

Ful besyly men gonne assaye and fonde
 Upon his hed to sette, of sondry hewe,
 Garlondes ful of freshe floures newe. (ll. 257-259)

More significant, however, is that once the narrator has entered the temple of love, Priapus and Venus are encountered; the way to the fuller vision beyond, involving the Goddess Nature, is thus made dependent, and consequent, on this meeting.

After discussing the medieval division of Venus into two goddesses, Ian Robinson decides that Chaucer is trying to show the links between all possible kinds of love, but he thinks Bennett mistaken in seeing Nature as superior to Venus.⁹ The development of the poem, however, makes Nature the culminating personage, while her description seems carefully intended to make her more

wonderful, more significant than Venus. What seems to me important is that, while Venus is shown as a very necessary aspect of the garden, she must nevertheless come under the dominion of Nature. Certainly no moral disapproval is offered in Chaucer's description (lines 260 to 273): she is a strange, perplexing, indeed rather haunting personage, her attire suggesting her lure and subtlety rather than the narrator's or Chaucer's puritanism.¹⁰ The concluding comment on her, 'But thus I let hire lye' (l. 279), hints that she is somehow unavoidable; her presence indeed underlies the major part of the poem. In particular, lines 265 and 266—

And on a bed of gold she lay to reste,
Til that the hote sonne gan to weste—

help to anticipate the end of the poem, the evening celebratory song of the birds as they depart with their new mates. Here Venus attains her full status but only through the benevolent yet firm authority of Nature. Curiously, it is Robinson's valid objection to commentators who claim that 'Chaucer is arguing a case in favour of Nature and against Venus'¹¹ which has led him to go to the opposite extreme and disparage Nature at Venus's expense.

The stanzas following those devoted to Venus seem to elaborate what the narrator meant initially by the 'crewel yre' (l. 11) of Love. In the very inmost recesses of the temple are the emblems of those who tried to deny or resist the offered power of Love, as well as of those whose involvement with Love made their lives tragic; this group seems especially to testify to the dread warning contained in the second inscription on the entrance gates (ll. 134-140). This temple, then, is no sentimentalised allegorical portrayal of the joys of human love: the help for which the two 'yonge folk' (l. 278) cry to Venus may very well bring them the same fate as Tristram (l. 290) or Troylus (l. 291). The amplification of the 'cruel yre' of Love of course helps to explain why the narrator continually seeks some more consoling certainty.

Whether the narrator leaves through the same door is not clear; the abruptness with which he finds himself back in the garden (ll. 295-296) emphasises that the temple is a special enclosure *within* the garden, that is, it is a temporary but crucial and intense experience arising out of all that is offered by the garden. Nature, Chaucer implies, is only discovered properly after that obtrusive temple has been investigated. Whereas Venus lay in a dark corner on a bed of gold (ll. 260, 265), revealed only by the barest minimum of light, the goddess Nature is seated in a glade on a 'hil of floures' (l. 302), and

as of lyght the somer sonne shene
 Passeth the sterre, right so over mesure
 She fayrer was than any creature. (ll. 299-301)

To some degree these contrasts make Venus and Nature seem antithetical but the total evidence doesn't suggest that they're in conflict; rather that Nature is the freer, less limited and more illuminating power of the two. Bennett's quotation from William of St. Thierry helps to express this relationship:

The master of the art of love is [not Ovid, but] Nature and God, who is the author of Nature.¹²

As Viceregent of God, Nature carries out his purposes, thus making the earth the locus for the enactment of divine love. Her concern for the whole hierarchy of birds mirrors through synecdoche His concern for all the hierarchies of creation. Her task in the parliament corresponds to what her Lord does for creation as a whole:

Nature, the vicaire of the almyghty Lord,
 That hot, cold, hevye, lyght, moyst, and dreye
 Hath knyght by evene noumbers of acord. (ll. 379-381)

Before we come to her, the figures of Cupid and his associates, together with the temple and its inmates, seem rather baffling. Through Nature's handling of the parliament she enables them to function so well for the common good that the bountiful purpose of her Lord is made known.¹³

The parliament seems to be intended to show the complexity of working for the 'commune profyt' and the consequent delight when this has been achieved. The long list of birds underlines the immense variety in appearance and impulse of the creatures over which Nature rules. This very variety implicitly reveals the love of the Regent himself for what Scipio regards as the 'lytel erthe'. It's this variety moreover which provides the opportunity and challenge to achieve a 'commune profyt'.

