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We apologise to our readers for our delay in producing the Index which we hoped to include with this issue. We look forward to its being available soon.

The articles presented here are all on literary topics. Obviously this does not detract from their intrinsic interest but we should like as well, in each issue, to be able to publish studies in other areas of the arts and in the humanities and social sciences. We are sure that a great deal more of the thinking and research being done in these fields could be shared with the readers of *Theoria*.

As we go to press we offer our very warm congratulations to Professor C.O. Gardner on his receiving from the English Academy of Southern Africa the Pringle Award for literary articles in academic and other journals. This award was made for two articles, 'Tragic Fission in *Othello*', published in *English Studies in Africa*, Vol. 20, 1977, and 'Beatrice and Benedick' published in *Theoria 49*, October 1977. We are gratified to be able to add that this award has been made three times before for articles published in *Theoria*.

Early last year we invited Professor C. de B. Webb, a former editor who is now at the University of Cape Town, and Professor C.O. Gardner of the University of Natal to act as editorial consultants for our journal. Their acceptance must be recorded with apologies that it was not mentioned in an earlier issue.

**THE EDITORS**

# 'MAJOR BARBARA': COMIC MASTERPIECE

*by* TREVOR WHITTOCK

The English dramatic tradition — if we can divert our eyes for a moment from the figure of Shakespeare who bestrides our petty, narrow world like a colossus — is essentially a tradition of comedy. Not that Englishmen have not written, or attempted to write, tragedies. Edward Marlowe, in the words of one of his characters, did ride in triumph through Persepolis; though Shakespeare indicated how much he thought his contemporary's heroics were mostly rant and rhetoric when he made the boastful braggart Pistol quote the line. John Webster presented the skull beneath the skin; but Bernard Shaw suggested how much it was in waxen effigy only when he dismissed Webster as a 'Tussaud laureate'. Ben Jonson penned tragedies, but it is his comedies we revive. Reel off the names of the British comic dramatists, however, and a glittering succession appears. Jonson, Dekker, Beaumont and Fletcher, Congreve, Wycherley, Vanbrugh, Farquhar, Sheridan, Gay, Goldsmith, Gilbert and Oscar Wilde. Above all, Shaw. And of course, Shakespeare — he is, after all, inescapable.

Shakespeare and Shaw are still the great figures in English comic drama. With Shakespeare comedy was only one facet of the universal genius. With Shaw it was the quintessential achievement of a lively and provocative man: music critic, drama critic, Fabian socialist, debater and propagandist, philosopher, wit, self-proclaimed professor of natural scientific history, and dramatist. In his best comedies all his talents meet and compound, and for us still explode in scintillating entertainment. The best of Shaw's best includes *Major Barbara*. Not only is it a delightful play, it is a great one.

The play opens innocuously enough. The scene is the library of a well-to-do aristocratic household: a setting appropriate to conventional 'drawing-room' comedy, to the comedy of manners. The first character we see is Lady Britomart (how suggestive that name is!). In her is instantly recognisable a succession of stage females, the long line of dominating English matrons. Soon she is condescendingly explaining to her priggish son, Stephen, that his father was a foundling, and now there are problems of the inheritance. Instantly recognisable stock stage situations. The audience relaxes, letting themselves be drawn into what they must feel will be conventional entertainment. Having thus lulled and enticed his audience into the play, the dramatist is now all set to mock these conventions, turn them upside down, or even show frightful implications in them. To reveal flesh and blood where the audience thought they need expect nothing more than greasepaint and canvas. In short, the dramatist proceeds politely — Shaw is

always polite in his wicked way — to assault the audience with incidents, characters and themes normally never associated with genteel comedy at all.

Consider with what the audience have been faced by the end of the second act. No luxurious living room but a Salvation Army shelter, a refuge for the starving and desperate. Very different social types here: 'a commonplace old bundle of poverty and hardworn humanity', prematurely aged by deprivation and hardship; an honest workman who has been consigned to the human rubbish heap because at the age of forty-five he is too old to satisfy his employers; a professing socialist, who makes false confessions and would rob a blind man if he had the chance; a brutal thug who hits the old woman in the face; and (let us include him here) the millionaire father introduced in Act I who, unashamedly, deals in wholesale slaughter. The audience have been made to witness a demonstration of the power of big business to buy religious institutions, and have been made to listen to debates on moral and religious principles, including several savaging attacks on the Christian tradition. The audience have also had to follow a subtle psychological presentation of different ways of believing in confession and salvation. The scene finally reaches a climax in the destruction of the heroine's faith, the climax itself culminating in her crying out the tragic words Christ uttered on the Cross: 'My God: why hast thou forsaken me?' — and this without any sense of blasphemy or mockery.

Intractable comic material? Not at all. The whole act is exciting, amusing, exhilarating. Barbara's manipulation of Bill Walker, reducing that blustering bully to a guilty soul seeking absolution, is an original piece of comedy such as only Shaw could have conceived. And Undershaft's ironic manipulation of the Salvation army in his campaign to 'convert' Barbara, while not exactly laughable, is no less fascinating and no less brilliant a piece of inspired writing.

But when we reflect on the extraordinary quality of the play it is not only the memorable moments we must take into account. Perhaps more important than these is the way very diverse material has been brought together and combined into something quite new. Drawing-room comedy, social realism, lowlife melodrama, polemic and satire and more than a touch of tragedy, religious fervour and economic arguments, Euripides and Ibsen, the 'Blood and Fire' of the Salvation army and the 'Blood and Fire' of the maker of cannons. No wonder some critics have suggested that a play such as this, so heterogeneous with serious matter, would be more accurately described as a tragi-comedy rather than a comedy.

What is remarkable is Shaw's ability to collate and control this material. If I pay tribute to this ability by designating it as *wit*, and

give it pride of place in the qualities Shaw possessed as a dramatist, I am not suggesting that this quality is in any way a superficial one. On the contrary, I wish to give that word *wit* its fullest weight. When people praise Shaw's wit they are usually drawing attention to Shaw's verbal ingenuity, his power to surprise and amuse with the elegant twist of a phrase. Yes, indeed. But in the history of literary criticism the word *wit* has been loaded with heavier ballast. Dr Johnson, in an essay on one of the metaphysical poets of the seventeenth century, distinguished several meanings of the word *wit*, and in particular defined wit as the metaphysical poets possessed it, thus:

> But Wit, abstracted from its effects upon the hearer, may be more rigorously and philosophically considered as a kind of *discordia concors*; a combination of dissimilar images, or discovery of occult resemblances in things apparently unlike. Of wit, thus defined, they have more than enough. The most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together; nature and art are ransacked for illustrations, comparisons, and allusions; their learning instructs, and their subtilty surprises . . .

Shaw also possessed wit in this sense: the attribute of an independent mind selecting unexpected material and then fusing it together in a way which not only unifies but also discovers unforeseen relationships. In short, to a high degree, it is the power of *imaginative organisation*. It is immensely more difficult to achieve in drama than in poetry because the scale is larger and the medium is technically very demanding. But Shaw did have this creative gift.

We observe it in the diversity of his material and the organisation of that material: in his arrangement and invention, the balance of scene unit against scene unit, the juxtaposition of character and character, the playing off of dramatic incident and dialectic argument against one another so as constantly to provoke fresh comprehension of human motive and possibility. The climax of Act II which I mentioned earlier may be taken as an illustration.

> CUSINS: *(calling to the procession in the street outside)* Off we go. Play up, there! Immenso giubilo. *(He gives the time with his drum; and the band strikes up the march, which rapidly becomes more distant as the procession moves briskly away).*
>
> MRS BAINES: I must go, dear. Youre overworked: you will be all right tomorrow. We'll never lose you. Now Jenny: step out with the old flag. Blood and Fire! *(She marches out through the gate with her flag).*

JENNY. Glory Hallelujah! *(flourishing her tambourine and marching).*

UNDERSHAFT: *(to Cusins as he marches out past him easing the slide of his trombone)* 'My ducats and my daughter'!

CUSINS: *(following him out)* Money and gunpowder!

BARBARA: Drunkenness and Murder! My God: why hast thou forsaken me?

*(She sinks on the form with her face buried in her hands. The march passes away into silence. Bill Walker steals across to her.)*

BILL: *(taunting)* Wot prawce selvytion nah?

This 'metaphysical' wit of Shaw is omnipresent in the play, appearing in small detail as well as in large-scale incident. May I cite one further, small example. Consider how in a sentence Shaw can sum up the essence of Plato's political argument in *The Republic*, and put it into a position where it can illuminate the plot of the play, give further insight into the characters, and yet in its mockery suggest that Plato was a bit naive.

UNDERSHAFT: Plato says, my friend, that society cannot be saved until either the Professors of Greek take to making gunpowder, or else the makers of gunpowder become Professors of Greek.

Perhaps these examples may be used to illustrate two other remarkable qualities displayed by Shaw in his drama. First, he carries his learning lightly. Though *Major Barbara* is crammed with literary, philosophical or mythological references, they are presented with gaiety, and generally do not slow or weigh the play down. Only in retrospect, or in close analysis, are we likely to appreciate how precisely they are used, and how they add dimensions to the drama. Secondly, Shaw deals in *real* ideas, not just propaganda catch-phrases, newspaper clichés or intellectual counters. His dialectic always progresses. Idea breeds idea; the dialogue and incidents test and reshape the ideas. That is why many people witnessing a Shaw play suddenly find themselves to their surprise rediscovering the pleasures of thinking. For thinking is an exciting process, and Shaw showed how it could also be an exhilarating source of drama.

Shaw's gaiety, his width of reference, quickness of intellect, his craftsmanship, and the seriousness of his commitment to his art — above all his wit as I have described it — ally him to one of the figures he most admired, the composer Mozart. Like Mozart, particularly the Mozart of the operas, Shaw tends so to delight us with the harmony and balance of his organisation that we may be tempted to overlook the sorrows and tragedy that are also part of

that order. Shaw's comedy is optimistic and uplifting, but it is not so at the expense of omitting the painful and frustrating aspects, the tragic experiences of life. Indeed, it is recorded that Shaw insisted that *Major Barbara* 'might easily have been transformed into a tragedy.'

It is not surprising that comedy may include, even be about, painful or serious subjects. Byron summed it up: 'And if I laugh at any mortal thing, 'Tis that I may not weep.' Who hasn't at some time observed a husband and wife, with tensions in their marriage, give expression to those tensions in wisecracks and jokes? Some of the commonest humour springs from the humiliations of our very existence: bed-pans, false-teeth, bald heads, skinny bosoms. We laugh and attempt to bury the anguish. Yet in the very denial is a kind of acknowledgement: a targetting of our suffering. This is one sort of comedy, and there are dramatists who work in this area (for example, the scene in Ben Jonson's *Volpone* where Mosca eggs on Corvino to enumerate in revolting terms the ailments of the supposedly dying Volpone.)

But there is another sort of comedy — higher in kind perhaps. This comedy does not dwell on malformed man trapped in the absurd miseries of his existence. Rather, it proposes that man's follies spring from his misdirected passions and false ideas; and it goes on to suggest that, through self-knowledge or some visitation of grace, man may be redeemed and come to dance in joy. The dramatists whose comedy is of this kind produce in the audiences an experience of unlimitedness, a joyous sense of 'great mystery and infinitude' Its supreme exponents in English are Shakespeare and Shaw. In Shakespeare's great comedies the opening scenes portray how tangled people's lives can be. As the plays proceed the follies multiply and the tangles knot and tighten. Yet somehow disaster is averted, all is resolved, and the plays actually end with a dance of celebration. How? The process is mysterious. But mankind is schooled into happiness, and — the plays often suggest this explicitly — it is achieved by 'great Creating Nature'. In the groves of the Forest of Arden or in the moonwashed woods of a midsummer night, in touch with a natural harmony and order they cannot comprehend, men discover their own true natures and are re-united with bliss. In Shakespeare's vision — unproved and perhaps unprovable — lies a conviction that the universe is fundamentally harmonious and beneficent, and that man could, were he only to open himself to its healing powers, re-create that harmony and good in his own little world.

> How sweet the moonlight sleeps upon this bank!
> Here will we sit and let the sounds of music
> Creep in our ears; soft stillness and the night
> Become the touches of sweet harmony.

> Sit Jessica. Look how the floor of heaven
> Is thick inlaid with patens of bright gold.
> There's not the smallest orb which thou beholdest
> But in his motion like an angel sings,
> Still quiring to the young-eyed cherubins;
> Such harmony is in immortal souls,
> But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
> Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

But for a moment men do hear it, and are transformed. Not all, though. Always there is someone who stands back, holds aloof or denies it: a Shylock, a Malvolio, a Jacques or an Antonio. In this life the circle is never quite completed, only eternally promised.

Shaw's comedy, too, is basically of this kind. It moves from folly and error, to challenge and disillusion, and on again to discovery and purpose. Not for Shaw lacerating laughter, the humour begot in despair and frustration. His satire, even at its most provocative, is neither morbid nor malicious, but rational and generous. Mankind *can* grow wiser, better, nobler; and he spreads this feeling with buoyant Irish charm. There are no real villains in Shaw, only misguided mortals who do evil because they don't know how to avoid doing it. But life and reason may school them yet. The comedy shows it happening. Shaw was, by temperament and by conviction, suited to this kind of comedy. How, in *Major Barbara*, the comedy reflects his convictions, and how the convictions shape the comedy I shall try to explain, and to do so I must unfold the central arguments of the play.

When his plays were being published in Germany, Shaw wrote to his German publishers suggesting that *Major Barbara*, together with *Man and Superman* and *John Bull's Other Island*, should be grouped together under the title *Comedies of Science and Religion*. By science Shaw meant a systematic body of knowledge, and included politics under this heading as he believed politics too was a study and practice that could be systematised. But the title he proposed serves as a reminder that the arguments for *Major Barbara* have religious, as well as political and economic, ramifications. We shall have to follow separate strands initially, before seeing how they all come together.

The arguments of the play are presented by means of two interrelated plots which form the basis of the play's action. The first plot, derived from conventional melodrama, is the search for an heir to Undershaft's armament industry. (With typical effrontery Shaw inverts the convention: the heir will turn out to be not a foundling who must prove the legitimacy of his birth but a legitimate child who must prove he was really a foundling.) The second plot turns on Barbara's challenge that she may convert Undershaft to the Salvation Army, and his counter-challenge to her.

BARBARA: . . . There are neither good men nor scoundrels: there are just children of one Father; and the sooner they stop calling one another names the better. You neednt talk to me: I know them. Ive had scores of them through my hands: scoundrels, criminals, infidels, philanthropists, missionaries, county councillors, all sorts. Theyre all just the same sort of sinner; and theres the same salvation ready for them all.

UNDERSHAFT: May I ask have you ever saved a maker of cannons?

BARBARA: No. Will you let me try?

UNDERSHAFT: Well, I will make a bargain with you. If I go to see you tomorrow in your Salvation Shelter, will you come the day after to see me in my cannon works?

BARBARA: Take care. It may end in your giving up the cannons for the sake of the Salvation Army.

UNDERSHAFT: Are you sure it will not end in your giving up the Salvation Army for the sake of the cannons?

BARBARA: I will take my chance on that.

UNDERSHAFT: And I will take my chance of the other.

What connects the two plots is that Cusins too must be 'converted' before he will accept his true inheritance, and Barbara does not declare herself until he has chosen.

Shaw portrays Barbara as a truly religious person. Rejecting the meaninglessness of her secure and pampered existence at Wilton Crescent, Barbara seeks to serve a cause greater than herself, and thinks she has found it in the Salvation Army where she can bring spiritual enlightenment and practical help to the needy poor. Cusins, on the other hand, is a humanist — intellectual and sceptical — though as a scholar he is extremely well-read in the history of religions. His profession, Professor of Greek, allies him to the great, rational civilisations of Greece and Rome. He combines the best learning of the past with contemporary aspirations for justice and equality. (The character is acknowledgedly based on that of Gilbert Murray.) Behind Cusins' mild demeanour lies a strong and determined man; his pursuit of Barbara is one indication of this. To ensure that Barbara and Cusins are fitting opponents for the struggle with Undershaft, Shaw is careful in the first and second acts to show their strength: Barbara's vitality and fervour, Cusins' determination and intelligence. In particular the episode with Bill Walker reveals how Barbara has inherited the best of both her mother and her father.

