# THEORIA

A JOURNAL OF STUDIES

in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

Vol. LXIV



64

May 1985

# THEORIA

A JOURNAL OF STUDIES

in the Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences

**Vol. LXIV**
**May 1985**

**CONTENTS**



Published twice yearly by the
UNIVERSITY OF NATAL PRESS
PIETERMARITZBURG

Members of the academic world are at present encouraged, or even forced, to specialize. Even in smaller universities where the teaching burden may turn anybody into a jack of all trades involved in a subject, the lecturer must become a master of one of them or be considered lacking in dedication. This is a trend of thought — and fact — impinging on journals which offer space to a wide range of subjects or disciplines rather than to specialization within those subjects.

Yet the editors of *Theoria* are conscious of what may be another trend. In recent years the discussion in our forum has come in a spontaneous way from a greater variety of disciplines than before. And the number of voices wanting to take part has resulted in queueing for a longer period until they can be heard. Is this perhaps significant? There are more than a few academics in the arts, humanities and social sciences who wish to communicate across a specialist barrier and also to gain from disciplines other than their own.

THE EDITORS

## SUBSCRIPTIONS

These should be sent to:

The Secretary,
University of Natal Press,
P.O. Box 375,
Pietermaritzburg
3200 South Africa.

The annual subscription for *Theoria* is:

Individuals R7,00 per annum (+ GST)
Institutions R10,00 per annum (+ GST)

## CONTRIBUTIONS

Authors should send contributions to:

The Editors,
*Theoria,*
P.O. Box 375,
Pietermaritzburg
3200 South Africa.

They are asked to send typescripts which are double-spaced. The beginning of each paragraph must be indented. Single quotation marks should be used for quotations, and double quotation marks only for a quotation within a quotation. When the title of a book is given it should be underlined. Notes should be consolidated at the end of an article, not inserted as footnotes. An abstract not more than 200 words in length should accompany an article.

# REVERSAL THEORY: A SYNTHESIS OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL AND DETERMINISTIC APPROACHES TO PSYCHOLOGY

*by* L.G. LACHENICHT

The apparent incompatibility between deterministic science and the richness of phenomenological (subjective) experience is one of the central problems facing psychology. It is an incompatibility which has divided psychologists into two camps. Both psychologists who emphasize subjective experience and psychologists who seek lawful behavioural and mental mechanisms should therefore be interested in a theory which claims to have bridged the divide between mechanism and phenomenology. This claim is made by a new (c. 1975) psychological theory, reversal theory, deriving from the work of Michael Apter and Ken Smith, which has been growing rapidly in England.

The present article has two purposes: it offers an introduction to this new and possibly unique theory; and it examines the theory critically, spelling out theoretical and methodological assumptions of the theory which have not previously been made explicit and subjected to critical examination.

One of the central insights of reversal theory—and a very convenient starting point in understanding it—is that behaviour is ambivalent (i.e., any particular behaviour can be given more than one interpretation). This ambivalence arises because exactly the same behaviour with the same goal can be experienced in very different ways. Consider a person riding a bicycle in order to get to a particular place. In this example there is an unambiguous behaviour (cycling) and an unambiguous goal (arriving at the desired location). Nevertheless the behaviour is ambivalent because there are two different ways in which the subject can interpret the combination of his goal and his behaviour. In one case

> the goal may be felt to have priority and the behaviour be chosen in order to achieve this goal. Thus the individual may have to get to the place concerned because he works there: he therefore has no choice over the goal, he feels it essential that he achieves it, and everything is directed to this end (Apter, 1979, p. 49).

In the other case

> the behaviour may have priority and the goal be simply an excuse for the expression of the behaviour. Thus the individual may enjoy cycling and the focus of his attention be on the cycling itself for its attendant pleasures. In this case the goal chosen, which may be to visit a village church, is merely an excuse to give the performance of the behaviour

> some *raison d'etre;* in any case the goal is freely chosen and is not felt as imposed or essential. And it can be changed. (Apter, 1979, p. 50).