The portrayal of the birds is far from romanticised: every kind of good and vicious quality seems to be represented amongst them. Though initially a general description of the birds in hierarchical order is offered (lines 323-329), they are haphazardly listed afterwards as though to indicate that higher status in the hierarchy is not necessarily to be equated with virtue. Thus the 'formel' eagle which Nature holds on her hand is not chosen because she

is an eagle, but because she is 'the moste benygne and the goodlieste' (l. 375) of Nature's works.

The principle of degree which establishes the order in which the birds are to speak is a necessary convention for allowing the 'commune profyt' to be established — order is thus seen as the necessary correlative to the birds' variety. The admiration that Nature expresses for the tercel suggests strongly that she desires him for her favourite, the 'formel'; nevertheless she does not dictate this view, stipulating rather that in each case the female must agree to being chosen by a particular mate. Thus Nature *has* a certain design but doesn't exert compulsion to achieve it. The final lines of her speech reveal the delicate balance involved between the individual's choice and the predetermined design of Nature:

And whoso may at this tyme have his grace,
In blisful tyme he cam into this place! (ll. 412-413)

This amplifies what the double gate inscriptions infer: not all the conjunctions of an individual's search for love, with a particular time, are to provide bliss. In fact Nature's suggestion anticipates the 'formel's' decision which allows neither her nor any of the terrels to find satisfaction on this St. Valentine's Day; there are, for example, the two terrels who will have to be rejected at the next feast (though the future occasion may, of course, lead them to discover another bliss).

The terrels are all very different in their speeches, as most critics have pointed out. The first, the royal eagle, who speaks with the most beautifully sustained 'curtesye', seems also to be the most deeply in love, as the strikingly described blush of the 'formel' suggests:

Ryght as the freshe, rede rose newe
Ayeyn the somer sonne coloured is,
Ryght so for shame al wexen gan the hewe
Of this formel, whan she herde al this. (ll. 442-445)

The second is more forthright, though his lack of courtliness in this case betrays a state of less sensitive feeling: his intentness on asserting his deserts and value indicates a less passionate involvement with the 'formel'. Perhaps his rather vain, bragging tendency is best revealed by the line:

I dar ek seyn, if she me fynde fals. (l. 456)

The arrogance of the opening phrase contrasts strongly with the

first tercel's humble envisaging of such a possibility (ll. 428-434). The third tercel has the disadvantage of speaking last and thus of being more bothered by the surrounding impatience. Yet he seems primarily concerned with possible unfairness to himself; when he comes, in his third and last stanza, to reveal his love there's no sense of truly passionate conviction. If the 'formel' chooses the first of the tercel's at the next annual festivity, these speeches help to explain why the other two should not receive the grace they claim to desire.

As a group the tercel's show little awareness of the 'commune profyt' in the sense of the necessities involved for the birds as a whole in the business of mating. The third is not so much concerned with the other birds as fearful that his lover's 'style' will be cramped. The special aristocratic claims of the eagles nearly cause chaos in the assembly; trouble is averted only by Nature's granting free expression on the subject to all the birds. Robinson, who equates Nature with the mating instinct, sees the aristocratic birds as directly in conflict with Nature because they choose a higher form of love.¹⁴ The poem does not vindicate this view, however, since the entire parliamentary debate and its resolution is Nature's method of recognising the special claims of the eagles, while at the same time ensuring harmony amongst all the birds. Her delight in the 'formel' and her sense of the first tercel's excellence (one that she has created) are further indications that Chaucer doesn't intend any opposition here.

Chaucer's balanced perspective is humorously implicit in the juxtaposition of the following two stanzas:

Of al my lyf, syn that day I was born,
 So gentil ple in love or other thyng
 Ne herde nevere no man me beforne,
 Who that hadde leysur and connyng
 For to reherse hire chere and hire spekyng;
 And from the morwe gan this speche laste
 Tyl downward drow the sonne wonder faste.
 The noyse of foules for to be delyvered
 So loude rong, 'Have don, and lat us wende!
 That wel wende I the wode hadde al toshyvered.
 'Com of!' they criede, 'allas, ye wol us shende!
 Whan shal youre cursede pletynge have an ende?
 How sholde a juge eyther parti leve
 For ye or nay, withouten any preve?' (ll. 484-497)