Undershaft breaks Barbara's faith when he demonstrates that the Salvation Army can, like any other organisation of that nature, be bought. By his cheque to the Army he proves that the pipers who call the tune are Undershaft and Bodger. The full im-

plications of this emerge gradually. One implication is that Barbara's faith rested on shaky foundations because it assumed that spiritual welfare could be separated from the material circumstances of life. Man does not live by bread alone; but without bread he may not live at all. No faith can be sustained which ignores the basic conditions of existence. Furthermore, however the Salvation Army may wish to alleviate the misery of the poor, it is incapable of abolishing the circumstances that create poverty and hardship. Should it attempt to change these circumstances it would be squashed by people whose wealth depends on their existence, and indeed it is only tolerated by the power-holders because it conditions the poor to accept their lot and thus prevents them rising in revolt for a better deal. Nor can people who are starving and scraping be brought to spiritual enlightenment: they can only be bribed by charity to pay lip-service to religious doctrines. The false confessions made by Rummy Mitchum and Snobby Price for hand-outs are examples of this, and the point is driven home when Undershaft says:

> UNDERSHAFT: . . . I enabled Barbara to become Major Barbara; and I saved her from the crime of poverty.
> CUSINS: Do you call poverty a crime?
> UNDERSHAFT: The worst of crimes. All the other crimes are virtues beside it: all the other dishonors are chivalry itself by comparison. Poverty blights whole cities; spreads horrible pestilences; strikes dead the very souls of all who come within sight, sound, or smell of it. What you call crime is nothing: a murder here and a theft there, a blow now and a curse then: what do they matter? they are only the accidents and illnesses of life: there are not fifty genuine professional criminals in London. But there are millions of poor people, abject people, dirty people, ill fed, ill clothed people. They poison us morally and physically: they kill the happiness of society: they force us to do away with our own liberties and to organize unnatural cruelties for fear they should rise against us and drag us down into their abyss. Only fools fear crime: we all fear poverty. Pah! *(turning to Barbara)* you talk of your half-saved ruffian in West Ham: you accuse me of dragging his soul back to perdition. Well, bring him to me here; and I will drag his soul back again to salvation for you. Not by words and dreams; but by thirty eight shillings a week, a sound house in a handsome street and a permanent job.

True religion is only possible when people have the energy and the freedom from want to pursue it. Undershaft argues that material prosperity must be given priority, and only when people are paid

and productive, and can afford homes and food and clothing, only then can the works of the spirit really begin. The lives his employees lead at his factory prove his point: they have security and dignity, and they worship at a multitude of churches. (The film script emphasises this point even more than the original play.)

There is good, sound sense in much that Undershaft says, and today in South Africa, with our own ill-paid, ill-fed, ill-housed populations, we could do worse than heed the gospel according to St. Andrew Undershaft.

> BARBARA: And will he be the better for that?
> UNDERSHAFT: You know he will. Dont be a hypocrite, Barbara. He will be better fed, better housed, better clothed, better behaved; and his children will be pounds heavier and bigger. That will be better than an American cloth mattress in a shelter, chopping firewood, eating bread and treacle, and being forced to kneel down from time to time to thank heaven for it: kneel drill, I think you call it. It is cheap work converting starving men with a Bible in one hand and a slice of bread in the other. I will undertake to convert West Ham to Mahometanism on the same terms. Try your hand on my men: their souls are hungry because their bodies are full.

Undershaft's strength of feeling about the evils of poverty springs from his own sufferings and hardships as a youth. It was in that period he became resolved to be a full-fed free man at all costs, even if he had to kill to do it. Here Shaw provides another contrast: that between Peter Shirley and Andrew Undershaft. Peter is a humble and honest man; though he is not a professing Christian he does live the life of a Christian. And where does it get him? He is sacked and forgotten. In the harsh capitalist world of competition and exploitation the Christian virtues are not only irrelevant: they are actually a handicap. The price of survival is to scrap them. Undershaft chooses to be the exploiter rather than the exploited, and flourishes.

Undershaft's creed is a capitalist one, but Undershaft speaks as a capitalist who knows what his wealth has delivered him from (and delivered his family from); he knows the benefits he can obtain for himself and his employees, the benefits of material security. This knowledge gives authority to his arguments. Now the question arises, how far is Shaw the socialist endorsing the argument of Undershaft the capitalist? To answer this we must consider another question and a much more important one. Why does Shaw make Undershaft a manufacturer of cannons, a merchant of death and destruction? The answers to this question will take us to the very heart of the play.

If Shaw had wished he could have given Undershaft some more socially approved occupation: he could have made him a capitalist of a more benevolent kind — a ship builder, a clothing magnate, or even an oil baron. But by making him an armaments manufacturer, Shaw is able to emphasise an aspect of capitalism that might otherwise be played down, namely, its ruthlessness. Undershaft, Lazarus and their employees are secure and comfortable because the goods they make murder and maim countless other people. This serves as a metaphor to describe all capitalism. Though capitalism may abolish pockets of poverty and exploitation, it will not abolish poverty and exploitation themselves: indeed its own success depends on their existence. Thus Shaw the socialist is only endorsing the gospel of Undershaft to a qualified extent. Something more adequate must be sought. This brings us to the choices that face Barbara and Cusins.

Their dilemma is greater than the one Undershaft faced as a young man; for him it was starvation or a full belly; for them the course they adopt must satisfy the demands of their consciences which tell them they must serve the spiritual and material welfare, not only of themselves or a select group, but of all men. Without this hope they cannot be reconciled to accepting the inheritance awaiting them. Earlier I said Undershaft had to convert them, but what he does is not strictly speaking a 'conversion' at all. They don't accept the capitalist aspect of his creed; rather they take from him the challenge and the pointer to how mankind may move beyond capitalism. Undershaft rallies Barbara with the challenge: 'Try your hand on my men: their souls are hungry because their bellies are full'; and Cusins he recruits with, 'Dare you make war on war?' They accept their inheritance: Barbara so that she may do God's work for its own sake when material prosperity has rendered bribes unnecessary; Cusins so that he can use the armaments works to give weapons to the poor that they may through force and revolution create a society where the necessities of life will be guaranteed to all. Undershaft's ruthless capitalism, which has demonstrated the importance of material security, points the way to socialist revolution and spiritual evolution.

At several points in the play itself Undershaft is associated with the ancient Greek god, Dionysus. Cusins calls him Dionysus several times, and also quotes lines from the Greek dramatist Euripides whose play, *The Bacchae*, was about the Dionysian religion. Philip Vellacott, in his introduction to his translation of the play, briefly sums up the religion thus:

> By the time the cult of Dionysus made its first appearance in Greece — at what date is not known — the Olympian gods were already firmly enthroned. Dionysus, however, seems to have taken his place among them within a very

> short time; he was accepted as son of Zeus, and given a place alongside Apollo at Delphi. He was primarily a spirit of life, and of all that produced or liberates life; liberates it from pain or fatigue, from tedium or ugliness, from the bonds of responsibility, law, pity, or affection. One of his most obvious and popular gifts was that of wine; but his exclusive association with wine was a later development. Music, dancing, and above all the excitement of group-emotion, of worshipping in a company distinguished by dress, secret rites, and a consciousness of power residing in mass-surrender to the supernatural — these were all means by which this cult attracted not only the more excitable Oriental, but the Greek who for one reason or another found the demands and restrictions of civilized life profitless and irksome. (Penguin Classics)

*The Bacchae* tells how Dionysus, in disguise, comes to Thebes where the king, Pentheus, has denounced the religion. Dionysus punishes the king for his blasphemy by possessing the women of Thebes, including Pentheus' own mother, with madness, and tricks Pentheus into going to spy on them. Imagining him to be an animal, the women hunt the king down and literally tear him to pieces. The last scenes of this tragedy are savage and appalling. Shaw not only makes reference to Euripides' great tragedy: his own play actually echoes it. Undershaft/Dionysus comes to the Salvation Army, possesses the women (Mrs Baines, Jenny Hill and their like) by means of his 'charity' and leads them triumphantly in religious procession (Undershaft blowing a trombone), having torn Barbara/Pentheus to pieces — figuratively only, of course — by rending apart her religious assumptions. Through this analogy between Undershaft and Dionysus, and the parallels in the action of the two plays, Shaw emphasises how, when a form of belief arises, its assault on the old assumptions will seem savage and cruel. In the arrival of the new will be apprehended fear, cruelty, madness, destruction, as well as exhilaration, joy and release. But the spirit of life is remorseless, and bears down any opposition. 'Blood and fire' is as appropriate a motto for the Dionysian force as it is for the maker of cannons.

Cusins, the Euripidean scholar, naturally spots the analogy and, expressing it, he gives vent to his own alarm before the challenging figure of Undershaft. Cusins again, and Shaw through him, makes further use of literary mythology when he associates Undershaft with another legendary figure, that of the Prince of Darkness. Certainly the reference to Mephistophilis conjures up the story of the scholar Faust who was tempted to sell his soul to the devil, and reveals how the scholar Cusins initially responds to Undershaft's challenge to forget the pursuit of a dead language and seize the

power of life and death. But the Mephistophelean portrait Shaw sketches of Undershaft owes less to the dramatists Marlowe and Goethe than it does to the poet William Blake. For Blake, particularly in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, presented a new way of conceiving the devil which enormously fascinated and influenced Shaw. Briefly and oversimply, Blake envisaged life as a progression created through the clash of contraries, in particular the contraries of Reason and Energy. His Satanic figure is not a force of evil, but rather of rebellious energy denounced by the sour Jehovah of intellect and repression whom Blake sometimes called Urizen (Your reason). Blake's devil then is a force of life, of instinct, trying to break the bonds established by arid intellect and established morality. Like Blake's devil, Undershaft comes with the gifts of energy and liberation. His so-called immoral doctrines assault conventional pieties; his vitality breeds enthusiasm and commitment; even his trade testifies to his destroying in order to liberate. As Blake puts it in one of his proverbs of Hell, 'The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.' (Some of Undershaft's aphorisms are almost straight from Blake: for example, 'There is only one true morality for every man; but every man has not the same true morality,' is implied in Blake's, 'One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression.')

By bringing in these associations of godhead, Shaw gives a greater substance to the effect of Undershaft. But how does he present Undershaft's own picture of himself? In Act I he makes Undershaft describe himself as a 'mystic': this remark is not explained until the following exchange in Act III:

> UNDERSHAFT: From the moment when you become Andrew Undershaft, you will never do as you please again. Don't come here lusting for power, young man.
>
> CUSINS: If power were my aim I should not come here for it. You have no power.
>
> UNDERSHAFT: None of my own, certainly.
>
> CUSINS: I have more power than you, more will. You do not drive this place: it drives you. And what drives the place?
>
> UNDERSHAFT: *(enigmatically)* A will of which I am a part.

The will of which Undershaft is merely a part is the will of Creative Evolution — life striving ever upward in its drive to greater comprehension. The vital spirits in each generation pass the task on to those who succeed them: so Undershaft's handing on of the inheritance is really a handing on of the creative destiny. The 'blood and fire' Barbara and Cusins choose to serve is the life and energy of godhead using its human creatures in the evolutionary surge. Hence the speeches of Barbara and Cusins,

very near the end, are life-celebratory. In particular, Major Barbara who thought her soul had died in West Ham finds it resurrected in Perivale St. Andrews. She recovers her pride, and recovers her joy — the joy of submission to a Purpose, to a Life Force.

> BARBARA: . . . I have got rid of the bribe of bread. I have got rid of the bribe of heaven. Let God's work be done for its own sake: the work he had to create us to do because it cannot be done except by living men and women. When I die, let him be in my debt, not I in his; and let me forgive him as becomes a woman of my rank.
>
> CUSINS: Then the way of life lies through the factory of death?
>
> BARBARA: Yes, through the raising of hell to heaven and of man to God, through the unveiling of eternal light in the Valley of The Shadow. *(Seizing him with both hands)* Oh, did you think my courage would never come back? did you believe that I was a deserter? that I, who have stood in the streets, and taken my people to my heart, and talked of the holiest and greatest things with them, could ever turn back and chatter foolishly to fashionable people about nothing in a drawing room? Never, never, never, never: Major Barbara will die with the colors.

Here is the real affirmation of the play. Now too is it possible to see how the comedy is at one with the meaning, the structure of the play with the argument. Shaw once defined comedy as 'nothing less than the destruction of old-fashioned morals.' The play begins with people set in their complacent beliefs and established illusions, as Lady Britomart is described in the first stage direction ('limited in the oddest way with domestic and class limitations, conceiving the universe exactly as if it were a large house in Wilton Crescent . . .'). Till life comes along in the shape of Dionysus Mephistophilis Undershaft to kick that little world to pieces about them. But despite the pain of loss they must welcome the actions of life because it pushes mankind forward. Life shatters and destroys, only to rebuild and re-create; at first the destructive element terrifies, later with liberation the energy and power are celebrated. Hence the answer to the question posed earlier, why did Shaw make Undershaft a manufacturer of explosives? As the agent of the Life Force he comes to demolish so that reconstruction can begin.

> UNDERSHAFT: Come, come, my daughter! dont make too much of your little tinpot tragedy. What do we do here when we spend years of work and thought and thousands

> of pounds of solid cash on a new gun or an aerial battleship that turns out just a hairsbreadth wrong after all? Scrap it. Scrap it without wasting another hour or another pound on it. Well, you have made for yourself something that you call a morality or a religion or what not. It doesnt fit the facts. Well, scrap it. Scrap it and get one that does fit. That is what is wrong with the world at present. It scraps its obsolete steam engines and dynamoes; but it wont scrap its old prejudices and its old moralities and its old religions and its old political constitutions. Whats the result? In machinery it does very well; but in morals and religion and politics it is working at a loss that brings it near bankruptcy every year. Dont persist in that folly. If your old religion broke down yesterday, get a newer and a better one for tomorrow.

The newer and better religion, morality, political constitution, whatever, must fit the facts: that is, accept the conditions life lays down. The political level of the play — the arguments that Christian morality and liberal humanism are no longer adequate to cope with the world of the twentieth century, that the achievements of technology and capitalism must give way to social equality — these arguments are only an illustration of the more fundamental issue: that men must move forward with the movement of life itself, serving with their creative energy that ultimate Creative Energy which makes what will be. Shaw's play does more than preach this doctrine: it enacts it. In the very structure and unfolding of the play the audience is made to *experience* that movement of life within and through the mode of comedy: the dismay, the disillusion, the challenge, the doubt, the celebration. Just as Shakespeare's comedies move to a glimpse and promise of the divine harmony, so *Major Barbara* may be described as a divine comedy of creative evolution. In time the play's politics may date, even theories of 'creative evolution' may become old hat, yet so long as men can struggle against the fetters of false ideas, be disillusioned yet learn from it and lift themselves again, and feel anew a purpose and a service in living, so long will this play be valid.

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# UNITY OF MIND AND THE ANTAGONIST THOUGHT OF DEATH IN WORDSWORTH'S POETRY

*by* F.J. HUGO

A perennial theme of literature is the tendency of the round of daily experience to close in upon itself, excluding the hostile image of death. Only by a detachment achieved through the discipline of rational meditation can the image be acknowledged in its full significance. This is the assumption behind Donne's vivid phrase 'my race — Idly, yet quickly runne'[1] and, indeed, the sonnet as a whole; since his essential purpose is to break the force of habit by terrifying himself into facing the terror of death. Meditation of this kind dwells on impersonal, abstract relations like the inexorable sequence of time or the involvement of all deaths in every particular death: as Donne says, 'never seek to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.'

But the best illustration, perhaps, is provided by Chaucer's *Pardoner's Tale*. In this story the sharp division between ordinary concerns, here emphasized by self-indulgence, and the reality of death is given full dramatic realisation. At the close of the story the three revellers rush to embrace death but are incapable of understanding that they are doing so. Only the old man who directs them to the gold has the moral and rational detachment to recognize the nearness of death.

The romantic period brought a change. The image of death was sought, not only according to the discipline of outward-moving thought, but also according to the elusive intimations of introspection. De Quincey in his *Confessions* notes the deep psychological affinity between the images of life and death: 'I find it impossible to banish the thought of death when I am walking alone in the endless days of summer.' A little earlier in the same passage he describes the suggestive influence of the vitality of summer: 'the exuberant and riotous prodigality of life naturally forces the mind more powerfully upon the antagonist thought of death.'[2]

De Quincey preserves the primary sense of the antagonism between the two images, but the painter Fuseli (a contemporary of Wordsworth) takes the disturbing subject a good deal further. A representative picture of his, called *Nightmare*,[3] shows a goblin gleefully perched on the outstretched form of a sleeping woman. The deep source of the sensational effect is the suggestion of underlying sexual compatibility between the goblin and the young woman. The painting that concerns us more closely is called *Young Woman Imprisoned with a Skeleton*.[4] A seated young woman slumps back asleep in a cell. Just beyond her sleeping form the skeleton's rib-cage can be dimly seen, but the centre of the pictorial effect is

the skeleton's arm, which is held close in the woman's folded arms. Again the deeper source of the sensational impact is the hint of a secret affinity, revealing all the power of sexual attraction. But Fuseli's prurience and diabolism prevent him from seriously exploring the potentially valuable intuition. It was left to Wordsworth to reveal that the dark magnetism of the image of death arises organically from the human psyche.