Behaviour is ambivalent because the subject can "experience" or "interpret" it in different ways. Reversal theory seeks to explain the way in which a behaviour is experienced, and thereby to account for the ambivalence of behaviour.

* * *

The theoretical system that reversal theory employs in order to account for the experience of particular behaviours is termed "Structural Phenomenology" (Apter, 1982a). This description is intended to show (1) that reversal theory "may be described as an approach which treats personal experience as a central part of psychology" (Apter, 1979, p. 61) and (2) that reversal theory seeks principles by which personal experience is governed. Thus reversal theory differs from classical phenomenology (which seeks the "essence" of various psychological terms by certain techniques of reflection) by assuming that experience is itself determined and can be the object of scientific investigation and explanation. However reversal theory differs from deterministic/mechanistic theories by assuming that behaviour cannot be interpreted apart from the way in which it is experienced — hence the emphasis on the ambivalence of behaviour.

The phenomenological side of reversal theory can therefore be understood as a demand that psychological theory be relevant to and true to experience, where "experience" is defined in terms of the individual's "phenomenal field" — which is "the entire universe including himself, as it is experienced by the individual at the instant of action" (Snygg & Combs, 1959).

However, reversal theory does tend to highlight some particular aspect of experience — of the individual's "phenomenal field" — notably, the contradictory nature of our impulses, motives and perceptions. This runs very much against the grain of most modern personality and social psychologies, which tend to assume that, if not already consistent, man seeks consistency (Mower White, 1982). For example, the very idea of a trait implies that it is a consistent property of a person. Reversal theory, however, argues that man is naturally inconsistent, and, further, that too great a consistency is actually likely to be harmful to a person (Murgatroyd, 1981).

The emphasis upon the contradictory character of experience arises from the "inner" or participant view that reversal theory takes with respect to experience, while the emphasis upon consistency in traditional psychology arises from the "external" or observer view that these approaches take with respect to behaviour.

Reversal theory's concern with the contradictory character of experience links up with some of the traditional concerns of phenomenology since Hegel's *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Hegel pointed out that experience is contradictory (when contradictory means "opposite in meaning", not "logically invalid arguments") but that contradictions can be "synthesized" into a higher truth. Similarly, reversal theory argues that people experience the world in contradictory fashions, but that these opposite ways of experiencing the world are essential for psychological health.

An important implication of the claim that experience is contradictory is the importance that must be assigned to dichotomies and pairs of opposites (the different "poles" of the dimension upon which contradictory experiences are located). Dichotomies, dualities and opposites in reversal theory can therefore provide a link between the phenomenological side of the theory and the "structural" side of the theory (much as they do in George Kelly's Personal Construct Theory). However, there is a worrying aspect to this emphasis on dichotomies, for, as Nietzsche said, "The fundamental faith of the metaphysician is the faith in opposite values" (Neitzsche, 1968, p. 200). This sort of observation implies that it is important to seek independent justification for any particular dichotomies or dualities.

Finally, another consequence of reversal theory's concern with the contradictory character of experience should be mentioned: if behaviour is inconsistent and contradictory, the character of the transition between experience at one end of a dichotomy and experience at the other end of the dichotomy is important. Reversal theory argues that these transitions tend to be abrupt (but see the discussion below) and they are therefore termed "reversals". It is part of the power and attraction of reversal that abrupt transitions between contradictory states do seem to occur—i.e., reversal theory is phenomenologically real.

It is necessary to give an indication of the phenomenological tools reversal theory employs. The most important is William James' (1980, Vol. 1, p. 249) idea that the phenomenal field has a "focus" and a "fringe" analogous to the perceptual distinction between "figure" and "ground" in the visual field. (See also Pollio, 1979, pp. 34–36). Although, by definition, one is aware of everything in the phenomenal field, one's awareness is concentrated upon those "phenomena" at the focus, other phenomena (the "fringe") being contextual for, and peripheral to the focal phenomena. This distinction between focus and fringe is fairly similar to Polanyi's (1959; 1969) distinction between "focal" and "subsidiary" awareness. The distinction between focus and fringe is used in reversal theory to analyse the contradictory character of experience. Consider again the example of how riding a bicycle for a