Through the narrator's response Chaucer reveals his admiration

of the courtly pleas, though, as I've shown, the speeches themselves invite us to discriminate between the pleas; then through the cries of the other birds he recognises how sorely the 'commune profyt' has been neglected. A kind of relief after the eagles' elevated discourse is provided by the lower birds' practical realism, yet the babel that is soon engendered reminds one all too soon of the need for order and convention. The cuckoo's stance in particular suggests potential anarchy:

'For I wol of myn owene autorite,
For comune spede, take on the charge now,
For to delivere us is grete charite.' (ll. 506-508)

Gratuitously he grants himself authority for the sake of what he deems to be 'comune spede', an ironic oversimplification of Nature's concern for the 'commune profyt'. The very convention now adopted by Nature shows how little more 'spede' would satisfy the birds, while at the same time she preserves a clear sense of a time limit. This limit is necessary above all because the goddess Venus awaits her appointed hour—

Tyl downward drow the sonne wonder faste. (l. 490)

In order to silence the disruption and initiate the formal debate Nature has to speak in an unusually firm way:

Nature, which that alwey hadde an ere
To murmur of the lewednesse behynde,
With facound voys seyde, 'Hold youre tonges there!'
(ll. 519-521)

The readiness of the tercels to respond to their representative's suggestion of battle, since arguments based on reason seem to have failed (ll. 538-540), introduces another amusing element of disorder and violence into the gathering; disturbance to the social peace is by no means the prerogative of the lower orders in this poem. Furthermore the very eagles who tried to conduct themselves with the utmost chivalric decorum are presumably amongst those who are only too ready to resort to simple violence to decide the issue when a mere hint of such a solution is given. To generalise about the virtues or defects of any class in this poem is to be foolish indeed: while the tercels as a group seem to allow pent-up aggression to dominate them, their representative shows himself capable of wider thinking, capable, in fact, of appreciating

how much the 'commune profyt' depends on a leader's sense of restraint and fitness.

Though this tercel has pointed out the difficulty of deciding by reason who loves the 'formel' best, his verdict, that she must know herself who best deserves her (ll. 548-553), is most reasonable, as well as being compatible with Nature's own initial proviso. What is suggested here in fact is the alliance between Nature and Reason which Nature herself humorously refers to later (ll. 631-632). Indeed, although Nature allows the debate to run its full course, the resolution has been found in this opening speech; her own decision follows the tercel's proposal exactly:

Thanne wol I don hire this favour, that she
Shal han right hym on whom hire herte is set,
And he hire that his herte hath on hire knet. (ll. 626-628)

What shows Nature's beneficent fairness is that the remainder of the debate strays widely from the point, showing all too little contact with 'Resoun'. Despite her strident claim to possess 'sharp' wit (l. 565), the goose confuses the issue:

'I seye I rede hym, though he were my brother,
But she wol love hym, lat hym love another!' (ll. 566-567)

The choice of the goose as spokesman for the waterfowl shows in comic miniature the difficulty of arriving at a consensus for the benefit of all:

The water-foules han here hedes leid
Togedere, and of a short avysement,
Whan everych hadde his large golee seyde . . . (ll. 554-556)

Here the deliberate clash between 'short avysement' and 'large golee' aptly clinches the problem, while the laying together of the geese's heads, so absurdly literal in this case, emphasises the way physical pressure is only too likely to profit at the expense of reasoned debate.

Though the viewpoints expressed by the remainder of the representatives shirk the central issue, the attitudes they reveal are central for Chaucer's sense of the complexity of the 'commune profyt'. The sparrowhawk, replying to the goose, and the merlin to the cuckoo, are theoretically justified in their attacks; what is more significant, however, is the relish they take in public vilification and their readiness, like the tercel, to abandon civilised

discourse. The merlin especially shows a lewdness almost equivalent to that of the cuckoo whom he is attacking. Even the 'tercelet', leader of the ravenous birds, shows in his abuse of the duck a marked diminishing of gentlemanly patience and tolerance. The turtle-dove's blushing, on the other hand, suggests a sensitivity like that of the 'formel' in the superior class; her stand for constancy in love isn't directly helpful to the debate since the suitors have in any case all pledged undying loyalty, but the sentiment deserves such a moving reaffirmation. The ideal suggested by the dove, though held with such evident sincerity, may however prove foolish or artificial in some cases. The duck thus has *some* wisdom on its side in registering the turtle-dove's speech as a jest. Unfortunately the duck turns to the other extreme in postulating the cynical dismissal of steadfastness:

'There been mo sterres, God wot, than a payre!' (l. 595)

The cuckoo's indifference to the entire debate, provided she can enjoy her 'make in pes' (l. 605), is a parody of the suitors' neglect of the 'commune profyt' in their courtly speeches. The difference is that they are indifferent not through deliberate choice but through striving to express the highest state of love.