As we might expect, Wordsworth does not approach that magnetism as formulated, crystallised truth but as evolving experience. He creates situations which dramatise various aspects of the evolving tension between the repulsive and the magnetic power of the image of death. One might say that the child of *We are Seven* represents the simplest resistance to the idea of death. She refuses to make a distinction between life and death, but this is not because of ignorance or inexperience. Her affection refuses to discriminate against the two children who have died and at the same time inspires her with the thought of incorporating them into the daily round of her life.

> 'You run about, my little Maid,
> Your limbs they are alive;
> If two are in the church-yard laid,
> Then ye are only five.'
>
> 'Their graves are green, they may be seen,'
> The little Maid replied,
> 'Twelve steps or more from my mother's door,
> And they are side by side.
>
> 'My stockings there I often knit,
> My kerchief there I hem;
> And there upon the ground I sit,
> And sing a song to them.

The girl's affectionate equanimity contrasts strangely with the adult's tactless harping on the arithmetical facts. Her disarming co-operation with death throws him off-balance, because it evades both the repulsive and attractive aspects of death and makes nonsense of the complexity of his feelings. The simplicity of the child and the poem as a whole appear as the means by which Wordsworth brings out the obscurity of adult emotions. This is not to say, of course, that we do not continue to appreciate the girl's simple vivacity for its own sake.

One often has occasion to reflect that Wordsworth's simple style varies in character and function. In the first stanza of 'Strange fits of passion . . .' the simplicity conveys an ominous tone which warns us that the uneventfulness of the following stanzas is only apparent. We are thus prepared for understanding that the

simplicity of the later stanzas belongs to the psychological essence of the poem.

> Strange fits of passion have I known:
> And I will dare to tell,
> But in the lover's ear alone,
> What once to me befell.

The vital unity of mind of young love is presented in the second stanza. It is sustained by Lucy's freshness which convincingly suggests independence of time.

> When she I loved looked every day
> Fresh as a rose in June,
> I to her cottage bent my way,
> Beneath an evening moon.

But alerted as we are by the ominous tone of the first stanza, we cannot share in the lover's calm and happy preoccupation: it seems to invite danger by its exclusiveness. Seen from this point of view the simple phrases accentuate a feeling of tension.

The narrator's eye is caught and held by the moon, now fully visible as a completed sphere above the horizon. A polar opposition is set up between the rider and the emergent moon, and so the tension developing in the poem is given shape and form.

> Upon the moon I fixed my eye,
> All over the wide lea;
> With quickening pace my horse drew nigh
> Those paths so dear to me.

The power of the moon turns out to be the magnetic attraction of the image of death. But for the moment the blankness of the moon corresponds to the blankness of the narrator's mind. Neither encroaches on the other; the mind's resistance to the image of death holds the moon's power in a state of tense equipoise. The horse's quickening, however, threatens to affect the equilibrium, because it hints that in accelerating time love's eagerness collaborates with the enemy, death.

As both moon and horse draw nearer to Lucy's cottage, the poem generates an intolerable 'mindless' intensity. At this stage the value of the poem's simple style is perhaps more evident than before: it reflects the purgation of the mind's constituents, as the mind engages in radical combat or radical change. One thinks of the simplified intensity of Lear's imagination in the scenes on the heath.

My horse moved on; hoof after hoof
He raised, and never stopped:
When down behind the cottage roof,
At once, the bright moon dropped.

The mind's deep resistance to acknowledging the meaning of the descending moon prompts a full assimilation of the moon's power. The rider's spontaneous exclamation demonstrates the original kinship of the image of death with the mind that so steadfastly resists it.

'O mercy!' to myself I cried,
'If Lucy should be dead!'

One is constrained to add that recognition of the kinship is at the same time confirmation of the loss of youthful unity of mind.

Wordsworth has been occupied with the great psychological drama of resistance and attraction; the poem 'A slumber did my spirit seal' examines the outcome of that drama more fully. The starting point is once again the exclusive unity of young love, but the poem progresses towards a stabilised state of mind which supersedes that unreflecting early unity. Simplicity in this poem functions as an uncompromising directness of statement which lends emphasis to the fateful gulf between the stages of experience represented by the two stanzas.

The word 'seal', towards which the first line so evenly progresses, brings out how insulated the unity of youthful love is.

A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears
She seemed a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.

But the word 'slumber' makes it equally clear that this unity of being is easy and tranquil and serves in its particular way the cause of life. As we continue, we begin to consider how it is in the essential nature of young love to dissociate the beloved person from the dominion of time. Young life best expresses itself in a response to the finest qualities of life in another and naturally resists compromising the response by paying respect to the meaning of time and circumstance. The transition from 'feel' to 'touch' beautifully and somewhat painfully expresses how near and how far life's touch and the touch of time are in relation to one another.

The gap between the stanzas represents the great gulf that divides the later from the earlier state of mind. Death is now an accomplished fact, and the stanza deals with the transition from resistance to gradual acceptance of the fact.

No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,
With rocks, and stones, and trees.

The first two lines portray a staring, stubborn unbelief in the evidence, which gradually gives way to acceptance. The concluding lines present the irresistible authority and power of death.

However, that is not all; those last lines are harshly conclusive from one point of view but from another they are strangely invigorating. They evoke on a cosmic scale what a musician calls a 'granite bass rhythm.' Thus authority and power are also associated with an unfailing rhythmic energy, diffused throughout the universe. One cannot readily speak of these contrary aspects of the stanza as balancing one another, but their dialectical copresence is intensely illuminating. The youthful unity of mind presented in the first stanza is not replaced by a corresponding unity but by a fulfilment of experience which has its own kind of wholeness. The cosmic vision links life and death but at the same time allows the greatest imaginable scope to life's resistance to the idea and reality of death.

The three poems dealing with the acknowledgement of the threat of death should be set alongside Wordsworth's attempts to come to terms with the sombre mystery of that presence. As a first step let us note that he could not resort to Donne's method of inverting the image of terror.

Death be not proud, though some have called thee
Mighty and dreadful, for, thou are not soe,
For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow;
Die not, poore death, nor yet canst thou kill mee.

It is not only a matter of different beliefs and assumptions; Donne's agile re-interpretation is foreign to Wordsworth's temperament. In later years, when Wordsworth came to associate himself closely with the church, he viewed the prospect of death in this steady mood.

There's not a nook within this solemn Pass
But were an apt confessional for One
Taught by his summer spent, his autumn gone,
That life is but a tale of morning grass
Withered at eve. From scenes of art which chase
That thought away, turn, and with watchfull eyes
Feed it 'mid Nature's old felicities,
Rocks, rivers, and smooth lakes more clear than glass
Untouched, unbreathed upon. . . .

*(The Trosachs)*

The image of the lake epitomises the quality of the poet's contemplation, as he assimilates the continuity of meaning which links the present scene with the time of death in the future. Unity of mind and of sensibility is sought through extension or expansion of imagination.

However, the poem *Lucy Gray* reminds us that it is highly characteristic of Wordsworth to achieve his poetic purposes by springing a surprise of some kind on us. It remains true, though, that his basic aim is expansion of vision and not displacement of the centre of interest. The surprise in this case is the little girl's vanishing without trace. It is all the more unexpected in that we feel we know and understand her. Our attention and sympathy remain with her when her father turns away from her, back to the work he must do.

> 'That, Father! will I gladly do:
> 'Tis scarcely afternoon —
> The minster-clock has just struck two,
> And yonder is the moon!'
>
> At this the Father raised his hook,
> And snapped a faggot-band;
> He plied his work; — and Lucy took
> The lantern in her hand.

We feel we are invisible company for the 'solitary child' as she goes on her journey; but she eludes us entirely in the end. We attempt to track her through the anxious eyes of her parents. We examine the last few prints intently, as they do, but still without finding any hint or trace.

> They followed from the snowy bank
> Those footmarks, one by one,
> Into the middle of the plank;
> And further there were none!

Wordsworth explained to Crabb Robinson that the subject of the poem was solitude, but surely that is only part of the truth?[5] Is the effect of the poem not to draw a parallel between solitude and death? When she so completely eludes us in death, a radical doubt is cast on our sense of sympathetically knowing the solitary child. Her aloofness in death reveals her essential aloofness while alive. Thus we sense, fleetingly, the personal, human mystery of death; and recognise in so doing yet one more form in which the mystery of life expresses itself. Wordsworth's surprise effect, then, seems intended to suggest the 'continuity' of life and death. An interpretation of a poem of this kind must be offered rather tentatively,

but what is certain is that this apparently slight piece never ceases to 'echo in the memory'.

Wordsworth's most substantial attempt to naturalise death in life is the poem *Yew-trees*. It stands apart from the other poems discussed, inasmuch as the main impulse of the poem is not to associate death with surprise or fear. *Yew-trees* resembles the sonnet briefly referred to, *The Trosachs*, in its lucid, steady view of death; but the conception of time in the two poems shows a marked difference. In *The Trosachs* Wordsworth regards the future as lucidly implied in the present scene, but he nevertheless bases the poem on the ordinary conception of time progressing in a continual flux from the present into a different future. In *Yew-trees* he expresses an image of time which yields no sense of real alteration or difference.

There seems to be some uncertainty regarding the date of composition of this poem, but Wordsworth dates it 1803, though it was only published in 1815. The year 1803 helps to link it with *The Simplon Pass* which was also written in 1803, or perhaps a little earlier. The first stage (the Lorton Vale passage) of *Yew-trees* uses a variation on the following paradox from *The Simplon Pass*.

> The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,

It is possible that, if the poem was only published in 1815, Wordsworth saw at some later time, between 1803 and 1815, that the variation already composed could be taken a great deal further and in due course added a long development in the shape of the Borrowdale section of the poem. This is speculation, but it would account for the difference in style (not one that weakens the poem) between the first and second stages.[6]

The opening variation on the theme from *The Simplon Pass* gives us so long a perspective of the principle of growth that growth seems unending, as though 'never to be decayed'. The darkness of the tree is no mere accident of lighting, it is part of the growth of the tree as much as any root or branch is: we must bear in mind the close-knit habit, the tough wood, and the dark, dense foliage.

> There is a Yew-tree, pride of Lorton Vale,
> Which to this day stands single, in the midst
> Of its own darkness, as it stood of yore:
> Not loth to furnish weapons for the bands
> Of Umfraville or Percy ere they marched
> To Scotland's heaths; or those that crossed the sea
> And drew their sounding bows at Azincour
> Perhaps at earlier Crecy, or Poictiers.
> Of vast circumference and gloom profound

> This solitary Tree! a living thing
> Produced too slowly ever to decay:
> Of form and aspect too magnificent
> To be destroyed.

The darkness is peculiar to the tree and has grown as the tree has grown. In that darkness the tree preserves, inviolate, its own remote past in the living present. Its secret is to grow so slowly and tenaciously that it seems to out-grow time itself or to reveal time as unending growth.

The vision of time as growth displaces the idea of decay and dissolution as the inescapable antagonist and victor in the drama of life. However, it remains for Wordsworth to realise imaginatively the proper function of the principle of decay and dissolution. In the second section of the poem (an afterthought as I believe) Wordsworth had the inspiration of presenting growth and decay as parallel in function, not antagonists in linear conflict with one another.

The image of the single tree yields to the image of four trees collaborating to form a natural temple. The temple must be a living one, because the principle it represents, decay and dissolution, is itself a living principle, and must be imagined as fully co-extensive with its contrary, growth. The following passage makes clear that for Wordsworth, as for Blake, Gothic form signified growth. Stated a little more broadly, convoluted organic form embodied in either Gothic architecture or Milton's verse-structure provided Wordsworth with a source of suggestion for the image of his natural temple.

> Huge trunks! and each particular trunk a growth
> Of intertwisted fibres serpentine
> Up-coiling, and inverterately convolved;
> Nor uninformed with Phantasy, and looks
> That threaten the profane; a pillared shade,
> Upon whose grassless floor of red-brown hue,
> By sheddings from the pining umbrage tinged
> Perennially —

This conveys a deep impression of an unyielding density of organic structure. We respond to mystery embodied in tenacious solidity, as in the sculpture of Henry Moore.

The concluding lines of the passage bring round the culmination of Wordsworth's variations on the phrase from *The Simplon Pass*. The word 'perennially' blends together perfectly the impression of the endless silent sifting of leaves and of the continual re-colouring of the red-brown floor. In other words we are poetically convinced that decay keeps pace with time or, otherwise, that time may be a

reflection of unending decay. As this point is reached, the matching of the first and second section of the poem is completed. They answer to one another's significance but also *for* one another's significance. Growth and decay are imagined together as parallel and unfailing principles.

The ghosts we vaguely discern are those we would expect to meet in contemplating the dimension of time: they reflect our own fitful and varied, but also consistent, recognitions of growth and decay.

> ghostly Shapes
> May meet at noontide; Fear and trembling Hope,
> Silence and Foresight; Death the Skeleton
> And Time the Shadow; —

The ghosts are united in listening to the river emerging from 'inmost caves'.

> or in mute repose
> To lie, and listen to the mountain flood
> Murmuring from Glaramara's inmost caves.

It seems natural to think of them as contemplating the unknown origin of the river of time. The phrases 'United worship' and 'mute repose' suggest a quality of reflection with which, guided by the poem, we readily associate ourselves. This depth and steadiness of contemplation represents a mature renewal or recreation of the unity of mind arising from youthful vitality which Wordsworth presents in poems like 'Strange fits of passion . . .'

## NOTES

All quotations from Wordsworth are taken from the Oxford Standard Authors edition revised by E. de Selincourt.

[1] In the sonnet 'This is my playes last scene, here heavens appoint . . .'

[2] De Quincey: *Confessions of an English Opium-eater*. A. and C. Black, London, 1901.

[3] Reproduced in Peter Quennell: *Romantic England — Writing and Painting 1717-1851*. Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1970.

[4] *The Diary of Henry Crabb Robinson* — An Abridgement, ed. Derek Hudson. O.U.P. London, 1967.

[5] De Selincourt comments: 'The M.S. readings quoted in the *app. crit.* are from a note-book in which the entries are, with three exceptions, poems written after 1812. The exceptions are: (1) two stanzas of *The Cuckoo*, one of which preserves a reading of 1807, the other one of 1815 . . .' He concludes that Wordsworth's date of 1803 is probably too early.

# REALISME ET ROMAN FRANCAIS AU XIXe SIECLE

Quelques réflexions sur la définition de STENDHAL:
'Un roman: c'est un miroir qu'on promène le long du chemin.'
*(Le Rouge et le Noir*, I, 13)

*par* P.G. PESTUREAU

Stendhal définit le roman comme un 'miroir'. Cette profession de foi réaliste est-elle sincère, et peut-on réduire le roman français du XIXe siècle au strict réalisme?

Certes Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert, Zola, Maupassant utilisent la réalité qui les entoure comme source d'inspiration et veulent donner au roman un fondement moins fantaisiste qu'aux origines. Cependant on s'aperçoit vite que leurs romans sont très subjectifs et que leur réalisme est souvent en fait l'expression de leurs préférences, de leurs rêves, de leurs fantasmes.

Mais la fiction romanesque elle-même ne nous ramène-t-elle pas à la vérité profonde de l'homme? Créant des types, composant une fiction, mettant en forme un monde original, l'écrivain nous révèle davantage sur nous-mêmes que s'il se contentait de reproduire photographiquement le monde.

* * *

Par trois fois dans *Le Rouge et le Noir* Stendhal cite ou évoque cette définition qu'il attribue d'abord à un certain Saint-Réal, abbé et historien français du XVIIe siècle: si le réalisme romanesque avait besoin d'un patron, sinon d'un intercesseur, que pourrait-on rêver de mieux? Cette phrase se trouve d'abord en exergue au chapitre 13 de la Première Partie, 'Les bas à jour', où se dévoilent les progrès de la passion de Madame de Rênal pour Julien, et où celui-ci décide: 'je me dois à moi-même d'être son amant' avant de déclarer à sa future maîtresse: 'je vous aime avec passion' [1]. Sachant que Stendhal écrit en pleine période de 'renaissance morale' due à la Restauration du Trône et de l'Autel, régime qu'il déteste, on est légitimement amené à penser que la définition attribuée à un abbé n'est destinée qu'à écarter le blâme moral de l'auteur, à l'excuser auprès des censeurs éventuels; c'est un moyen de décliner toute responsabilité!