particular purpose can be experienced in different ways. Such alternative modes of experience are possible because different phenomena can be at the focus of one's awareness. In one case, the goal to be accomplished (getting to work) is focal and the behaviour itself is relatively peripheral. In the other case, the behaviour (enjoying a bicycle ride) is focal, and the goal is peripheral. In this way, one mode of experience emphasizes felt significance, while the other emphasizes activity and sensation. It is true, of course, that one is always aware of the fringe, and it is always possible for some aspect of the fringe to enter the focal area and thus precipitate a reversal. The distinction between focus and fringe is also used, in reversal theory, to reconcile apparent logical contradictions: while certain combinations of experience may be logically contradictory, they may nevertheless be *experienced* together if some of them are confined to the fringe, while others take the "centre of the stage" in the focal area.

To summarize the phenomenological side of the argument: The need to take account of experience in psychology follows from the fact that behaviour is fundamentally ambivalent (as is proven by the bicycle and other examples) and can only be understood when "experience" is taken into account. But these examples indicate that experience is contradictory in character, i.e., it can be characterized by means of dichotomies. Such dichotomies provide a structural concept and also link reversal theory with traditional phenomenology. Further, they focus attention upon the character of the transitions between the two dichotomous modes of experience — transitions which, according to reversal theory, occur rapidly. Contradictions and opposing modes of consciousness can be understood phenomenologically by paying attention to the "focus" and "fringe" of consciousness.

Before turning to the structural side of reversal theory, a critical point needs to be made. A phenomenological approach emphasizes individual experience. While the emphasis upon internal experience may be thought of as greatly enriching a purely behavioural psychology, it may also lead to a neglect of "ecological" and contextual factors which may be very important for a correct understanding of man. And there are, indeed, some indications that reversal theory has some difficulty in understanding the way in which ecological context influences a person's "phenomenal field" and behaviour.

* * *

The "structural" side of reversal theory is intended to show how experience can be organized in a lawful fashion. Not surprisingly, therefore, this side of reversal theory consists of a "mechanism" for governing experience — or at least explicating the principles by

which experience is governed. But there is another meaning to be attached to "structural" — derived from French social science — and it is worth exploring this alternative meaning in relation to reversal theory because it reveals aspects of reversal theory which would otherwise remain hidden. We will now discuss the mechanism thought to govern experience in reversal theory, and then discuss the possibility of viewing reversal theory as a "structuralist" theory in the French social science tradition later in the paper.

Reversals between contradictory psychological conditions are explained in reversal theory by means of the cybernetic systems principle or mechanism of *bi-stability*. This principle is a generalization of homeostasis which has long been familiar to psychologists (Oatley, 1978). Bi-stability can be thought of as the conjunction of two self-correcting (homeostatic) mechanisms so as to form a single but more complex system. In a bi-stable system, only one of the two homeostatic mechanisms is operative at any one time; but it is potentially possible for a switch to the other homeostatic mechanism to occur. In engineering examples of bi-stability, switches — or reversals — between the two self-correcting mechanisms can be induced either by changes of sufficient magnitude in one of the dimensions along which one of the mechanisms varies (internal explanation) or by external control of that dimension.

A very simple mechanical example of bi-stability is given in Apter (1982a pp 31–33). It consists of a narrow rectangular box balanced upon a fulcrum. In the box, a marble is placed: it will run to one or the other side of the box, thus disturbing the balance and causing the box to tilt to the more heavily weighted side. This simple mechanical system thus has two potentially stable positions: either the left hand side or the right hand side will be weighted. Because of the corrective action of the marble, the system, in one of its two stable positions, will tend to resist small disturbances and return to its original position. Large disturbances which displace the marble beyond the central point of the box. (i.e., where the box pivots upon the fulcrum) will however create a reversal and the system will stabilize in its alternative stable position. Here it is apparent how the marble creates a homeostatic system at whichever end of the box it is placed: it acts so as to resist disturbances of the stable position of the system. However, disturbances of sufficient magnitude can precipitate a switch to an alternative stable position from which the marble again acts to correct small disturbances. This example serves to show that bi-stability is physically possible, and is, in fact, frequently employed in engineering. Apter (1982a) shows that bi-stable mechanisms also occur in nature quite frequently.