How skilfully and amusingly, then, has Chaucer compressed some of the central issues of the 'commune profyt' into this debate: the tendency of classes to treat members of their own class differently from those of other classes; the similarities both for good and evil that underlie exterior status; the possibility, at both ends of the social scale, of neglecting the concerns of others; perhaps most of all the possibility of being totally misled in an entire debate!

Though Nature drily comments that 'in effect yit be we nevere the neer' (l. 619), she doesn't stop the debate until all have had their opportunity to speak. Even the merlin is able to give full vent to his disgust. Nature then takes up and extends the verdict of the 'tercelet', the only one directly relevant to the debate: the 'formel' shall herself have the choice. Though this was implicit in the 'tercelet's' conclusion that the 'formel' knows which one is most suitable for her (l. 551), he presumably couldn't venture to offer it, surrounded as he is by his fellow warlike males. Possibly the most delicate irony of the poem is Nature's condition by which she makes it clear which eagle she thinks the 'formel' should choose:

'If I were Resoun, certes, thanne wolde I
Conseyle yow the royal tercel take. (ll. 632-633)

Chaucer's humour here seems to infer a close correspondence, even an identity, between Nature and Resoun; that is, when Nature is a governing presence, Resoun is a presence that will inevitably accompany her. This kind of marriage or alliance between Nature and Resoun is what the narrator lacks. His excursions into the fields of scholarly reasoning, the search for a 'certeyn thyng', have lacked the wise and benevolent authority of Nature.

The 'formel's' gracious acknowledgement of Nature's power is offset by her confidence in asking the boon of a year's delay. The request suggests the necessity for the individual to give free consent to the voice of Nature in alliance with that of Resoun. She will not serve Venus yet, knowing the special demands of that goddess and perhaps having some awareness of the kind of tragic fate that the experience of Venus may bring, as conveyed in lines 288 to 294. Thus she is neither choosing Dyane like the maidens depicted in the temple (ll. 281-284), nor avoiding choice seye (ll. 654-655). Necessity is made a virtue just as in Theseus's like the narrator: she is already committed to love as her blush so vividly suggested earlier, but she wishes time to prepare for full engagement in the rites of marital love. Never was Nature more incontrovertibly natural than in her reply to the 'formel': 'Now, syn it may not otherwise betyde, . . . heere is no more to seye' (ll. 654-655). Necessity is made a virtue just as in Theseus's speech at the end of the *Knights Tale*, but it is important to observe the large degree of freedom involved in the way the concept operates here.

The goddess's farewell speech to the suitors restores the equilibrium threatened by their prolonged courtliness. For most of the birds the 'commune profyt' is achieved through unsophisticated conjugal love; for the tercel's however, additional heroism and endurance is required. All three must prove themselves by suffering during the following year — two will still have to suffer disappointment when it ends (ll. 659-665).

The apparent dichotomy between the two inscriptions on the garden's entrance gates is resolved through the birds' Valentine song: the work of Nature is shown to be the bringing of summer (cf. the joyful first inscription) and the overpowering of winter (cf. the gloomy second inscription). 'There grene and lusty May shal evere endure' (l. 130) proclaims the first; in retrospect I think we're meant to see that this suggests the permanent *possibilities* of love's fruition. Only now that the parliament is concluded, however, has Nature, through her concern for the 'commune profyt', shown that 'evere endure' is a process of constant renewal out of disharmony and conflict.

The dichotomy at the commencement of the poem, where Scipio in transcendent bliss scorns the 'lytel erthe', is also resolved through the Song:

'Saynt Valentyn, that art ful hy on-lofte,
Thus syngen smale foules for they sake.' (ll. 683-684)

The small creatures whom Nature looks after sing in praise of the heavenly Valentine: the two worlds are therefore shown to be united through the bond of triumphant joy. The sense of a hierarchy is not lost (Valentine is 'ful hy on-lofte') but rather given a new dimension through the birds' eager and spontaneous reverence for what lies beyond their world.