Cette explication est confirmée par la seconde allusion à la même définition:

> Eh, monsieur, — dit Stendhal au lecteur dont il imagine la critique à propos, cette fois, du comportement de Mathilde de La Mole — un roman est un miroir qui se promène sur une grande route. Tantôt il reflète à vos yeux l'azur des cieux, tantôt la fange des bourbiers de la route. Et l'homme qui porte le miroir dans sa hotte sera par vous accusé d'être immoral! Son miroir montre la fange, et vous accusez le miroir! Accusez bien plutôt le grand chemin où est le bourbier, et plus encore l'inspecteur des routes qui laisse l'eau croupir et le bourbier se former.[2]

A nouveau donc Stendhal plaide non-coupable en décrivant la folle passion de la jeune aristocrate pour le séduisant roturier, mais, et c'est bien dans la manière de ce maître de l'ironie, il encadre son plaidoyer de l'affirmation que Mathilde est '(un) personnage tout-à-fait d'imagination' et que 'Maintenant qu'il est bien convenu que le caractère de Mathilde est impossible dans notre siècle, non moins prudent que vertueux, je crains moins d'irriter en continuant le récit des folies de cette aimable fille.'[3]

Dernière allusion à la même formule dans le chapitre 'La discussion' (II,22). Il s'agit là de s'excuser auprès des lecteurs d'un long développement politique, que Stendhal fait mine de juger fastidieux — ou offensant pour certains —, à quoi son éditeur est censé répondre:

> Si vos personnages ne parlent pas politique, ce ne sont plus des Français de 1830, et votre livre n'est plus un miroir, comme vous en avez la prétention . . .[4].

L'usage de cette définition me semble donc surtout de circonstance: plaidoyer pro domo en face des juges bornés, et clin d'oeil ironique 'To the Happy Few' pour qui écrit Stendhal.

Cependant, si l'on désire approfondir les rapports du réalisme avec les romans du XIXe siècle, et particulièrement les romans d'Henri Beyle, il vaut la peine de chercher jusqu'à quel point ceux-ci s'appuient sur la réalité, mais aussi jusqu'où ils échappent au réalisme strict par le génie, l'art, l'originalité de l'auteur, que ce soit Stendhal, Balzac, Flaubert ou Zola.

L'héritage le plus ancien du *roman* est certes l'invraisemblable, le chimérique, l'illusion, comme le dit encore le *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* en 1694: 'ouvrage en prose contenant des aventures fabuleuses', et comme l'avaient montré aussi bien Rabelais

qu'Honoré d'Urfé ou Voltaire, ce dernier mêlant à plaisir le burlesque, la parodie, le sérieux et le constat à valeur philosophique dans ses *Contes*. Mais assez tôt les auteurs de romans ont voulu donner un fondement réaliste à leurs récits; c'est le réalisme psychologique ou moral du roman précieux et de *La Princesse de Clèves*; le réalisme sociologique du roman de moeurs, avec par exemple le *Roman bourgeois* de Furetière, la *Vie de Marianne* de Marivaux ou *Le Paysan perverti* de Restif de la Bretonne; le pseudo-réalisme du roman picaresque où Gil Blas de Santillane de Lesage donne la main à Jacques le Fataliste de Diderot; le réalisme du roman pseudo-historique: citons encore *La Princesse de Clèves* qui mêle la cour d'Henri II à celle du jeune Louis XIV que l'auteur connaissait mieux, et renvoyons le lecteur aux évocations romancées d'Alexandre Dumas . . .

L'effort vers le réalisme va se poursuivre, conscient, constant et obstiné tout au long de ce siècle d'or du roman qu'est le XIXe siècle, en dépit des tendances romantiques du début — mais elles invitaient aussi à imiter Walter Scott . . . — et grâce à l'influence du scientisme et à l'exigence d'écrivains désireux avant tout de faire surgir du monde de la fiction 'la vérité, l'âpre vérité'.[3] Evénements historiques vécus et chronique sociale du temps présent vont d'abord servir de toile de fond 'active' au roman; c'est Waterloo dans *La Chartreuse de Parme* ou le monde de la Restauration dans *Le Rouge et le Noir*: Verrières et les petites intrigues provinciales, 'L'église neuve' symbole de la puissance retrouvée de l'Eglise, le séminaire de Besançon dans la première partie; le monde parisien dans la seconde avec l'hôtel de la Mole comme coulisses du pouvoir: c'est bien une 'Chronique de 1830' que traverse le chemin suivi par Julien Sorel. Le réalisme de Balzac, lui, s'appuie toujours sur le monde socio-économique — argent, pouvoir . . . — de son époque; le cadre de *L'Education sentimentale* montre Flaubert attentif à l'histoire de son temps: bourgeoisie et révolution; Zola croit rendre compte à travers une 'vitre' — son idéal esthétique — de l'évolution de la France du Second Empire comme son maître Claude Bernard étudie les transformations biologiques des espèces.

Dans le détail même de la vie des personnages, Stendhal, c'est bien connu, s'inspire de faits réels, et son 'miroir' suit, en racontant l'histoire de Julien, la vie et la mort de Berthet ou Lafargue qui ont défrayé la chronique judiciaire et fourni de copie la *Gazette des Tribunaux*. Chez Balzac, Nucingen est d'abord le banquier Rotschild et Vautrin le fameux Vidocq. Marie Arnoux, de *L'Education sentimentale* ne reflète-t-elle pas madame Schlésinger? Ainsi non seulement ces romanciers semblent souscrire avant la lettre à l'affirmation de Georges Duhamel: 'Je tiens que le romancier est l'historien du présent', mais ils s'inspirent d'êtres qui ont vécu autour d'eux. Stendhal, nous le savons, ne perdait jamais une

occasion, d'ailleurs, d'accumuler ces 'petits faits vrais' qui fondent valablement la psychologie de ses personnages romanesques, et cette exigence de réalisme s'accompagne de l'usage d'un style qui tend à la rigueur et à la simplicité, sinon à la litote classique dans certains passages célèbres, l'exécution de Julien ou la mort de Madame de Rénal, par exemple, dans les dernières pages du roman. Style d'un admirateur du *Code civil* napoléonien, où puisse se refléter comme dans un miroir d'une absolue clarté l'âme et les actes des héros que l'on a suivi sur le chemin de la vie, la simplicité de la ligne narrative reproduisant son itinéraire chronologique. La forme du récit se compliquera au XXe siècle, mais le style de Stendhal est déjà l'annonce d'un réalisme formel plus systématique, le style de constat photographique du 'Nouveau Roman' chez Robbe-Grillet ou Butor.

Mais il n'est nul besoin d'effort pour voir apparaître l'antithèse immédiate de cette idée de 'réalisme'. J'ai déjà indiqué quelles raisons profondes — et de mauvaise foi! — avaient pu pousser Stendhal à répéter une définition du roman très simple, trop simple . . .

Tous ceux qui écrivent, tous ceux qui lisent, savent bien que même le style le plus anonyme est une mise en forme, que l'expression change et présente la réalité sous tel angle, telle lumière, avec telle ou telle connotation, de façon d'autant plus complexe et particulière que le sujet choisi se rattache davantage aux préoccupations de l'artiste, 'chasse au bonheur' de Stendhal, 'démiurgie' mystique de Balzac, 'être-pour-l'art'[6] de Flaubert. Même le photographe cadre, choisit, révèle personnellement. L'écriture est en elle-même — et c'est sa victoire ou sa malédiction — purification artistique, transposition, sinon transmutation. L'art est d'ailleurs la seule opération alchimique dont nous soyons certains jusqu'à ce jour qu'elle ait atteint son but: transmuer le plomb des jours en or de l'éternité.

Même chez les plus réalistes et impersonnels des romanciers l'oeuvre se nourrit de subjectivité, de sentiments et de passions, de rêves inaccomplis et d'imagination. Qui forme, déforme; qui écrit, se décrit. Le miroir alors s'embue, se trouble, et sa surface désormais heureusement infidèle à un simple constat scientifique reflète plus l'âme de celui qui le porte dans sa hotte d'écrivain que la réalité d'alentour. Les options et opinions politiques et philosophiques de Stendhal sont évidentes dans *Le Rouge et le Noir*, bien sûr: haine de la Restauration, qui se nourrit à la fois de nostalgie bonapartiste et d'anticléricalisme virulent; passion de l'énergie morale; individualisme forcené; 'égotisme' et désir; goût du masque et du jeu; tout cela décrit mieux Henri Beyle à travers Julien Sorel qu'il n'évoque les modèles historiques et anecdotiques du héros. Que nous importent Berthet et Lafargue, pâles

assassins; c'est Stendhal lui-même qui revendique son crime et sa révolte face au jury de Besançon; c'est lui qui rêve qu'une Mathilde lui rend le culte posthume réservé aux demi-dieux et que Madame de Rênal s'abandonne à la mort, ne pouvant lui survivre. Flaubert n'a-t-il pas avoué: 'Madame Bovary, c'est moi!', et ce n'est pas qu'une boutade; et Frédéric Moreau, c'est encore lui, d'une certaine façon . . . Zola lui-même, le maître du Naturalisme qui devait être l'achèvement scientifique d'un réalisme trop incertain et subjectif, Zola lui-même plaide ouvertement pour son socialisme optimiste et doit ses principaux mérites d'écrivain à son tempérament épique: le 'roman expérimental' verse dans la poésie lyrique ou l'épopée. Quant à Maupassant, comment ne pas deviner ses hantises et ses hallucinations derrière les notations les plus banales. La fin du Naturalisme, c'est d'ailleurs Huysmans qui la scelle, ouvrant la porte à la réaction 'surnaturaliste'.

Nostalgie des pays perdus, rêves des amours adolescentes, imagination romanesque — et on sait quelle acception poétique a gardé cet adjectif —, toutes ces sources de fiction s'épanchent évidemment dans le roman du XIXe siècle, quelque réaliste qu'on le veuille. Cette double postulation me semble d'ailleurs l'une des raisons pour lesquelles Stendhal recourt à l'ironie ou à l'humour quand il risque de trop s'identifier à son héros, et de partager avec lui le charme d'une situation particulièrement romanesque. Ainsi Julien sur sa grande échelle, lors du premier rendez-vous dans la chambre de Mathilde de la Mole, a-t-il moins l'air d'un amant heureux que d'un homme traqué; ce ne sont pas des fleurs qu'il tient à la main, mais un pistolet, et bien d'autres dans ses poches, et il sort même un poignard avant de regarder sous le lit de Mathilde?! Le comique de la situation, mais surtout l'humour avec lequel Stendhal la décrit sont un signe du pudeur dans un épisode où sa propre sensibilité vibre trop vivement. Mais c'est aussi la preuve que la subjectivité s'ajoute à la transmutation artistique pour faire éclater les limites insupportables du réalisme.

Bien sûr, au XIXe siècle, aucun écrivain n'aura l'audace d'écrire: '(Cette) histoire est entièrement vraie, puisque je l'ai imaginée d'un bout à l'autre'.[8] Il faut attendre la révolution esthétique du XXe siècle pour qu'un romancier ose proclamer une telle profession de foi: l'artiste crée par son imagination un monde plus vrai que celui que pourrait atteindre n'importe quelle exigence réaliste.

Si le roman est un miroir, ce ne peut être que ce 'miroir de concentration' dont parlait Victor Hugo à propos de son idéal du drame. Par la convergence de l'éclairage projeté — ne suivons-nous pas uniquement la 'route' de Julien Sorel, ou l'errance maladive de Frédéric Moreau? —, par la concentration du 'spot'

lumineux de la conscience et de l'art, l'auteur a isolé, fait ressortir, transformé un être anonyme et tiré la quintessence de la réalité. Il a choisi et, par là, a fait naître une vérité humaine. Il nous force à prendre conscience, nous lecteurs, des rapports humains éternels, à mieux les comprendre et les analyser. Le 'type', que ce soit Julien l'ambitieux, Mathilde la 'condottiere' de l'amour, Madame de Rênal la femme douce, ou plus encore les types de Balzac, tous éclairent la psychologie générale: on pénètre mieux l'avarice, après le Père Grandet; on sympathise mieux avec l'amertume d'un être désespéré après avoir rencontré Emma Bovary . . .

L'art même et la beauté de la composition romanesque nous rendent sensible une de ces Idées platoniciennes qui est une face de la Vérité: la Beauté idéale. Je pense surtout à l'équilibre admirable du *Rouge et le Noir:* deux thèmes et deux couleurs, deux parties et deux mondes, deux femmes et un héros à la double postulation, ambition et sensibilité exacerbée, enfin ce sacrifice final qui entraîne dans le sillage du héros les autres personnages principaux . . . Mais l'itinéraire d'Etienne Lantier, dans *Germinal* de Zola, sa lutte sur fond mythique de monstre dévoreur — la mine —, fait naître le même sentiment d'un achèvement essentiel, d'une réussite vers la Beauté, grâce à quoi le roman donne la main à la poésie, particulièrement à l'épopée. 'Moyen d'expression privilégié du tragique de l'homme' selon l'heureuse définition de Malraux, le roman sous nos yeux transforme la vie en *destin.* C'est sans doute ce que Camus voulut exprimer par 'Le roman fabrique du destin sur mesure', oeuvre comblant à partir des scories du réel notre désir d'éternité.

Les grands romans, et ceux du XIXe siècle n'y manquent pas, atteignent donc bien des idées morales, des intuitions esthétiques et philosophiques à la fois, et, par la stylisation, témoignent du pouvoir de 'catharsis', de libération et purification rituelles, qui est celui même de l'art le plus haut. Pouvoir véritablement psychanalytique où le miroir, peut-être devenu celui de Narcisse, nous découvre notre propre conscience profonde . .

* * *

Constat objectif, narration documentaire, c'est évidemment insuffisant. Certes le romancier du XIXe siècle comprend qu'il n'aura aucun crédit s'il ne s'appuie sur la réalité mieux que ses prédécesseurs ne l'ont fait. Il s'en sert donc, de cette foisonnante réalité, objective dans le monde qui l'entoure, ou subjective, surgie de ses désirs et de ses choix. Puis, qu'il le veuille ou non, qu'il en ait conscience ou non, il compose, déforme, transpose, stylise, et c'est ce qui rend son oeuvre grande ou immortelle. André Malraux tire le bilan d'un siècle de roman quand il écrit: 'Le romancier doit (. . .) faire concurrence à la réalité qui lui est im-

posée, celle de la vie, tantôt en semblant s'y soumettre, et tantôt en la transformant pour rivaliser avec elle.[1] Ainsi peut-il satisfaire la quête du lecteur, mariant rêve et réalité.

Aucune métaphore optique, et Stendhal le sait mieux que quiconque, bien sûr, ne rend compte exactement d'une démarche esthétique qui est à la fois celle d'un analyste et d'un démiurge. Le miroir qu'il prétendait promener le long d'une route parfois lumineuse et parfois fangeuse est toujours un miroir déformant, un miroir infidèle ou ironique; un miroir 'égotiste'; il peut même être créateur, comme ce miroir de Jean Cocteau dans *Orphée*, d'où surgit la mort sous les traits hiératiques de Maria Casarès. On pourrait parler de la loupe qui semble l'instrument préféré de Balzac, mais ce serait aussi une loupe bien subjective, cependant que Zola nous attire plus par ses thèmes épiques et sa vision mythique que par son idéal jamais atteint du roman-vitre.

Dans le même temps où la photographie poussait le peintre à interpréter de plus en plus originalement son sujet, le romancier, transcendant à la fois le romanesque superficiel et gratuit et le réalisme plat, sans âme ni valeur artistique, découvre la voie royale du roman moderne, fiction et vérité, témoignage et beauté.

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**NOTES**

[1] Stendhal, *Romans*, Vol. I, Pléiade., pp. 291-292.
[2] ibid., p. 557.
[3] ibid. pp. 556-557.
[4] ibid. p. 576.
[5] ibid. p. 215.
[6] Sartre, *L'idiot de la famille*, passim.
[7] *Le Rouge et le Noir*, II, 16.
[8] Boris Vian, *L'Ecume des jours*, (Avant-propos).

# JOHN DONNE'S 'SONGS AND SONETS': THE POETIC VALUE OF ARGUMENT.

*by* R.T. JONES

Among the poets of the seventeenth century, John Donne is the one who has been most strikingly rediscovered in the twentieth century. The discovery was important to T.S. Eliot, helping him to find his own voice as a poet — helping him to make a fresh start, liberating himself from the poetic conventions of the Edwardians. And the discovery has been important for many readers of poetry, giving us a richer sense of the possibilities of poetry than we had found in the usual anthologies. Instead of the conventional currency of, say,

> We are the music makers
> And we are the dreamers of dreams,

we found the refreshing immediacy of Donne's

> For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love;

the very voice of a man speaking —

> Busy old fool, unruly Sun;

the voice of a man grasping the real experience in its immediate presence —

> Dear love, for nothing less than thee
> Would I have broke this happy dream;

or —

> Let me pour forth
> My tears before thy face, whilst I stay here;

or, to take one of the best known of the *Songs and Sonets*,

> I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I
> Did, till we loved?