The use of the cybernetic principle of bi-stability in reversal theory implies that contradictory psychological conditions must each be understood as "states" or modes of being, rather than actions (i.e., they cannot be chosen but "happen to a person"). Further, each psychological state must be thought of as having a stable point to which it will tend. Each state in a pair of dichotomous states can be thought of as representing a homeostatic mechanism in its own right. Out of a pair of contradictory states, one state will have a different stable point from the other, and therefore the two states will tend to change in different directions. The homeostatic mechanism in each state will work by means of the same cybernetic principles (feedback, etc.) as an ordinary homeostatic mechanism. The only difference between bi-stability and an ordinary homeostatic mechanism is that there will be periodic switches between states.

A mechanism based upon contradictory states which alternate and which have different stable tendencies, implies that the contradictory psychological states must be understood dynamically, as having a range of values but only one underlying stable tendency. This can best be illustrated by considering a particular pair of contradictory states—the *telic* (from "telos", end) and *paratelic* states. These states have already been illustrated briefly in the bicycle example, above.

> The telic state is defined as a state in which the individual's phenomenal field is oriented towards some goal which he sees to be essential; the paratelic is defined as a state in which the individual's phenomenal field does not have this characteristic. In the latter case . . . the goal, if there is one, is an excuse for the ongoing behaviour and is not seen as essential by the person performing the behaviour (Apter, 1979, p. 52).

An example of somebody in a telic state of mind would be someone making notes from a textbook while studying for an examination in a subject he does not enjoy, but which it is essential that he pass. Here the behaviour is seen as essential and unavoidable, and is not enjoyed in and for itself, though achieving the goal may eventually provide some satisfaction. An example of someone in a paratelic state of mind, by contrast, would be someone engaged in dancing, where the goal of completing the dance is not seen by him as an essential one, but the behaviour itself and the stimulation and excitement related to that behaviour is felt as enjoyable and in need of no further justification.

The telic and paratelic states involve different attitudes to goals (seeing them as essential or non-essential) and therefore different attitudes to arousal—a person in the telic state seeks to avoid situations in which a goal could be frustrated (i.e., arousing

situations) while a person in the paratelic state seeks situations in which an enjoyed activity can be prolonged (i.e., frustrating and therefore arousing situations). If a person is in the telic state then he will either seek a goal which he can view as essential, or he will treat a non-essential goal as though it were essential. Similarly, if a person is in the paratelic state, he will view even essential goals as non-essential and to be enjoyed as activities in themselves. Consider a man playing a game of tennis: in the telic state it will be important to him to win the game, and a good opponent will be threatening (arousing) while a weak opponent will be relaxing (unarousing). In the paratelic state the game itself will be important, and a good opponent will be exciting (arousing) while a weak opponent will be boring (unarousing). All this serves to illustrate the dynamic quality of the telic and paratelic states. This dynamic quality can be depicted diagrammatically, as in Figure 1 (Apter, 1979, p. 56).

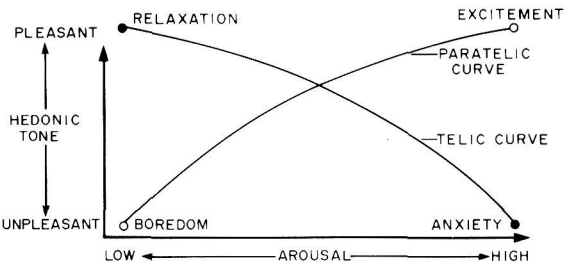



FIG. 1.
Two curves relating 'felt arousal' to affective tone illustrating bi-stable relationship (Apter, 1979, p.56)