It is this same bond of love that Troilus celebrates at the end of Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*:

'So wolde God, that auctour is of kynde,
That with his bond Love of his vertu liste
To cerclen hertes alle, and faste bynde,
That from his bond no wight the wey out wiste;
And hertes colde, hem wolde I that he twiste
To make hem love, and that hem liste ay rewe
On hertes sore, and kepe hem that ben trewe!' (ll. 1765-1771)

In the light of this sublimely generous vision of Love's achievement one can understand why Chaucer added the following stanza to his translation of Cicero's description of the dream of Scipio:

But brekers of the lawe, soth to seyne,
And likerous folk, after that they ben dede,
Shul whirle aboute th'erthe alwey in peyne,
Tyl many a world be passed, out of drede,
And than, foryeven al hir wikked dede,
Than shul they come into this blysfyl place,
To which to comen God the sende his grace. (ll. 78-84)

When we have experienced the parliament of the fowls we can appreciate that breakers of the law and lechers may nevertheless have committed themselves to Love to the best of their capacity. To some extent they are therefore encircled by Love's bond and are in that sense 'saved', for once bound, 'no wight the wey out wiste'. And ludicrous as the narrator seems in returning to pore over more books at the end of his dream, his condition is in fact a most serious one. For he must be numbered finally among

the 'hertes colde' whom Troilus (and Chaucer) prays might even be twisted to make them love (see the quotation above from *Troilus and Criseyde*). It is this very certainty of the secure encircling by Love of hearts that give themselves to love that the narrator is blind to from the beginning to the end of the poem. He is outside the bond because essentially he doesn't wish to be in it. No 'twisting' will induce him to give himself to love, because, like T. S. Eliot's Gerontion, he is too afraid of the consequences of being 'devoured' by it.¹⁵

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NOTES

- ¹ I have in mind mainly John Speirs, *Chaucer the Maker*, Faber, 1951. While recognising the value of his point about the way the poem 'attains a maximum, a plenitude of dramatic English life' (p. 48), I find it very disappointing that he doesn't see the poem as possessing more significance than 'a joyous celebration of the early spring festival day on which the birds choose their mates for the year'. (p. 47) Nevill Coghill acknowledges some coherence in terms of the uniting in the poem of the 'noble hierarchies of the Natural Order under God and of the social graduations in feeling and delicacy in sexual love' (*The Poet Chaucer*, OUP, 1967, p. 42). On the other hand he finds that Chaucer has 'found room for the thoughts that haunt all his other work'. (p. 45) Amongst these thoughts he singles out the narrator's explanation for his dream merely as Chaucer's way of expounding an intriguing new theory.
- ² cf. Ian Robinson, *Chaucer and the English Tradition*, CUP, 1972, p. 53: 'The effect of placing this beautiful garden next to the preaching of "Affryan" is to bring out the insufficiency of both.'
- ³ J. A. W. Bennett, *The 'Parlement of Foules': An Interpretation*, 1957, p. 15.
- ⁴ Robinson, op. cit., p. 51.
- ⁵ Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy* (transl. V. E. Watts), Penguin Classics, 1969: Book II, Metre VIII, p. 77. Troilus's song in praise of love at the end of Book III, *Troilus and Criseyde*, is closely modelled on the Boethius passage.
- ⁶ Bennett makes the point about Cytherea: op. cit. pp. 56-58. For a confused sense of the relationship between Nature and Venus see Robinson, op. cit., pp. 61-67.
- ⁷ Charles McDonald, 'An Interpretation of Chaucer's Parlement of Foules' in *Chaucer: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. E. Wagenknecht, OUP (1959), pp. 312-313.
- ⁸ McDonald, op. cit., pp. 316-317.
- ⁹ Robinson, op. cit., p. 61.
- ¹⁰ See Bennett's full treatment of this question: op. cit., pp. 93-98.
- ¹¹ Robinson, op. cit., p. 55.
- ¹² Bennett, op. cit., p. 12.
- ¹³ Though McDonald seems to me mistaken in his view that in the garden love according to Nature leads to 'ever-green joy' while courtly love leads to 'barren sorrow and despair' (op. cit., pp. 312-313), I am indebted to his account of Nature as the 'greatest single unifying factor' in the poem

and in particular to the following suggestion: 'Love, under Nature and within the bounds of sincerity, varying as they may be for the individual, can lead to "commune profyt".' (op. cit., p. 326)

¹⁴ Robinson, op. cit., pp. 62-67.