The directness of the communication is striking. Here is no archaic poetic diction, but the human voice. And many readers have tried, as I have, to communicate an enthusiasm for Donne by that most direct and effective method: saying 'Listen to this!' and reading one of the poems aloud. It generally works; the listener is seized with wonder and delight at the clarity of this voice out of the past, still speaking straight and true through the centuries. That, at least, is often the effect of the *beginning* of a poem by Donne. But you read on, and find that the poem is changing into a far more difficult thing; reading aloud as I described, you find yourself offering your listener some strenuous and ingeniously contorted argument, which you can't yourself quite believe in;

your listener's facial expression changes from unaffected delight to a strained willingness to be delighted — and you begin to wish you had stopped your recital after, say, the first stanza. 'The Good Morrow' may be used to verify this account:

I wonder by my troth, what thou, and I
  Did, till we loved? were we not weaned till then,
But sucked on country pleasures, childishly?
  Or snorted we in the seven sleepers' den?
'Twas so; but this, all pleasures fancies be.
If ever any beauty I did see,
Which I desired, and got, 'twas but a dream of thee.

And now good morrow to our waking souls,
  Which watch not one another out of fear;
For love, all love of other sights controls,
  And makes one little room, an every where.
Let sea-discoverers to new worlds have gone,
Let maps to others, worlds on worlds have shown,
Let us possess one world, each hath one, and is one.

My face in thine eye, thine in mine appears,
  And true plain hearts do in the faces rest,
Where can we find two better hemispheres
  Without sharp north, without declining west?
What ever dies, was not mixed equally;
If our two loves be one, or, thou and I
Love so alike, that none do slacken, none can die.

When F.R. Leavis reviewed *The Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse* in 1935, he quoted the first stanza of this poem and commented: 'At this we cease reading as students, or as connoisseurs of anthology-pieces, and read on as we read the living.' — A true and important observation. But I hardly think he could have said the same of the last stanza. It is this change in the tone of the poem, from the direct, colloquial immediacy of the opening to the ingenious and only half-convincing argument that follows, that seems to me to be characteristic of Donne's *Songs and Sonets*. And this is what makes him specially interesting.

For many other poets have achieved a natural and vibrantly human voice in poetry; Chaucer sustains such tones far more consistently than does Donne. Other poets have caught the experience, the very texture of the passing moment, with more ease; Shakespeare does it continually, and Browning often seems to be doing little else. What seems to me to be particularly interesting and moving in Donne is that he achieves the direct colloquial expression of a felt experience momentarily, against some strong internal resistance that gives it a special force, even a violence; that

he has to fight to hold on to the reality that he has grasped. Consider, for example, 'The Sun Rising':

> Busy old fool, unruly sun,
> Why dost thou thus,
> Through windows, and through curtains call on us?
> Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?
> Saucy pedantic wretch, go chide
> Late school-boys, and sour prentices,
> Go tell court-huntsmen, that the King will ride,
> Call country ants to harvest offices;
> Love, all alike, no season knows, nor clime,
> Nor hours, days, months, which are the rags of time.
>
> Thy beams, so reverend, and strong
> Why shouldst thou think?
> I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink,
> But that I would not lose her sight so long:
> If her eyes have not blinded thine,
> Look, and tomorrow late, tell me,
> Whether both th'Indias of spice and mine
> Be where thou left'st them, or lie here with me.
> Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
> And thou shalt hear, All here in one bed lay.
>
> She'is all states, and all princes, I,
> Nothing else is.
> Princes do but play us; compared to this,
> All honour's mimic; all wealth alchemy.
> Thou sun art half as happy as we,
> In that the world's contracted thus;
> Thine age asks ease, and since thy duties be
> To warm the world, that's done in warming us.
> Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere;
> This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere.

First we have the direct, spontaneous, passionate utterance, 'Busy old fool!' — expressing the felt conviction of the lover that his love is not subject to times and seasons. This is felt, we might say, in the heart. But the head and the heart are not always in agreement on these matters. A modern verse expresses the contradiction thus:

> I put my hand upon my heart
> And swore that we would never part.
> I wonder what I would have said
> If I had put it on my head.

The sun, in Donne's poem, reminds his head that times and

seasons exist. There is a note of anger in the speaker's rejection of this reminder, a note of scorn in his devaluation of daylight time; and this anger seems to me to register the stress between the heart's conviction and the thinking mind's resistance to that conviction. The poem explicitly insists that nothing matters outside the room where the lovers are; but the first stanza contains in its rhetoric a lively awareness of a populated world outside, engaged in all its various time-governed activities — hunting and harvesting and opening shops and going to school. Love, perhaps, knows no seasons or seasonal changes; but Donne's restless mind knows them, and cannot forget them.

Some critics have maintained that, in Donne, thought and feeling were united. But in these poems the passionate apprehension and the reasoning intellect are usually at war, and their reconciliations are hard-won and short. Why was this?

There can be no full answer. But T.S. Eliot's observation (in another context) is relevant:

> Sensibility alters from generation to generation in everybody, whether we will or no; but expression is only altered by a man of genius. A great many second-rate poets, in fact, are second-rate just for this reason, that they have not the sensitiveness and consciousness to perceive that they feel differently from the preceding generation, and therefore must use words differently.

For a poet of Donne's time, the stress must have been acute: so much had changed and was changing in every aspect of life that one seemed to inhabit a different world from one's father's. And for John Donne in particular, the tensions must have been exceptionally great. Secretly educated in the Catholic faith and devotion to the memory of St Thomas More — his mother's great-uncle — the habits of thought in which he had been trained were both more archaic and more rigid than those of his Protestant contemporaries; at the same time his sensibility was alert and wholly contemporary. The tension between sensibility and intellect is evident in nearly all the *Songs and Sonets*.

'Belief,' says D.H. Lawrence, 'is a profound emotion that has the mind's connivance.' He applies this not only to religious belief, but to 'real belief in *anything*.'

In 'The Sun Rising', the profound emotion is the poet's conviction of the transcendent supremacy of love and the unreality of the ordinary world. This emotional apprehension seeks the mind's connivance; and in this it is resisted by the wholly rational knowledge that there *is* a world outside and that this is in some senses real. Of course, as soon as I say 'in some senses real' I am on metaphysical ground; John Donne is rightly called a metaphysical

poet. Most of us now, and most people at any time, are content to leave metaphysical questions to the experts; most of us are not disturbed by frequent doubts about what is and what is not real. And that is why for most of us, most of the time, the openings of Donne's poems are all we care about — those openings that communicate the *felt* reality of the individual's 'being in the situation'; we are content to accept that that's the way he felt, so that's the way it was, and that's all we want. But for Donne there was always the further, pressing problem of how to justify the felt apprehension, to procure the mind's connivance, even perhaps to bludgeon the poor intellect into a worried acquiescence.

The expression of scorn in the first stanza of the poem, then, is an attempt to beat down the resisting intellect which wants to assert that of course lovers' seasons, like those of everybody else, must run to the motions of the sun, since the lovers are human and must stand in *some* relation to the rest of the world — they must get out of bed — and they must grow tired, grow old, 'ripen and rot', all of which are functions of time. The central tension of the poem is created as a tension in the reader by the rhetorical question 'Must to thy motions lovers' seasons run?'; the heart cries 'No', but the head must answer 'Yes': we experience both answers simultaneously.

Against the power of time represented by the sun's beams, the poem offers an argument: 'I could eclipse and cloud them with a wink'. It will be agreed, I hope, that this is an argument devised to paralyse the intellect rather than to satisfy it; it is a bad argument, althouth it makes good poetry; and this is true of the arguments in many of Donne's poems. I shall suggest later that much of the point of 'The Flea' depends upon the outrageous illogicality of its arguments; and when the unknown editor of Donne's poems (after the poet's death) prepared a second edition, he put 'The Flea' first, instead of 'The Good Morrow' — perhaps to warn the reader not to take the arguments, as arguments, too seriously.

Of course one cannot eclipse the sun by closing one's eyes: one can only give oneself an illusion of its eclipse. Nor can one circumvent the power of time by asking rhetorical questions: one can only confuse one's awareness of it. As long as he continues to argue, Donne can sustain the illusion, and resist the attacks of his reason long enough to allow the emotional truth to establish a foothold. Yet he never wholly convinces himself, and at the end of the second stanza he is asserting what he wants to assert with a wry recognition of the absurd consequences of his audacious contention — this is what his logic has brought him to:

> Ask for those kings whom thou saw'st yesterday,
> And thou shalt hear, all here in one bed lay.

Capacious bed indeed; over-populated bed. The intellect is not

satisfied, but perhaps bemused. And in the last stanza, with a coolly insolent twist of the argument, the speaker abandons his previous demand that the sun stay out, and reverses it to urge the tired old sun to stay inside. The 'truth' that we recognize here is of the dramatic kind, as if the lover were mocking some policeman, or rent collector, who tried to interrupt the lovers' intimacy — first refusing to let him in, and then, secure and good-humoured in his love, inviting him to come in and have a drink.

A comparable poem among the 'Holy Sonnets' is 'Death be not proud . . .':

> Death be not proud, though some have called thee
> Mighty and dreadful, for, thou are not so,
> For, those, whom thou think'st, thou dost overthrow,
> Die not, poor death, nor yet canst thou kill me;
> From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
> Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow,
> And soonest our best men with thee do go,
> Rest of their bones, and soul's delivery.
> Thou art slave to fate, chance, kings, and desperate men,
> And dost with poison, war, and sickness dwell,
> And poppy, or charms can make us sleep as well,
> And better than thy stroke; why swell'st thou then?
> One short sleep past, we wake eternally,
> And death shall be no more, Death thou shalt die.

Donne could not conceivably have been unaware of how bad his arguments are: their very badness must be taken as part of the meaning of the poem. To take one example: if we accept his contention — valid as far as it goes — that when Fate overwhelms you with a flood, or Chance directs the lightning on to your head, or a king has your head cut off, or a desperate man cuts your throat, then Death has no choice but must come to you — then perhaps we shall be less terrified of Death as an abstraction (whatever that may be), but only to transfer our terror, undiminished, to fate, chance, kings and desperate men — leaving our predicament, if anything, a little worse. But we should not be thinking in terms of terror at all if we had taken seriously the arguments that had come earlier in the poem, for example:

> From rest and sleep, which but thy pictures be,
> Much pleasure, then from thee, much more must flow.

We don't, I think, take this seriously because, in the first place, we do not accept the premise that the relation between sleep and death is in all relevant respects the same as the relation between a

picture and the thing depicted; and in the second place we cannot for a moment believe that if a picture gives us pleasure the thing it depicts must necessarily give us more pleasure. We have been watching a conjuring trick; we do not 'believe' that the skull has been turned into a white rabbit, but perhaps we admire the sleight-of-hand all the more for that.

The arguments, bad as they are, are necessary: there is still a resisting intellect to be teased or tricked into connivance. And, as Donne says of his acceptance of the Anglican faith,

> I had a longer work to do than many other men; for I was first to blot out certain impressions of the Roman religion, and to wrastle both against the examples and against the reasons, by which some hold was taken; and some anticipations early laid upon my conscience, both by persons who by nature had a power and superiority over my will, and others who by their learning and good life, seemed to me justly to claim an interest for the guiding, and rectifying of mine understanding in these matters.

'These matters' were, in this context, matters of Christian doctrine; but the habit of mind that impelled him to 'wrastle . . . against the reasons, by which some hold was taken' can be recognized in the love-poems of *Songs and Sonets* as well as in the Divine Poems. In both love and faith, what one admires in Donne is his refusal to be intimidated by reasons: his uncompromising affirmations of felt convictions, followed by the 'wrastle' of the intellect to catch up and to deal with the implications of the felt truth.

But this account must be modified to take account of the experimental nature of some of the poems. For the felt convictions that Donne affirms are not always, one suspects, his 'actual' convictions, but ones that he imagines himself feeling; the felt truth whose implications he grapples with may sometimes be one of several possible truths, and his commitment to it a provisional one. The uncompromising affirmation may then register not the culmination but an earlier step in a process of discovery. It is not absurd to ask, 'How can I tell what I feel till I see what I say?' So in 'The Sun Rising' there is an element of experiment — the experiment of *saying* 'Busy old fool, unruly sun,' to see what follows.

We tend these days to value sincerity as it deserves, but at the same time to take a rather simple-minded view of what it is and how it may be achieved. A great deal of the process of learning consists of behaving as if we already knew something that we don't yet know — living our way into the truth of it, as it were. A boy of thirteen needs to become a boy of fourteen, and this involves far

more than the involuntary physical growth and change — he needs to achieve a new way of being, a new relationship with himself and with others. He prepares himself by trying to behave as if he *were* fourteen, creating a provisional self for himself and trying it to see if it fits. Sometimes when courage is necessary we act as if we had it: 'stiffen the sinews, summon up the blood', and the quality we imitate begins to come into real existence. Donne asserts the conviction that Death shall die in the hope, perhaps, that when he says it the conviction will turn out to be his own. 'Being oneself' is not a passive process.

In both 'Death be not proud' and 'The Sun Rising' there is an enactment, as if on a stage, of an encounter between man and more-than-man — the mere man in audacious confrontation with incomparably greater power that will in the end overwhelm him. For us there is the spectator's delight in watching the man teasing, mocking, abusing, something we are afraid of (and so, surely must *he* be). There is an element of performance in the poems. A too simple notion of 'sincerity' may make it hard for us to allow a poet to say things he does not yet believe; and it may be useful to remind ourselves that we don't begrudge Shakespeare a variety of dramatic voices, nor charge him with insincerity when he gives persuasive expression to several contradictory beliefs in the same play. Donne, like Shakespeare, played many parts. There is a portrait of him in which he adopts the pose of the Melancholy Lover; and when he was near death he posed in his shroud for a sculptural representation of the resurrection of the dead. Of his poems, Donne once wrote in a letter to a friend,

> You know my uttermost when it was best, and even then I did best when I had least truth in my subject.

What truth, then, can we find in 'The Flea?' No statement in the poem seems to carry conviction. We have to treat it, I think, rather as a scene from a play, without stage directions. The lovers are evidently together — quite intimately so — and if the flea has been pursued before being caught, they are engaged in a friendly and collaborative activity, perhaps partly undressed, perhaps in bed; and it may be that the question proposed for debate in the poem is already of academic interest only.

> Mark but this flea, and mark in this,
> How little that which thou deny'st me is;
> Me it sucked first, and now sucks thee,
> And in this flea, our two bloods mingled be;
> Confess it, this cannot be said
> A sin, or shame, or loss of maidenhead,
> Yet this enjoys before it woo,

And pampered swells with one blood made of two,
And this, alas, is more than we would do.

Oh stay, three lives in one flea spare,
Where we almost, nay more than married are.
This flea is you and I, and this
Our marriage bed, and marriage temple is;
Though parents grudge, and you, we'are met,
And cloistered in these living walls of jet.
Though use make you apt to kill me,
Let not to this, self murder added be,
And sacrilege, three sins in killing three.

Cruel and sudden, hast thou since
Purpled thy nail, in blood of innocence?
In what could this flea guilty be,
Except in that drop which it sucked from thee?
Yet thou triumph'st, and say'st that thou
Find'st not thyself, nor me the weaker now:
'Tis true, then learn how false, fears be;
Just so much honour, when thou yield'st to me,
Will waste, as this flea's death took life from thee.

The opening line parodies a preacher's *exemplum*, and the argument that follows could not hope to convince the most moronic of ladies. That the lady is far from moronic soon becomes clear. The opening of the second stanza indicates that she is about to express her comment on the argument by killing the flea — a wholly apt rejoinder, which shows that, far from being bewildered by the argument, she is enjoying it. The melodramatic opening of the third stanza is addressed to a lady who appreciates hilarious parody of the language of the tragic stage, and later in the same stanza we hear of her making a verbal rejoinder to the argument that fits it perfectly — and in fact proves unanswerable. The man then nicely displays *his* mastery of a mode of argument generally regarded as feminine: driven out of one position, he magically reappears at the opposite one — 'Tis true . . .' — and attacks the lady's position from there. What the poem seems to present, then, is the use of argument as a form of love-play, and a more complex relation between 'mind' and 'heart' than is assumed by Dryden when he complains that Donne

> perplexes the minds of the fair sex with nice speculations of philosophy, when he should engage their hearts, and entertain them with the softnesses of love.

Against this it is interesting to set an observation by Raquel

Welch, which seems to me to throw more light on the nature and function of pre-Restoration love poetry. 'The brain,' she said (but perhaps she meant 'the mind'), 'is an erogenous zone'. Donne, by this account, knew more than Dryden about the hardnesses, if not the softnesses, of love.