The paratelic state, depending upon the level of arousal, can encompass both excitement and boredom, while the telic state can encompass both relaxation and anxiety. The idea of bi-stability depicted by means of two curves in Figure 1 explains many of the paradoxes of arousal which cannot be explained by such traditional but popular theories as the "inverted U curve" (Yerkes & Dodson, 1980) of arousal. Clearly, it is phenomenologically obvious that there are times when high arousal is sought, and there are other times when low arousal is sought. If this were not true, fairground activities, such as roller-coasting, which offer experiences of very high arousal, and activities such as relaxing in an easychair, which offers an experience of very low arousal, would be inexplicable. The bi-stable systems character of reversal theory explains these common-place activities, whereas the inverted U does not. (Of course, other theories have also attempted to solve the paradoxes of arousal—see e.g., Eckblad, 1981). Empirical evidence that high arousal can be pleasant has also accumulated (Apter, 1976; Svebak,

note 1; 1983 Svebak & Stoyva, 1980; Svebak, *et al.* 1982; Walters, *et al.* 1982).

It seems clear that the idea of bi-stable phenomenological states has much to offer research in motivation and emotion. A unique contribution of reversal theory to the study of emotion is the idea of "parapathic" emotions. Reversals occur abruptly. What happens to an emotional state, such as fear, which involves high arousal and which is therefore experienced as unpleasant in the telic state, when the person abruptly reverses to the paratelic state? Reversal theory argues that the fear continues to exist, but that it is now experienced as pleasant, in conformity with the paratelic state. The cognitive content of fear may not have changed, but its interpretation — the way it is experienced — by the person suffering the emotion has changed. Emotions, such as pleasant fear, enjoyable anger, or agonizing love (i.e. emotions which are characteristic of one state when experienced in the alternative state) are termed "parapathic" emotions. Again, common-place examples of parapathic emotions are easy to find. People may enjoy and seek out horror movies and "spine-chilling" experiences, and poets have long discussed the unique unpleasantness of love in the telic state. Still, however many new insights reversal theory has to offer, it cannot be said that reversal theory explains all features of arousal. For example, reversal theory does not directly account for the relation between arousal and the structural complexity of stimuli (with the exception of the idea of "cognitive synergy" — see below) which has been the focus of much modern research (see e.g., Berlyne, 1966; 1971; Walker, 1973; Boykin, 1973).

Reversal theory frequently impresses the novice as "phenomenologically real" in the sense that it seems to be talking of things everyone knows but just has not bothered to spell out. This sense of phenomenological reality is largely due to the properties assigned to the telic and paratelic states. The telic and paratelic states are self-perception determined — persons can be said to be in one or other of these states only as a result of the way in which they see their own actions. The actions themselves are ambiguous. Someone driving a car at 200 km/h may be telic if his action is done in order not to miss an appointment, or to get his wife to the maternity hospital on time. However, he may be paratelic if this action is done because it is thrilling to drive fast, and even more thrilling if traffic officers are chasing him.

Telic and paratelic states differ in three crucial areas: the way in which one experiences (reacts or orientates to) goals, time and intensity of experience. The telic state, of course, is defined as being goal dominated, whereas the paratelic state is process or behaviour oriented. But this simple difference involves other general differences. In the telic state, being goal dominated, one attempts

to complete activities. However, in the paratelic state, one will attempt to prolong and extend one's activities. Someone speeding in order to meet an appointment will obviously wish to complete his speeding as soon as possible; someone speeding for pleasure may continue to speed for hours. In the telic state one's behaviour is externally directed, for it is derived from a goal. In contrast, in the paratelic state, one's behaviour is self-directed. This point may not seem very important, but it has two important consequences. Firstly, in the telic state, one tends to react to rather than initiate behaviour — especially outside the goal area. A tendency to initiate behaviour is characteristic of the paratelic state. Secondly, in the telic state, one is inclined to make use of fixed and routinized — "tried and tested" — behaviour, while a more experimental approach, even an enjoyment of novel activities, is characteristic of the paratelic state.