¹⁵ T. S. Eliot, *Collected Poems: 1909-1962*, Faber, 1963:

'The tiger springs in the new year. Us he devours.' (p. 40)

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS OF SOCRATIC METHOD

by D. A. Rohatyn

It is more than a commonplace that Socratic method involves the examination of the presuppositions and consequences of positions held, that it is concerned with achieving precision in the formulation of definitions of crucial terms (the vaunted 'search for essences'), with the detection and elimination of ambiguity in meaning and of fallacy in logical reasoning, and with the making explicit of assumptions only tacitly held or implicitly understood in the framing of doctrines. It is also universally accepted that the goal of Socratic method is not merely the rectification of beliefs or their arrangement into an orderly and coherent pattern, but also the transformation of the personality of the inquirer, such that he comes to value this activity in proportion to his ceaseless practice of it, and devotes himself to the pursuit of 'self-knowledge' with a passion indicative of the high place that this activity holds in his scale of ultimate human values.

There can be no disagreement with these propositions, either as independently stated ideals or as commentaries on the direction which Plato's protagonist takes (and bids his interlocutors take) in the *Dialogues*. There may be added features of Socratic method not stated here, but the foregoing are unarguably central. To document this is as unnecessary as it is tedious, especially before an audience whose acquaintance with Plato is more than casual. My concern, however, is not with these matters, nor with the interpretative problems surrounding the actual paradigms of Socratic pedagogical technique that Plato presents us with. (The slave-boy episode, *Meno* 81-86, leaps readily to mind.) These are fascinating and perplexing issues in their own right, and they are challenges to the scholar that deserve to be met repeatedly. But Socratic method as philosophers have come to understand and cherish it, is not my immediate quarry. I am concerned rather with misinterpretations of Socratic strategy and moral commitment that have filtered down to the general public, at least that segment of it which is considered 'educated'. I am concerned because I consider them both false and harmful. They are false, as I shall try to show shortly, both to the Socratic conception of method as we find it in Plato's works, and to the ideal which it represents. They are harmful both because they are widespread and because the errors are such as to vitiate the intended effects of scholarly learning, both humanistic and scientific, in every branch of knowledge. I shall not attempt to demonstrate the prevalence of these

erroneous views; it will suffice if, in their citation, they are recognized as familiar to one's own experience. I shall simply have to content myself with listing the views which I reject, and, in refuting them, exposing their erroneous character.

The first misconception concerns the word 'dialogue' itself. Ours is supposedly an age of 'dialogue'. What does this mean? In academic circles, it means that there is a presumption of equality between any two parties to a dispute, or between any two individuals of differing convictions. 'Everyone is entitled to his opinion' is a familiar axiom of everyday life, and the call for 'dialogue' is its academic equivalent. Socratic 'dialogue' is taken as one, perhaps the premier, expression of such equality. The fact is, however, that the parties in a Socratic conversation are, with the possible exception of Protagoras (and the definite exception of Parmenides), not Socrates' equals at all.¹ The whole point of many of these encounters is precisely that not everyone is entitled to an opinion, but only those who are competent to hold one. Alternatively phrased, if everyone is entitled to an opinion, yet it is not the case that everyone is entitled to iterate his views, or to make them influential upon the determination of public policy and state (or other types of) craft. In the *Apology* (25), Socrates asks why everyone considers himself an expert on education, when no one would dare to behave in such fashion with respect to the *technai* of shoe-making, horse-training, gymnastic, or anything else. The view that some people are better equipped to carry out tasks than others is also at the foundation of the plan for a Utopian community set forth in the *Republic*. (Whether one interprets that dialogue as a proposed handbook of, or satire upon, political rule, or in a manner that brings in the metaphysical, artistic, and religious levels of analysis contained in the discussion, is for the moment irrelevant). It is therefore as Platonic as it is Socratic; we need not allow ourselves to be ruffled by the never-to-be-settled controversy concerning the conjectured outlook of the historical (as opposed to the Platonically drawn) Socrates. It is very clear that Socratic dialogues are *directional*,² that is, they have a main character, and it is *he* who exposes the illusions of his partners in discussions, he who points out the flaws in their arguments, he who steers them onto higher ground, he who controls the terms and the outcome of the debate.