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# THE HOTTENTOT EVE:
## A MYTH IN SOUTH AFRICAN LITERATURE

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The myth of the Hottentot Eve in South African literature has to be pieced together from several diverse and scattered sources. In the seventeenth century she usually has no name; in the eighteenth she acquires one and achieves apotheosis so successfully that by the next century she has gone into business; in the twentieth century she rises and she falls. She is a manifestation of the white man's view of the interior and, with the pressures of the Hottentots as a political factor in the course of South African history, she changes her shape and her effect. Her appearances are the parameters of the course literature has taken in South Africa.

The first English traveller to land at the Cape of Good Hope and describe it in some literary detail was Sir Thomas Herbert (1606-1682). Herbert's entry of 1 July, 1627, was as elegant as any Carolean progress and, like a true diplomat's assistant and rover, he named the first foothills he beheld, Green Point ridge and Signal Hill, King James Mount and King Charles Mount respectively. He reserved the tallest of them (Devil's Peak) for himself — it became Herbert's Mount. In surveying the measurements of Table Mountain, he multiplied its impressiveness by three — from 3 549 feet to 11 853 feet — an exaggeration entirely in line with his general tendency to inflate his overseas experience.

As Norman H. Mackenzie establishes in his 'South African Travel Literature in the Seventeenth Century',[1] Herbert was vastly more interested in style than in exact reporting. His *Some Yeares Travaile into Afrique and the Greater Asia* went into four editions (1634, 1638, 1665, 1677), each an extensive revision and elaboration of the notes he made on board the vessels that landed him at the Cape on his way to and from his real objective, Persia. Herbert's account of the Cape appears in Raven-Hart's *Before van Riebeeck*,[2] with the variant readings that show Herbert's keen involvement with matching the style of his travelogue to the literary fashions prevalent at each date of printing.

The Hottentot Eve's first recorded appearance in the literature takes place under these circumstances. She is one of Herbert's 'most savage of all savages.' Commenting on her and her fellow maidens' nudity, he writes:

> . . . their bodies are naked, save that a thong or girdle of raw leather circles them, a square peece (like the back of a Glove) is fastened to it, serving to cover their *pudenda*.[3]

Anatomical details are stretched into gross libels: the Hottentot women 'give suck, the Uberous dugg stretched over her naked shoulder.' (p. 18) But appearance gives way to Puritan prurience when he continues:

> But I cannot commend their modesty, the woman (upon receipt of anything) returning her gratitude by discovering her shame, a curtesie taught them by some ill-bred Boore, our men I hope have more civility. (p. 16)

This image of the bemused Hottentot woman, smiling vertically from between butterfly-shaped labia at the passing English Euphues, has a companion image. Herbert tells another whopper: 'Most of the men are Semi-Eunuchs, one stone being tane away by the Nurse, either to distinguish them from ordinary men, or that Mistress *Venus* allure them not from *Pallas*.' (p. 16) Although these specimens, 'who differ in nothing from bruit beasts save form' (p. 16) do at least express ordinary human gratitude, Herbert solemnly informs his readers that these 'anthropophagi' couple 'without distinction' (p. 17) and 'as simple as they seeme, they are witty enough in craft, revenge, and villany.' (p. 19) And thus, Herbert concludes, in the Hottentot realm, 'Anarchy confounds order, no Prince of power or policie awing them.' (p. 16)

Herbert's observations may be balanced stylistically; they are not, however, balanced scientifically. He had not heard the voice of Othello (c. 1604) deflating such prevailing notions of the picturesque horrors of so-called savagery. But Herbert's fictions are of interest here because they are at the root of a mythopoeic process. Herbert's fantasy presents the Hottentot woman as immodest, anarchic and brutish — each characteristic is schematically opposite to those which were admirable in European concepts of feminine grace and courtesy. His sense of antithesis makes him declare that they felt no pain in childbirth. Although Hottentot males were not, and have never been, monorchs, nor were their womenfolk in the habit of behaving like grovelling 'hyenas' when there was a washed-up mariner's body to be disposed of, Herbert's contrary devices make them so. Neither did they 'cicatrise' their scars. Europe required the Hottentot Eve and her mate to be seen to be obscenely repellent. Subduing them is thus an easy matter: 'we found that a dozen Musquets will chase 1 000, at every discharge falling down as if thunder-struck.' (*Before van Riebeeck*, p. 121)

Similar preconceptions that control the myth of the Hottentot Eve were responsible not only for dictating her life style, but her fate. When she first appears as a particular historical individual, it is in the household of no less than Governor Jan van Riebeeck,

founder of the Dutch East India Company station at the Cape and keeper of the journal of his settlement's first decade (1652-1662). Her real name was Krotoa, and she 'fell under the benevolent protection of our fort'[4] before her teens. By October, 1657, she was assessed to be fifteen or sixteen years of age, and she was 'by us called Eva, who has been in the service of the Commander's wife from the beginning and is now living here permanently and is beginning to learn to speak Dutch well.' (*Journals*, II, p. 170) As Eva learned to be 'clad in clothes' (II, p. 4), she outwore her usefulness as a domestic servant: she became the company's most reliable interpreter in matters of general diplomacy to do with the feuding neighbouring Hottentot tribes. A constant theme in van Riebeeck's *Journals* is the quest for gold and other riches, and Eva is more than once charged with the company business of setting off back into the hinterland with samples of gold and seed-pearls that would surely induce the same to emerge from 'Monomatapa.' (III, p. 281) Eva was skilful enough to persuade her own tribesmen, the Saldanhars, to whose chief she was sister-in-law, to hunt elephant in order to produce ivory at the company store (in exchange for livestock and other items, including the inevitable tobacco). Eva learned Portuguese as well, to further her qualifications.

Eva the intermediary appears to have led a complex double life, for she occasionally dropped her Christian clothing for her old G-string and reverted to her former ways. Yet, as van Riebeeck and his staff comment: 'she appears to have become already so accustomed to the Dutch diet and way of life that she will never be able to give it up completely.' (III, p. 308) The Dutch way of life, in those founding days, offered her a husband in the form of the explorer, Pieter van Meerhoff, to whom, as a baptised Christian, she was legally married on 5 June, 1664. An early visitor to the Cape settlement like William Ten Rhyne found her 'urbana, casta, eloquens', that is, a 'civil, modest body, of rational discourse.'[5]

Eva's subsequent history, however, appears to exemplify much of the behaviour pattern that her 'Christian' name implies, for her fall from social acceptability and entrepreneurial rank into a welter of original sins seems in accordance with the inevitable lot of all Eves. Eva van Meerhoff died at the age of approximately twenty-two, by which time she had born at least six children, of which three living and some stillborn were by her husband. Her obituary notes that:

> Since [her husband's] death however at Madagascar, she had brought forth as many illegitimate ones, and for the rest, led such an irregular life, that for a long while the desire would have existed of getting rid of her, had it not been for the hope of the conversion [i.e.

> reconversion] of this brutal aboriginal, which was always still hovering between. Hence in order not to be accused of tolerating her adulterous and debauched life, she had at various times been relegated to Robben Island, where, though she could obtain no drink, she abandoned herself to immorality. Pretended reformation induced the Authorities many times to call her back to the Cape, but as soon as she returned, she, like the dogs, always returned to her own vomit, so that finally she quenched the fire of her sensuality by death, affording a manifest example that nature, however closely and firmly muzzled by imprinted principles, nevertheless at its own time triumphing over all precepts, again rushes back to its inborn qualities. (Schapera, p. 125)

Despite her moral lapses, all the more shocking considering how many she managed to fit into her brief life, Eva was buried within the church of the new Castle, a sinner saved.

The facets of Eva's career were observable over a lengthy period. The tenor of van Riebeeck's relationship with her is one of give-and-take, of broad tolerance, on the grounds of her usefulness, balanced against frustration at her recalcitrance. Eva is at her best in the *Journals* when in open competition with the fort's other Hottentot interpreter, Doman (also called Dominee, on account of his mild appearance, or Anthony). Whereas Eva was merely wily, Doman possessed the opposite side of that virtue — guile; so much so that by June, 1658, van Riebeeck somewhat ruefully noted: 'We sincerely wish that he had never been to Batavia [where he learned his Dutch], or that he may be induced to go back by fair words; there he has learnt how to use firearms effectively, and we are now obliged to exercise great care to keep them out of his hands.' (II, p. 289) Eva was at least not dangerous; she was no more than a disappointingly licentious alcoholic who left behind her not only South Africa's first officially mixed population, but a story of legendary proportions.

That Eva herself has not become the source of a legend is a comment on how limiting the dominant views of South African history tend to be. Nevertheless, Eva is indelibly part of that general myth of the Hottentot Eve, about which cling all the attractions and repulsions of attitudes to the inhabitants of the continent itself. Herbert's associations with the Hottentot Eve are, at base, still there in his wake: the animality, the lubricity and, in short, the very down-to-earth physicalness that, from one point of view (let us say a white point of view) is to be envied and abhorred, and, from another, perhaps, to be regarded as the carnal font of life itself. Herbert's Hottentot women may have given birth

without pain, but in Eva we learn that her womanly pain earns her redemption.

It is as attitudes to so-called primitive people take a radical change that the myth of the Hottentot Eve is re-angled. By the time a traveller like Francois le Vaillant encounters his version of her in the 1780's, her image has been drastically reformed in the white man's eyes. Le Vaillant, a passionate admirer of Rousseau, exemplifies best what the poor Hottentot woman had to put up with once the European had acquired a romantic ideology, by which every primitive indigenous denizen flourishing outside the parlours of Europe had become an object lesson in true nobility. Le Vaillant treated Southern Africa as every much his personal paradise as Herbert had before him, and was likewise determined to live out *his* preconceptions for an ever more avid audience back home. Indeed, so successful was le Vaillant's report back on his two South African adventures that it is not with Herbert or van Riebeeck that the Hottentot enters the European consciousness with any great force; le Vaillant's records of his two journeys into Africa were destined to become bestsellers on a scale that outdid similar works in an increasingly popular field.

In an age that was slowly replacing preconception with patient observation, le Vaillant stands out as the man who was not averse to talking frankly and to letting his fervent individuality be the pole of his carefully accumulated experience. As an ornithologist and botanist, le Vaillant has taken his rightful place in South African studies only recently; but as a romantic philosopher, like the other Rousseauist in the southern hemisphere, Bernardin de Saint-Pierre, his contribution to our knowledge of the poetic possibilities of the interior remains unacknowledged. There is a reason: by 1800 it was English and not French culture that was infiltrating the Cape, and the English were too pragmatic to fall for le Vaillant's beguiling notions — while le Vaillant chose to live with his Eva, the English chose to live against her Doman.

Le Vaillant's encounter with Narina was not merely a passing fancy; it was integral to his entire attitude to objective reality. If one accepts le Vaillant, one has to accept his confessions about Narina too, just as one has to accept, for example, Keats's indolent Red Indian. Narina is a manifestation of an attitude, rather than a sociological specimen — an attitude that le Vaillant was singularly well equipped to enact.

There is no ranking within his thoughts; he is as enchanted collecting bugs off the carcass of a decaying whale and storing them in a bottle in the crown of his hat, as he is pacing out the measurements of Table Mountain, or protecting villagers from man-eating lions. Like Darwin, he is as absorbed in classifying finches as he is in measuring out the first giraffe specimen to make it back to the natural history collections of Europe. His personal

equipage may have been extravagant beyond belief, but his style never was. Scrupulousness acquired an almost religious significance for him, because it revealed both the glory and the complexity of the creation. To the English he appeared unforgivably pleasure-loving: no other traveller could come up with a scene like the one during his second voyage, when in Namaqualand a white trash settler produced a 'sort of violin', and le Vaillant spent three days 'scraping catgut, while the noisy crew skipped joyously around me.'[6] No other traveller's favourite musical instrument was a jew's harp. Nor was he after gold, which he called an 'inhuman metal.' (II, p. 182)

Apparent artlessness was his way of mirroring the sprawl of nature herself. Just as Bernardin de Saint-Pierre could write his Mauritian idyll, *Paul and Virginie* (1788) with such 'artless' conviction that Marie Antoinette cried over it all the way to the guillotine, so le Vaillant could make the equivalent statement about the inherent goodness of untarnished man:

> . . . the sight of these good savages, who entrusted themselves in my hands, by troops, without fear, and without the least suspicion, always restored me to my natural character, which is that of gentleness, tolerance, and the love of ease; and never were the ideas of conquest and empire, which sometimes spring from obstacles and resistance, so soon or so completely driven away as by the mild and frank behaviour of these sons of nature. (II, pp. 234-5)

Thus, Narina, the innately genteel savage incarnate. She was a Gonaqua Hottentot whom le Vaillant found bathing on the banks of the Great Fish River, and she was as comely as 'the youngest of the Graces.'

> My young savage soon grew accustomed to me [he wrote]. I plied her with endless questions because I found her answers to be so full of charm. Nothing could equal the pleasure that I took in watching her . . . I asked her to stay with me, making her all sorts of promises; but especially when I talked to her about taking her to my country, where all the women are queens in charge of powerful hordes of slaves, far from being tempted by my offer, she turned down that proposal outright, and gave herself up to gestures of impatience and amusement.[7]

When le Vaillant turns his Hottentot Eve into a literary concept, he at least lets his version of her bear a name from her own environment:

> I found her name difficult to pronounce, and disagreeable to my ears, and it meant nothing to my spirit; I baptised her and named her *Narina*, which in Hottentot means *flower*; I begged her to keep this beautiful name that suited her in a thousand ways; she promised me to carry that name as long as she lived, as a souvenir of my passing through her country and as evidence of her love; for she was no stranger to such sentiments, and in her naive and touching language she confirmed all that was impressive in my first impressions of Nature. Thus, in the wastes of the African desert [he concludes], I had learned that one didn't have to be daring to be happy. (p. 369)

The lesson learned from this encounter with a 'savage' belle is one of modesty and, above all, reciprocal humanity. The le Vaillant who has a reputation for elaborate postures and rodomontade is nowhere in evidence here — he experienced, and should be seen to have experienced, in this key moment in South African literature, confirmation of his conviction that the less civilised the beings of the planet, the more virtuous they are. Le Vaillant, in his disillusion with Europe, entered Africa to be educated afresh, and it was the Hottentot Eve herself who taught him a lesson in fulfilment.

When Andrew Geddes Bain chose *his* version of the myth, he wrote it for South African audiences. In the creation of Kaatje Kekkelbek as a character he could rely entirely on his audience knowing every nuance from the life around them. He no longer needed to describe exteriors, and to expatiate upon them in an explanatory manner, in order to create a field of understanding; he had only to let her appear and talk for herself.

Here the Hottentot Eve comes home, as it were, and she enjoyed great popularity on the Cape stage. In Bain's sketch of her, her language is incomprehensible to those who still cherish the thought of English as a standard, international medium of communication. She has creolised English into a regional lingo that Bain is happy to pick up, not only as a source of insight, but as a source of mirth. And once she talks, our view of her must pass from airy, speculative generalities into the particularities of an authentic situation.

Bain's *Kaatje Kekkelbek, or Life among the Hottentots*,[8] was first performed by the Graham's Town Amateur Company in 1838, and enjoyed great popular approval thereafter. When Kaatje made her début (playing a jew's harp), she, as every Afrikaans-speaking pupil knows, was making an early and vital contribution to the origins of the Afrikaans language; her contribution to South African English was no less substantial, for the linguistic hotch-

potch out of which Bain derives his theatre was concocted with a fine English ear. Bain's use of this type of mixed language works two ways: it is drawn from the market-place where Dutch, English and a host of indigenous tongues interfuse once they deal with common concerns: land, stock-theft, liquor, food and justice, so that it fell within the threshold of both the average white settler's and the Hottentot's ken; and, secondly, it is reset for literary purposes with a sophisticated and witty white audience in mind, so that its effect falls outside Kaatje's ken. Bain's language thus works with a double effect: it carries the shock of recognition (yes, 'they' *do* speak like that), and at the same time Kaatje's apparent slips of the tongue let loose a series of nimble English and Dutch puns which, although supposedly beyond her grasp, have ready meanings for an audience delighting in satirical double-talk. 'Jan Bull' for 'John Bull', 'Extra Hole' for 'Exeter Hall' and 'Temper Syety' for 'Temperance Society' are, of course, hilariously apt. For the rest, the topical allusions in *Kaatje Kekkelbek* are so strongly local that it is hard to gather much of the point of the sketch line by line today; it needs the footnoting it gets in Margaret Lister's text.

*Kaatje Kekkelbek* was written to be sung to the tune of 'Calder Fair', or of 'How Cruel was the Captain', itself a hilarious incongruity. Yet we may be sure that the man who played her on stage let her have a riotous time, for *Kaatje Kekkelbek* is mined with alliterative plosives:

> My name is Kaatje Kekkelbek,
> I come from Katrivier,
> Daar is van water geen gebrek,
> But scarce of wine and beer. (Lister, p. 198)

At the end of each stanza Kaatje interrupts her song to interpolate commentary; here Bain adapts the received music hall form of the sketch to this new turn with perfection, as the traditional interpolations serve to underline Kaatje's moniker of Kekkelbek (=chatterbox).