Time orientation is also characteristically different in the telic and paratelic states. In the telic state one's behaviour is future oriented; one's actions are a means to an end; one's activities are planned and deliberate, and one's pleasure — if one has pleasure — is derived largely from anticipating a goal. Someone speeding in order to meet an appointment clearly meets most of these criteria, with the possible exception of the last. Pleasure, in the telic state, usually occurs if the goal by which one's behaviour is dominated, seems to be within one's grasp. The man speeding to meet an appointment may feel satisfaction if it seems clear that he will indeed arrive in time, and that no further delays will occur. The contrasting paratelic state involves a "here and now" orientation without concern for the future, actions which are regarded as having meaning (value) in themselves, activities which are spontaneous and free, and pleasure derived from immediate sensation. Again, the man speeding for the joy of it serves as a good illustration.

The contrasting orientations to goals and to time in the telic and paratelic states imply contrasting orientations to the intensity of experience. The telic state involves a preference for a low intensity of experience — for intense experience is interpreted as arising from obstacles to achieving a goal. A preference for less intense experience has as its concommitants, a preference for a low level of arousal, a preference for realism (as opposed to make-believe and exaggeration), and an effort to avoid barriers to action — indeed any situation which, or a person who, may constitute an obstacle to goal achievement. The speeding driver attempting to meet an appointment may even slow down if he thinks that there is a likelihood of meeting a traffic officer, thus adding to the complications of his situation. In contrast, a person in the paratelic state prefers his experience to be intense, for this maximises the interest and meaning of the experience, which is the object of his

interest. This preference brings with it a preference for high arousal and strategies to enhance arousal, such as the use of make believe and exaggeration. Someone speeding for pleasure may recall his favourite film car chase, or even fantasize that he is being chased by the agents of the law in order to enhance excitement. This means that a person in the paratelic state prefers barriers to action — and will sometimes seek them out — since they add to the intensity of his experience. Someone playing tennis for the prize money will dislike a good opponent, since that opponent will constitute an obstacle to attaining the prize; someone playing tennis for the joy of the game will prefer an able opponent since such an opponent will test his skill and add to the intensity of his experience.

Reversal theorists believe that both states — the telic and the paratelic — are necessary for healthy living. They frequently identify the paratelic state with our creative side, the ability to throw up new ideas and find new solutions to problems; the telic state then involves the determination to push an idea or solution until its difficulties have been overcome and success has been achieved. Both are necessary for creative work. But at an even more mundane level, both states are necessary. There are times when we need to be in a party spirit and "let our hair down". There are other times when we need to be serious and goal oriented. If we cannot join in the party spirit we will feel alienated, alone, even a victim. If we cannot be serious, we will find it more difficult to keep out of trouble, to hold employment, or to avoid the more severe difficulties of life. Reflections like these show the clinical usefulness of reversal theory. They also point to the crucial issue of how reversals are precipitated.

* * *

Reversals are said to occur abruptly, but they are not instantaneous and they do involve a normal sequence of events. It is helpful to examine this sequence of events before turning to how reversals may be induced. Apter (1982a pp. 317–321) analyses the reversal process into three sequential components. First, there is the state change as such; secondly, the newly operative state must acquire a "content"; and thirdly, this content may suggest specific activity. These components need not necessarily occur in this order — since the "content" at the focus of the phenomenological field may have precipitated the reversal in the first place and may therefore be fixed. But reversal theory does permit the intriguing philosophical possibility that a mental state may be momentarily "contentless" (cf. Brentano's intentional criterion of the mental). Clearly, reversal theory views a person's underlying mental state as more fundamental than any particular mental content. The three components of the reversal process may be paraphrased as follows:

(1) a switch from one preferred level of a variable to another (e.g., a switch from a preference for high felt significance to a preference for low felt significance); (2) a choice of a mental content in relation to the new preferred level of the variable; and (3) an attempt to bring the value of the chosen variable closer to the preferred level by means of particular actions.