And this is not all. In a Socratic (unlike a Ciceronian, or a Humian) dialogue, the mere disabuse of one's past, uncritically held beliefs ('the unexamined life'), no matter how important, is not the only element present. I am far from the opinion of some commentators, who take the *aporia* of the early dialogues at its

word. Socratic dialogues may *appear* to end inconclusively, but this, in fact, is never the case.³ The reader (or dramatic *persona*) who looks beneath the surface and studies the subject seriously will always be able to reach a conclusion touching upon his own life, to *see* the application of an abstract principle to his own concrete circumstance and situation, and the corresponding value-imperative that he change his way of life from its previous course and act in accordance with its dictates. Substantiation of these points in specific cases would, of course, require a book-length essay. Fortunately, some authoritative studies have already appeared, permitting us to abbreviate considerably the task of providing textual support.⁴

The second misconception stems from the first. If everyone is held to be equal, and each person is entitled to his own opinion, then each opinion is held to be of equal value. The reasoning, although specious, has a surface plausibility about it. In the jargon of logicians, we may even go so far as to say that it is valid, but not sound — that is, as just explained, its premises are mistaken. The view that in philosophy all opinions are of equal weight, and therefore of none, is found in nihilistic quarters, although it is by no means confined to them. What makes this sophism even more pernicious than its bald incorrectness already suggests is that it is frequently fathered upon Plato, as though he had *established* it (and as though, by lending Plato's authority to this dubious thesis, one could dim the sensibilities of others into overlooking the fact that there is a contradiction between what the thesis maintains and the reliance of its proponents upon the prestige of Plato to provide a kind of intellectual endorsement for it). Plato, in other words, is made the bearer of something like the following position: that in philosophy nothing is provable (or disprovable); that disagreement in philosophy occupies a role parallel to that of disagreement, i.e. relativism, in morals; that philosophers enjoy no consensus of opinion on any important (or even insignificant) matters, and that therefore their opinions are just that—merely subjective, unfounded, scientifically valueless biases; and that Socrates *showed* this, by championing the virtues of open-mindedness, of resistance to authority, of intellectual autonomy, and of 'questioning everything', especially 'the system'.

Nothing could be further from the truth—or from the truth that the Platonic Socrates saw. Resistance was not to authority, but to unjustified authority, or the unjustified exercise of incompetent authority, either directly or through institutional representatives. Questioning was not meant to lead *merely* to the destruction of untenable world-views or life-styles, but to their replacement by

more supportable ones. Open-mindedness did not mean laxity or absence of standards; it did not mean a lack of standards (for example, those of cogent reasoning and marshalling of evidence) for the evaluation of proffered arguments. And one does not have to struggle to confirm the assertion that Socratic-Platonic opposition to *all* forms of relativism, in metaphysics as in morals, was relentless and unyielding.

The third misconception from which these unintentionally fictionalized accounts of Socratic method suffer is the supposition that the translation of that method into a classroom procedure is its natural outcome, an extension and outgrowth of Plato's own wishes. If that were so, Plato would not have lectured, as we have assurance that he did, at the Academy. Moreover, even when Socratic method is correctly apprehended, as at the beginning of this essay, its very laudable motives do not necessarily make for a desirable form of classroom pedagogy in a mass education setting. The relation of twenty students to one professor in a community of inquiry is vastly different from the relation of two human beings in a dramatic context bounded by the actualities of political tension, highly charged emotion, and reflection carried forward, in many cases, by the sense of human finitude engendered by the imminence of death.⁵ The lecture format, first perfected by Aristotle and brought down to the present by his successors, is much more suitable to the heterogenous, pluralistic and impersonal climate of modern civilization than any attempts, however well-intentioned, to crack through those barriers and return to 'dialogue', or to elicit feelings from the (too-often mute) participants in a formal, structured learning environment. Just as the 'rap session' is a misguided effort at overcoming distance between teacher and student, so too the *demand* that such teaching take place and the insistence that this is in the best, or the exclusive, Socratic tradition are at variance with the facts and unappreciative of the very real differences between teacher and student, differences which require submission before authority, where authority is genuine and not abused.⁶ The formal setting of modern education has its disadvantages, but the limitations it imposes are far fewer and less inconveniencing than any attempt to overcome them, given the conditions of modern life and society as I have just described them.