Where Kaatje Kekkelbek scores so powerfully as a character on the South African stage is in the way she uses it as her hearing ground, as her court of appeal. Bain builds into his sketch of her several obvious pro- and contra-factors of the case for 'Life among the Hottentots' being heard. Kaatje is there on the stage in the first place because Dr Philip has recently taken two of her fellow Kat River Settlement Hottentots to give evidence of their political condition before the Aborigines Committee of the House of Commons. Kaatje's point is that if Jan Tzatzoe and 'Oom Andries' can speak there on her behalf and, under Dr Philip's supervision, at Exeter Hall, she must be allowed to speak for herself back home,

and in the broadest, most graphic terms. Basically, although Bain is still dealing with types, he wants to point out that politically 'staged' Hottentots are categorizable, but that once an audience sees through the staging, they can perceive the actual individual human being behind the frumpery. Given that context of the news from England, Kaatje comes across through all the devious techniques of the theatre as wonderfully actual — in her own voice, unprompted, uncontrollable, unmanipulated. Presentation matches theme here, for her whole plea is that she be allowed to keep doing her own impossible thing, that she be allowed to *be*. If Bain has social reform or Hottentot rights in mind, those concerns are tangential to his main interest — letting Kaatje show that she is a great survivor, and that we can accept her through laughter.

Kaatje revolts against her missionary education and the alphabet:

> Myn A B C at Ph'lipes school
> I learnt a kleine beetje,
> But left it just as great a fool
> As gekke Tante Meitje. (p. 198)

Her mixture of language is, of course, an insult to the integrity of English missionary education, and the failure of its three R's in getting across to Kaatje is counterbalanced by her triumph in not letting her sense of folly be suppressed. For her to be an accredited 'gek' is grand, as we know we are to expect the profoundest wisdom from the English stage's most foolish fools.

> But a b, *ab*, and i n, *ine*,
> I dagt met uncle Plaatje,
> Aint half so good as brandewyn,
> And vette karbonatje. (p. 199)

Bain was hardly to know that another Plaatje would later have the same sentiments as Kaatje's to express about the pre-white state of the tribesmen: 'Work was of a perfunctory nature [then], for mother earth yielded her bounties and the maiden soil provided ample sustenance for man and beast.'[9] But here Bain's point is that what Kaatje has learned from her pastoral elders is that meat and drink are more important than book-learning, even though, in the collision between pastoral and industrial cultures which Kaatje dramatises, the 'brandewyn' is a killer, and that fat cutlet has undoubtedly to be stolen on the hoof.

Bain's fascination with the linguistic implications of Kaatje's song is also of interest; he lets Kaatje say 'vette karbonatje' rather than 'greasy chop', not only because the words have an authentic gusto to them, but for a number of other reasons. The word 'kar-

bonatje' has a lengthy history in English as well as in Afrikaans. In English it has associations of hacking raw meat to bits and grilling it on coals ('carbonado' = 'braaivleis') and also with greed, as when Autolycus uses the word in connection with barbecuing toads and adders' heads (*The Winter's Tale*, IV, iii, 268). Herbert uses 'carbonado' to describe what the Hottentots do to the three-day-old corpse of one of his mariners they exhumed. (Mackenzie, p. 45) The associations of hot coals and the reek of fat meat have by this stage in the history of the appearance of the Hottentot in Western literature acquired stock proportions, and no commentator has failed to mention the Hottentot's alleged love of animal fat, preferably stinking. Let's not overwork the point: 'vette karbonatje' is a phrase packed with deeply sensual undertones of gratification. That anything that is carbonized turns black and hellish goes without saying. Bain knew that 'fat chop' would not have anything near the same emotional clout.

The same is true of the wording throughout Kaatje's song. Phrases such as 'a schelm boer het ons gavang' are full of a deep playfulness, particularly since a word like 'skelm' is usually reserved by whites to describe their underlings. That Kaatje can say that a Boer is 'een moer slimme ding!' (p. 199) is an outrageous profanity, particularly when her qualification that '*Hot'nots en Kaffers het hom slim gemaak*!' drives home the jab. Bain sees that Kaatje's 'slim' one-upmanship puts race relations into the arena of farce, where insult, irreverent rudeness, endless nigglings about the downright unfairness of fate, and getting away with the deed are delightfully pleasing. Kaatje even insinuates that the reason the Boer has quit the Cape on that historical saga, the Great Trek, nowadays myth enough ('die moervreter zeg dat hy neit meer kan klaar kom met die Engelse Gorment!' (p. 199) ), is that all the fun has gone out of the chaotic old frontier days and he's fed up now. The farce expresses her commitment to disorder. But Kaatje's boldest irreverence is reserved for the killjoy English with their policies of forced convict labour. Once convicted for theft, she translates for us:

> 'Six months hard work,' which means in Dutch,
> '*Zes maanden lekker leven!*' (p. 200)

Her scorn for the sentencing judge, whose wig she compares to the mop the English 'die vloer mee schoon maak' (p. 200), cloaks a serio-comic but very real complaint. She has to deflate the Englishman's awe for all judges so that the process of law and order, with all its lengthy 'speetses', the same process that dispossesses her, stands opposed. That Kaatje is neither terrorstruck nor even reformed by prison is one of those marvellous ironies; but the fact that she regards prison as one of the few ways left open

to her to get free board and lodging is astounding. Bain sees that the old Hottentot way of life does endure, even if only within the walls of an English jail. But the truth is that, although Kaatje puts a bold face on her prison experiences, she emerges severely melancholic. That Kaatje could use such a word at all is profoundly moving: 'melancholy' one associates with the lowest romantic dejection, with a Coleridge or a Keats who writes his way out of it in deeply blue stanzaic form. Kaatje's response to the 'melancholies' is to drown them in liquor, to conquer them, not in the nobly-conceived metres of English romantic blank verse, as Thomas Pringle does, but in the frenzied jingle that Bain's piece is.

Kaatje's last gesture, and the one that presumably brought the house down, was to turn her notorious backside on the audience — a gross piece of buffoonery, not only appropriate to the musical hall occasion, but in line with what has come to be thought of as the function of the Hottentot's most noted feature. When Bain has Kaatje make this outrageous gesture, he means it both to elicit a belly-laugh and to express an earthy protest. Kaatje is really very disillusioned with the way she is treated by frontier society, and when she exits direct to the 'Gov'neur' she means her last exclamation: '. . . myn right wil ik hebbe!' (p. 202) Kaatje wants not only Hottentot rights, but her rights as an individual woman. Of all the characteristics that Bain assigns to her, the one that is most accusatory is her disgust at the way her spell in prison cuts her off from her 'sweet heart.' No sooner is she out of jail than:

> Next morn dy put me in blackhole,
> For one Rixdollar stealing,
> And knocking down a vrouw dat had
> Met myn sweet heart some dealing. (p. 201)

She claims that she has 'as much right to steal and fight' (p. 201) as anyone else, but that the greatest injustice of all (greater than merely disturbing the peace) is to lock a woman in the black hole when a 'teef' has stolen her man. To Bain the Hottentot Eve is no longer a sub-human who couples indiscriminately; she is beginning to look very much like, and have the feelings of, a monogamous bourgeoise.

It is in that role that she appears in a work that studies her in terms of twentieth-century urban society, Stephen Black's *Love and the Hyphen*. Her name, this time, is Sophie Wilet, and her motto is: 'I can be obstroperlous because I'm under der Junion Jack in der Metropolis of der Junion.' (Act III, p. 19) Black is not overcareful about dates; the Sophie speaking there is dated 1908, the year that *Love and the Hyphen* was first produced at the Tivoli Theatre in Cape Town. The complete MS. of the play[10] describes it as a 'Stage Skit on Cape Social Conditions.' In 1928 Black re-

wrote and revised it, with an additional preface, and a postscript in which his characters reappear 'twenty years later.'

'The original *Love and the Hyphen* was clean fun and kindly satire,' wrote the anonymous reviewer of the *Cape Argus* (1 February, 1929). 'Mr Black was out to make you laugh and he did that and no more. Now, by way perhaps of bringing it 'up to date', he has interspersed the dialogue with doubtful witticisms and a broad type of humour which certainly wouldn't have been tolerated in the original Lady Mushroom's day . . . The preface and the epilogue which are new are, I regret to say, an error in judgment and good taste. In a country like this with its eternal problem of black and white, the incidents in the epilogue are a pity. To make fun before an audience of mixed races of the problem of the illicit mixing of the races is unwise and unnecessary.' So much for the stock response of a culture that prizes amusement above engagement, and propriety above enlargement of insight.

Black takes precisely those social attitudes as his target in *Love and the Hyphen*. The hyphen in question is the 'trait d'union' of the well-to-do, the double-barrelled surname. When in Act II, Frikkie the gardener (Sophie's coloured boyfriend) asks her what this much-prized, unionising hyphen could be, her opinion is sufficiently flattening: 'No, I don't know, but it's got three feathers like der Prince of Wales and I tink it must be a kind of volstruis.' (p. 14)

The white characters who grace Cape society in Black's play derive from Sheridan by way of Oscar Wilde; the play is regular comedy of manners. Captain Hay-Whotte (the aide-de-camp to His Excellency), Spavin-Glanders and the nubile Gwendoline are all repeats of familiar nineteenth-century drawing room comedy, gone a trifle insipid in their overpoweringly lush colonial setting. Black's potshots are predictable, and delectable:

> *Lady Mushroom:* Alice has colic or cholera or something. That's the worst of these English maids — they will get colic in the hot weather. We shall have to use salted servants as they use salted horses up-country. (p. 17)
>
> *Lynda:* Have you been Home before?
> *Gerald van Kalabas:* Well not exactly Home, but I once went with the football team to Robben Island.(also p. 17)

But Black's theme of social-climbing and snobbery is played through that underside of the colonial society, the servants' quarters, as well, so that their snobberies and ambitions compare and contrast to telling effect.

> *Sophie* (to Frikkie): Talk proper language, you black

> nigger. [Our daughter's] no bastard because she was born after I married you.

Sophie's daughter is in fact fathered by a version of Kipling's Tommy Atkins, because Sophie has always held that: 'All the ladies is mad after der regiment. I will have my corporal or kill me with poison seepdip.' (p. 32) Sophie's daughter, Cornelia Violet Smith, escapes the domestic class into becoming a cashier in a tickey bazaar. And Frikkie, content to let his 'daughter' try for white, is unable to complain. Van Kalabas, the 'Boer jong' of the play, has his own brand of social climbing, too; when he returns to the scene of his past gaucheries in the postscript of the play, now a South African diplomat in service in the United States, his delightful conclusion is: 'Marcus Garvey says "Africa for the Africans," but I say "America for the Afrikaners," ' and off he goes, sold out to the Jazz Age and its flappers.

Black's theme is a Shavian one: what happens when economic necessity meets moral pretension? In Black's eyes, Sophie is only one of many who cannot afford the luxury of a moral existence. Her greatest moment of pretension is her appearance in Act III in the Elite Tea Gardens (revised into the Jazz Tea Rooms), decked out in a feather boa (borrowed from her madam) and twirling a parasol, demanding she be served tea since she has the money saved up.

Gwendoline de Gadde, trembling at the sight of a coloured on the premises, staring social ruin in the face, appeals to Sophie: 'It's me you're hurting, Sophie. You don't want to spoil my trade?' To which Sophie replies: 'I don't care what I spoil, so long as I get my own way.'

Sophie's own way in the end is a luxury (second class) taxi which backs onto the stage in the post script, bearing her off complete with her twenty years' accumulation of possessions, steam radio included. In exchange for a little whoring, a little discrete theft and a lot of nerve, she has accumulated enough material wealth and two educated 'white' kids to retire on. And Frikkie's curtain line to the play, as he sees his woman drive into the future, is: 'You can all go to hell!'

Black's comic touch is sharp and skilful. His metaphor throughout the comedy is that the wrangle for rank and repute is like an all-round attack of 'scarlet fever'. Sophie defines it as a lust for military uniforms. Her frankness, like Kaatje's, is disarming. And when Frikkie querulously challenges her on her ambitions with the observation that: 'All coloured girls is med after khakis', her reply is blatantly outspoken:

> *Sophie:* Yes, before I go to bed every night I pray God

> must make me a good girl en give me er Tommie every time. (p. 14)

That God granted her desire takes us out of the bounds of literature into history; that Eva's descendants number over a million in an official South African racial group all of their own is a matter for the state census-taker. But that Black saw miscegenation as merely a part of a larger English upwardly-mobile social drive, and let his loud-mouthed wench spell it out, is not without interest in the study of South African literature. Black and Shaw would have agreed with one another: let the colours run.[11]

The comedy writer of the 1900's could afford to let his coloured heroine talk for herself. Perceval Gibbon's *Souls in Bondage* of 1904 — the first example of the 'try for white' theme in fiction in South Africa — is explicit in the same way. But the later writers who chose to cast the myth of the Hottentot Eve into tragic terms hardly let her occupy centre-stage at all. By 1924 we have Sarah Gertrude Millin's *God's Step-children* which Stephen Black might well have written his 1928 post script specifically to refute. Nevertheless, the novel is commonly rated as part of the great tradition of South African writing; after Olive Schreiner's *The Story of an African Farm*, it was the one work that enjoyed the greatest acclaim inside and outside South Africa. In the United States alone, *God's Step-children* went into ten editions. It made Sarah Gertrude Millin's name so convincingly that it is not until 1948, with *Cry, the Beloved Country*, that its fame is rivalled.

The use of miscegenation as a tragic theme was central to Millin's output; it dominates no less than six of her novels, and her popularity with it indicates that her views on the subject must have held widely-accepted support. Millin describes the Hottentot seductress, as she embarks on a sin of our fathers, and emphasizes that her act will reverberate through anything up to a century of misery and unrelieved suffering. But she is seen in terms that make Herbert's distaste seem a mild aberration. That Millin tries to build her own pathological horror of mixed blood into tragic material is a fact; but it is also a fact that she had no tragic feeling for her victims. *God's Step-children*, as Snyman remarks with faint surprise, was, amongst other things, 'used in Germany as a racial novel in the campaign against the Jews'[12] — a supreme irony, considering Millin's own Jewish origins. The reason for Millin's failure to achieve tragedy is simple: *God's Step-children* purports to be about the pain and distress caused by discrimination, but its actual content illustrates more than Millin intends — the discrimination is all one way. In Millin's view of the racial mix, any man who, like one of St Paul's devotees in the desert, is driven by his baser instincts to sleep with a non-white, sows a curse that taints all of history. Millin cannot accept that mixing of bloods is irreversible

and get on with it; she stews and simmers over it, sensitizing the reader into getting to know the outward symptoms — frizzy hair, brown half-moons on the toenails, humiliated eyes that may see far, but which contain no beauty — only shame. There is no barrack-room vigour here, only compounding degeneracy and disgrace. In her fictional ancestor of the South African colour curse, the Rev. Andrew Flood in Canaan, she sees:

> He was a tall, bony man, with hollow blue eyes, wistful and yet fervent; his teeth projected slightly, so that he had difficulty in closing his mouth; and his chin, strained with the effort of assisting his lips to meet, was pricked with little holes. The bones of his long face were prominent, and they seemed to move visibly when he became agitated, as happened very often. His skin was naturally pale, but it was almost always flushed with ardour . . .[13]

He is motivated, of course, by a 'tremendous sermon preached about the essential equality of all human beings, whatever their colour, in the eyes of the Creator,' to which Millin's retort is that: 'It was, throughout Britain, the creed of the moment.' (p. 4) That it should not have been the creed of her South Africa of 1820 to 1920, the period covered by the novel, is Millin's purpose to demonstrate. The Rev. Andrew Flood lapses into Hottentot arms, not because Millin can conceive of a Hottentot as being appealing, or a suitable mate, but merely because Flood is incapable of inspiring a white woman to marry him. Only such a debased specimen would 'sow seeds of disaster in a clean land,' as Snyman puts it. (p. 59) Again, when Flood's granddaughter marries a man who 'snapped his fingers at the sanctities of race' (p. 189), Millin means that we must watch for another wave of woe. She, Elmira, has a rough ride at her convent school, but gets away with it for a while as being 'Spanish.' Her dilemma is expressed as follows by one of Elmira's schoolmates:

> . . . whatever they are, they aren't pure, [my father] says. I heard him tell mother that he couldn't stand mongrels. He says they've got the bad of both sides. What would you do if you found out you had coloured blood in you, Elmira, with that dark skin and all? I'd drown myself or something, wouldn't you? (p. 123)

The view that a so-called coloured automatically inherits the worst of both sides, a view to which Millin and her faithful commentator, Snyman, both subscribe, was a sufficiently commonly-held prejudice for it to go untested. But when Elmira is asked not to return to the convent (together with three Jewish girls), Millin does not

have her suicide; she lives on to face a fate worse than death. 'And life goes on' is Millin's favourite, ominous refrain.