This is not to argue in favour of *élitism*—although *élitism* of a Platonic variety deserves far more of a hearing than is given to it in the egalitarian and in-principle 'democratic' societies of the contemporary world. The fact is, in educational contexts we are not equals, unless in respect of the fact that, next to Socrates, we all appear to have betrayed and compromised the noble ideals of

autonomous thought and personal commitment for which he stands, and therefore are alike reduced to nothing in comparison with the heroic model afforded to us by Platonic literature. The difference between the transmitter of knowledge and the transmittee must be respected by the latter if communication between the two is to take place, and if skills, information and even wisdom are to be passed from one to the other. Of course this system is subject to abuse; although far less so than any other, judging by the parade of bogus figures and quacks masquerading as philosophic healers who have in recent times converted the naïvete of their following and the yearnings and superstitious fears of the gullible and the ignorant into successful commercial enterprises of no small moment. The Platonic dialogue is not a shapeless groping for vague answers to the unformulated problems of life; it is a highly organized search for accurate, non-misleading responses to highly articulated problems of being, discourse, existence, finitude, knowledge, art, and moral action and judgment. Education should not be groping either, and although it should duplicate the Platonic achievement, it cannot expect to be as successful as that pinnacle, nor to reach it by aping a poorly grasped (if not entirely misconstrued) version of what passes for Socratic 'method', and attempting to impose it upon a situation for which it was not designed, and for which it cannot work. The function of the scholar is not to draw out students' inchoate thoughts or feelings but to lay out results of work in progress. He can be enthusiastic about his subject and convey his own pioneering sense of research and of mission, but he cannot fail to be objective and formal, just as Socrates could not fail to be objective and intimately personal. Faithfulness to Socratism does not mean imitating the superficial (and misleading) characteristics of 'dialogue', or the traits implied in any equivalent catchword; it means doing and adhering to the rigours of analysis and inspection of arguments, in value-theory as elsewhere, in just the manner set forth at the outset of this paper, and with just the same overt cognizance of its value and central place in the life of the truly human, self-possessed individual. Socratic method will not tolerate defections carried out in its name; and the defections created by modern prejudices and fashions are quite faithless, the more so as they attempt to conceal this by waving the banner of a Socratic technique that never was, indeed logically could not be.

The task that remains is to identify the proponents of these misconceptions. The answer is: everyone — scholars, students, and misled educational missionaries alike. The proof of this, as I said initially, stems from one's own recognition of the shibboleths about Socratism that are so widely promulgated in our own time. The

next step in becoming the master of this dilemma is refusing to uphold them, that is, seeing them *as* shibboleths, and dismissing or refuting them. The refusal of many in academic life to do so stems from fundamental timidity and corrosive cynicism (or scepticism) about intellectual values themselves. The antidote to this is a rebirth, or an injection, of true Socratism. To *be* intellectually superior to one's students is not arrogance or 'authoritarianism' in the pejorative sense, but a necessary prerequisite for productive relationships between teacher and pupil such as are possible for us today in the educational surroundings in which we of necessity encounter one another. The scholar who acknowledges his own fitness to determine the criteria for excellence, for *aretè*, which his underlings are to meet, and who is *prepared*, as Socrates was, to meet the same requirements himself is not engaged in a master-slave, but rather a *primus inter pares* relationship of the highest sort. He will also find the highest and most intangible rewards and satisfactions in having strained to arrive, like his protégés, at this summit. And, like Socrates, the originator of the method so many profess but so few comprehend, and which still fewer are actually capable of following, he may even succeed in inspiring some of those entrusted to his tutelage to reach the same level, and so succeed him.

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FOOTNOTES

¹ For detailed treatment, see my 'Who is Nietzsche's Overman?', *Universitas*, Vol. IV (1974), 31-45.

² I owe this term to R. S. Brumbaugh.

³ I owe this line of thinking (non-acceptance of 'literalist' interpretations of Platonic dramas) to H. G. Wolz.

⁴ For example, the discovery of the 'self-instantiating' pattern of the Socratic discourses, as carried out in the acute textual interpretations of R. S. Brumbaugh; see his *Plato for the Modern World* (New York, 1962). Also see references in note 5, below.

⁵ See H. G. Wolz, 'Philosophy as Drama: An Approach to Plato's *Symposium*', in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 30 (1969-70), 323-53.

⁶ St. Augustine's *Confessions*, and Kierkegaard's *Philosophical Fragments* make very similar statements in the context of self-prostration before God, and the religious (worshipful) attitude toward Being or its psychological surrogates.