But what is truly distorted in Millin's vision is that her dogma of separateness can allow no insight beyond its own white confines. When she does depict the Hottentot bastard view of things in this novel, it is from a distance only and it is done, not with understanding or with irony, but with contempt. Here we have Flood's daughter, Deborah, cradling the baby Elmira:

> And as she sang the little tune she saw again the river at Canaan — they called it the Vaal now; and she saw her father, the Rev. Andrew Flood, wandering around like an ejected spirit, with his lost-looking blue eyes and his lips which would not close over his big teeth . . . and she saw the Hottentots of Canaan dancing under the naked moon . . . She herself had not participated in their lunar festivals, but she had gone with the other Hottentot children dancing down to the river to the sounds of their singing, a line of little girls with vessels on their heads for water, swaying their hips to the rhythm of the song they were making — some little tune or other endlessly repeated — their voices ringing out loud and wild on the high notes . . .
>
> But these things were past for her and hers. How different life was these days; how one tried to be just like the white people . . . how one was *getting* white. (pp. 108-9)

What Millin means to convey here with dramatic power is a half-Hottentot's regret at the loss of the pastoral days, and we must grant that her purpose is to convey the woman's own contempt for her own past and the details that would give away the ancestral origins of the new grandchild. Millin shows Deborah gripped in the process of consciously trading her heredity for whiteness, her step-relationship for being a true child of God. It is a moot point whether the contempt here is functional within the novel or imposed by Millin's own views on the issue: it would be possible for Deborah to come to think of Hottentot song as endlessly monotonous, and full of shrieks, but we also know from earlier in the novel that Millin herself has no time for undressed 'lunar festivals' whatsoever. But Millin writes better than she knows; that a coloured could be taught that white perceptions are exclusive and unattainable, and that she ought to aspire to them, is a historical truth (see Adam Small's *Kanna Hy Kô Hystoe*, 1965). But that a coloured should not be allowed to have her own perceptions of her own father (Flood is identical to both Millin and his daughter) is another matter. Millin's fiction is so in the grip of her

own limiting imagination, from which it gathers its obsessive repetitions and driving, bluff rhetoric, that, for all its persuasive power, it ends up merely as in illustration of separatist ideology.

But our lady of the interior does make one further convincing reappearance in the literature, and her return performance makes additional sense in the light of all the foregoing. Her last role to date is as the heroine of Athol Fugard's play, *Boesman and Lena*. The work was premiered in Kaatje Kekkelbek's old stamping ground, Grahamstown, in July 1969. With the exception of some of the record-breaking black township dramas of the sixties and seventies, *Boesman and Lena* on stage and on film has been seen by more South African theatregoers than any other South African play. It is at once a phenomenon and an institution. It has travelled outside South Africa more extensively than any other serious local dramatic work, which is to some extent surprising considering Fugard's uncompromising way of writing a South African drama: it speaks, verbally at least, a language that is intensely regional — slangy, abruptly and even obscenely 'Hotnot' at times, cadenced kitchen-talk designed to have visceral rather than intellectual impact. As stage language, however, it transcends the merely regional, as the local dialect becomes the new vocabulary of the oppressed making themselves heard and felt.

To isolate, then, aspects of *Boesman and Lena* that are characteristically 'Hotnot' is to do the play a disservice, if the 'Hotnots' are really working as representatives of universal models. Nevertheless, since the precedents are so obvious, it might be worth examining Fugard's Lena, out of the context of the play for a while, in terms of this supposedly coherent myth of the Hottentot Eve. The crucial test here is one of coincidence against some greater apprehensible pattern. It is safe to assume that Fugard does not know *God's Stepchildren*, just as Millin knew nothing of Black's Sophie, and Black knew no Bain, and so on backwards all the way to our original source, Herbert, for it is an alarming characteristic of South African literature that every work is always hailed as a 'first' even if it is, in fact, a case of old hat with new feathers. If this recurrent attitude to the Hottentot Eve is in fact a pattern, it is safe to assume that no writer mentioned here has been aware of it. The myth has functioned in spite of, not because of, writers.

So we have Lena's story. In the play she is the more vocal of the two: all the writers here reach consensus on this point; Eva earned her living with her tongue (interpreter); le Vaillant enjoyed Narina's mellifluous naivete; Kaatje Kekkelbek was an inveterate cackler; Sophie had more verbal staying power than anyone else in the Imperial high noon; Elmira, although she was not given room to talk in the novel, is conceived of as part of a society of chronic chanters and dancers; and Lena is — well, shrill. She is a figure

who must be heard (rather than watched or felt). What she says is always brazen, or earthy, or robust, or seductive, certainly outspoken; Lena's consistent demand of Boesman is that he come out with it, that he *say it*. She is acquisitive; le Vaillant's only scruple about Narina was that she helped herself to every trinket that he had; and here Lena is the one who could have been placated by her saving the junk of their flattened *pondok*: 'Might be white-man's rubbish, but I can still use it'[14] is her attitude — she is invariably grasping of white man's throw-aways, subdued with valueless objects which have essential functions for her, not excluding beautification. She also has social pretension which her counterpart rejects; her aggression is caused by not being able to join the company of the invaders, whereas her mate remains hostile and intractable (the Eva-Doman contrast). Lena's impulse towards remaining within the master's society is so strong that on the outset of their trek she almost drops out in favour of settling for domestic service, and when Boesman imposes the isolation of their mudflats existence on her, she opts for the Outa's company, which is lower than a brak's company, rather than be a lone outsider.

Yet the Hottentot Eve yearns for her former unfallen condition, as Lena yearns for her days of dancing at Coegakop and the days when she could cradle Boesman in song. Her presence is associated with narcotics: she drinks wildly and smokes tobacco, two habits which place her beyond the realm of acceptable white society; she'll trade in her natural dagga-smoking habits for liquor that stupefies her all the quicker. Brandy and syphilis and acculturation will get her in the end, and her man will die like the animal he is thought to be. Lena foregoes her share of Boesman's dop on this evening as she knows it is a fatal weakness in her that conquers her willpower and forces an easy submission. The role of the Hottentot Eve in the writer's imagination can be forestalled temporarily, but not gainsaid.

The common characteristics of the Hottentot Eve throughout the gallery are overwhelmingly in favour of our having to see her as an archetype that recurs through the centuries which, despite superficial variations conditioned by the writer's point of view within his own period, continues intact. Above all, her leading characteristic — that of seductress or love goddess, rather than mere household woman — is the one that remains dominant, perplexing and alluring, to be confronted and to be overwhelmed. She is not a case of Eve triumphant, but of Eve on the downhill.

Yet in Fugard's reworking of the myth what is truly remarkable is his not being aware of the historical process behind his play. He is hardly interested in Lena's being a Hotnot-white product at all; the only physical labelling she is given is that she wears 'one of those sad dresses that reduce the body to an angular, gaunt cipher

of poverty.' (p. 167) There is a reference in the stage directions to the straightness of her neck when carrying a burden on her head. She acquires 'brown' attributes, associated as she is with the brown mud between her toes and the burnt-out veld landscape around her, to be sure. But it is Boesman who has trouble classifying himself racially, who is worried about rating himself as above a cave-dweller (Herbert's Troglodite) and above the intruding *kaffer* in status. In his quest for freedom he desires to be able to stand upright, and it is his failure to achieve this that generates his violent aggression. Yet Fugard does not see Lena's predicament in racial terms at all: her dilemma is, as has been said, a social rather than a political one. Her 'brownness' is incidental to her quandary; the play is ultimately more about the strains of the marriage bond than the colour problem which aggravates it.

But Lena's one moment of absolute truth happens to be one that we would readily associate with the past versions of the Hottentot Eve. It happens to be Lena's outburst which is beyond speech and beyond 'white' means of expression. It is worked out in the second act as an affirmation of faith in the power to keep existing. In her monologue to the dummy Outa, she says:

> It's a hard mother to us. So we dance hard. Let it feel us. Clap with me.
> *(Lena is now on her legs. Still clapping she starts to dance. In the course of it Boesman's head appears in the opening to the shelter. He watches her.)*
> *(Speaking as she makes the first heavy steps.)*
> *So* for Korsten. *So* for the walk. *So* for Swartkops. *This* time. *Next* time. *Last* time.
> *(Singing.)*
>
> Korsten had its empties
> Swartkops got its bait
> Lena's got her bruises
> Cause Lena's a *Hotnot meid.*
>
> Kleinskool got prickly pears
> Missionvale's got salt
> Lena's got a Boesman
> So it's always Lena's fault.
>
> Coegakop is far away
> Redhouse up the river
> Lena's in the mud again
> *Outa's* sitting with her. (p. 208)

It is her moment of liberation, her ritual dance that transcends her earthly imprisonment. It is a moment out of time. Lena's lyric acquires rhythm from her own bodily movements, and the form of

her song generates itself as she impels it along. Her improvisation falling into metre, with its satisfying locking into place with rhyme, is half nonsense poem, half sly innuendo. But during this performance of hers the absolutely open joy that bursts through speaks as an affirmation of her own inner resistance, her small, powerless but unextinguishable being in a hostile universe.

But part of the strength of Fugard's portrait of Lena the beachcomber is in the way he creates her *against* the drift of our preconceptions about the Hottentot Eve. For the central irony of *Boesman and Lena* is that Lena the earth mother, the life-giving figure, whom we feel should be endlessly fertile, is not. Lena is so physically battered and impoverished that her children have been stillborn. One never really worried too much about the fate of the Hottentot Eve, because before Fugard she had always been able to procreate so successfully that if she herself was subjected to a humiliating and degraded life, one always felt that her offspring would have the chance to make it one day — a bitter observation, but a true one. Yet Lena's history goes this way. 'It's a long story,' she tells the Outa. 'One, *Outa*, that lived. For six months. The others were born dead.' (*Pause.*) 'That all? *Ja*. Only a few words I know, but a long story if you lived it.' (p. 193)

Later Boesman, while articulating his own sense of impotence, describes it:

> *Sies wêreld!*
> All there is to say. That's our word. After that our life is dumb. Like your *moer*. All that came out of it was silence. There should have been noise. You pushed out silence. And Boesman buried it. Took the spade the next morning and pushed our hope back into the dirt. Deep holes! When I filled them up I said it again: *Sies*.
> One day your turn. One day mine. Two more holes somewhere. The earth will get *naar* when they push us in. And then it's finished. The end of Boesman and Lena. (p. 212)

Lena's moment of celebratory transcendence does not endure through to the end of the play, and the play's resolution does not point towards any sense of redemption. Fugard's pessimism is drastic and final.

In Fugard the Hottentot Eve is awarded a little life, but that life, like the bread she eats, is 'bitter and brown.' (p. 199) Her greatness is that she stares extinction in the face, but Fugard leaves us in no doubt that death is her end. Possibly her death in political terms, due to a life that strips her down to a 'frail anatomy' (p. 209), is an obvious comment on current realities. But equally possibly it is because the myth of the life-giving woman of the land, the Hotten-

tot Eve, has run out, too. It is heading for burial in the mud that Fugard says has harboured too many shrunken corpses already, and won't return them.

There are no more Hottentots.

*Rand Afrikaans University*

## FOOTNOTES

[1] Norman H. Mackenzie, 'South African Travel Literature in the Seventeenth Century,' *Archives Yearbook for South African History*, 18th year, Vol. 2 (Pretoria, 1955), p. 34.

[2] R. Raven-Hart, *Before van Riebeeck: Callers at South Africa from 1488 to 1652* (Struik, Cape Town, 1967).

[3] Thomas Herbert, *Some Yeares Travaile into Afrique and the Greater Asia*, 1638 edit., p. 16.

[4] *Journals of Jan van Riebeeck*, 3 vols., ed. H.B. Thom (Balkema, Cape Town, 1952), Vol. I, p. 208.

[5] *The Early Cape Hottentots*, ed. I Schapera (Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1933), p. 126.

[6] Francois le Vaillant, *Travels in Africa: Second Voyage* (Paris and London, 1794), Vol. III, p. 488.

[7] *Voyage de Monsieur le Vaillant dans L'Interieur de L'Afrique par le Cap de Bonne-Esperance* (Paris, 1790), Vol. I, pp. 366-7, translated by the commentator.

[8] *Kaatje Kekkelbek* in ed. Margaret H. Lister, *Journals of Andrew Geddes Bain* (Van Riebeeck Society, Cape Town, 1949), reprinted from *Sam Sly's African Journal*, 20 August, 1846.

[9] Sol T. Plaatje, *Mhudi* (1917) (Quagga Press, Johannesburg, 1975), p. 21.

[10] Amongst the Stephen Black papers, Johannesburg Public Library.

[11] See George Bernard Shaw, *The Adventures of the Black Girl in Her Search for God* (written in Knysna, 1932).

[12] J.P.L. Snyman, *The Works of Sarah Gertrude Millin*, (C.N.A., Johannesburg, 1955), p. 54.

[13] Sarah Gertude Millin, *God's Step-children* (Constable, London, 1924), pp. 1-2.

[14] Athol Fugard, *Boesman and Lena* in *Three Port Elizabeth Plays*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1974), p. 220.

# CORRESPONDENCE:
## LANGUAGE OF EXCHANGE

The Editors,
*Theoria.*

Dear Sirs,

Mr Bizley, in his reply to my letter, continues confident that his incorporation of an historical-cum-semantic argument into his analysis of *Timon of Athens* does 'the text *most* service'. His reply makes it clear that he is able to maintain this confidence because of his faith in the extra-literary theory that a particular 'cultural evolution' in which 'two "generations" of sensibility' were involved was really happening in Shakespeare's time. This faith is evident in the way he feels free to *begin* with this theory — i.e. the assumptions and biases are *a priori* — and then '*return* to the text as the "rub" to the argument'. This 'argument' is, of course, about the 'cultural evolution' of Shakespeare's time and not about the text, primarily. The confusion is this: does Mr Bizley use the text in the service of the theory, or the theory in the service of the text? The process of his logic insists on the former, while his undertaking as a literary critic aiming 'to assist in the understanding of Shakespeare's writing', insists on the latter. This is the unsatisfactory paradox I mentioned in my first letter which I hope I have identified more clearly now.

The above dialectics notwithstanding, however, it is odd to me that Mr Bizley can be so confident in saying that the vocabulary of his 'language of exchange' pertains so narrowly to Shakespeare's own time. Consider how Chaucer three hundred years earlier found the same essential vocabulary to hand for the embodiment of characters in his world: e.g. the 'Marchant'.

> A Marchant was ther with a forked berd,
> In mottelee, and hye on horse he sat:
> Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bever hat,
> His bootes clasped faire and fetisly.
> His resons he spak ful solempnely,
> Sownynge alwey th'encrees of his wynnyng . . .
> Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle.
> This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:
> Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette,
> So estatly was he of his governaunce
> With his bargaynes and with his chevyssaunce.
>
> (General Prologue 270-282)

Do we not find in the merchant, with his suitably conventional but opulent affectations in the style of his dress, his pompous self-justifying opinions and his boastful proclaiming of his financial 'encrees', the façade of men, akin to the Athenian senators in *Timon*, who operate deviously behind their public 'front' — men in whom 'policy sits above conscience' (III ii 95)? Is not this merchant with his 'eschaunge of sheeldes' (his illegal money-changing and profiteering on foreign-exchange dealings), his shrewd and determined commercial activity which Chaucer alludes is at the expense of others, the astute assessment of security and loan prospects (we sense the wryness in Chaucer's 'Ther wist no wight that he was in dette,' and in 'estatly was he of his governaunce') — is he not of the same mould as Lucullus who says 'this is no time to lend money, especially upon bare friendship, without security' (III i 43-45)?

When we consider this brief comparison are we not justified in asking ourselves whether Mr Bizley's concern to show that exchange, with its human implications — dishonesty and the avoidance of responsibility — as issues inhering, with a special exclusivity, in Shakespeare's time, and thus in Shakespeare's intention in *Timon*, is the sign of presuppositions he (not Shakespeare) has brought to the text? What Shakespeare, in *Timon*, and Chaucer are surely fundamentally concerned with is the embodiment through representative characters, in their own times and with their own individualities (and we may think of the moneylenders in the temple, and of characters in George Eliot, Dickens, Lawrence, Solzhenitsyn and numerous others elsewhere), of an essential or universal proclivity in men to deceive themselves (and, in so doing, their fellow men) by means of a set or form of materialistic dishonesty. This surely is what leads us to seeing the point of the ironies which are present in *Timon* and to the intention of Shakespeare's writing.

I value the opportunity Mr Bizley has given me to make my point more clearly a second time.

Yours faithfully,
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