The central claim of reversal theory is that the way in which we interpret actions and activities depends upon our underlying "state". Now, according to reversal theory, we cannot choose the state in which we find ourselves, though we can perhaps undertake particular activities which we know are likely to induce a change of state. (Here reversal theory touches upon the idea of "indirect rationality" explored by Elster, 1979). Instead, three broad factors are said to precipitate the unconscious (Apter, 1982a p. 325) reversal process: contingency, satiation and frustration. "Frustration" induces a reversal when an activity cannot be completed or enjoyed. For example, if while in the telic state one cannot win a tennis match — no matter how hard one tries — a paratelic state may be induced. With the switch in state, a search for a cognitive content may begin, or alternatively, one may draw directly upon what was previously at the "fringe" of attention. For example, one may give up "trying to win at all costs but settle into trying to enjoy the game itself, or perhaps... one playfully fantasizes goal achievement in the paratelic state" (Apter, personal communication). Reversals in the opposite direction can occur: if one is playing tennis for the enjoyment of the game but one has a particularly weak partner, one may suffer a reversal to the telic state and therefore try to win — and complete — the game as quickly as possible. Again it is clear that the fringe of the phenomenal field is important in this reversal, for in the paratelic state, the aim of winning is subordinate to the pleasure of the game itself.

"Satiation" is the reversal inducing process which applies to reversals which occur because of the passage of time alone. It may be thought of as analogous to the mechanism which governs the sleep/waking cycle. Such a mechanism is conceptually tricky for reversal theory because it implies that the bi-stable reversal mechanism must be placed within the framework of a larger homeostatic mechanism which will tend to equalise — or at least regulate — the amount of time spent in any one state. However, the concept of "satiation" does have advantages, for it enables reversal theory to explain man's "divine discontent" — the fact that people are seldom content when they receive what they have striven for, or when they repeat what previously gave them pleasure. It also enables reversal theory to explain why psychological conditions such as boredom, long endured, seem inevitably to turn to relaxation (and vice versa). Further, if the analogy with sleep is

taken seriously, then the occurrence of insomnia can be seen as analogous to certain psychological disorders which occur when a person cannot reverse, and is "stuck" in one of the two states.

Even more conceptually difficult for reversal theory is the reversal inducing power of "contingent events". Very pleasant/exciting or very threatening events have the power to induce reversals. For instance, if one is hunting a lion and enjoying the chase (paratelic state) one may suffer an abrupt reversal when one discovers that one's rifle is unloaded and the lion is about to charge. Similarly, a young child may enjoy exploring a room in the presence of its mother, but be frightened when its mother leaves the room. A reversal in the alternative direction is equally possible: for example, a manager, busy with sales projections (telic state) may suffer a reversal when a very attractive secretary enters the room.

The idea that contingencies can induce reversals is clearly both necessary theoretically and phenomenologically real. It involves conceptual difficulties for reversal theory because of the claim that the reversal process is unconscious (in the sense of involving a mechanism which is autonomous with respect to consciousness) and cannot be controlled directly. Obviously a contingent event (with such exceptions as sudden pain) has to be consciously understood in order to induce a reversal. There therefore has to be a fairly direct connection between consciousness and the reversal mechanism. Consequently the picture put forward in reversal theory, of consciousness and the reversal mechanism being "parallel systems" (Apter, 1982a p. 326) only indirectly connected with each other, is in need of revision. Without such revision, reversal theory is in danger of creating a new dualism, this time between immediate awareness and underlying psychological states.

The depth of the difficulty becomes apparent when one considers that any particular contingent event must initially be perceived in terms of the existing underlying state. The paratelic man facing the charging lion with an unloaded rifle ought, in terms of the paratelic state, to find the event exceptionally exciting. Instead, he reverses to the telic and finds it frightening. The difficulty may be further illustrated by pointing out that failure to reverse may be morally evaluated. Nero is said to have fiddled while Rome burned, obviously paratelicly enjoying the excitement. We find his conduct deplorable. If a reversal is entirely unconscious and involuntary, our tendency to morally evaluate failures to reverse seems paradoxical.

A possible way around this difficulty which occurs to the present writer, is to exploit known distinctions between kinds of mental content—for example, between firmly held beliefs and lightly entertained (or even imagined) mental content. This, of course, would involve arguing that, at least in the case of reversals induced

by contingent events, mental content is just as important as the underlying state. Beliefs, unlike more lightly entertained propositions, have the peculiar property that they are largely not within our voluntary control (there is of course, a possibility of self-deception). When staring at our examination results for example, we cannot choose to believe that we have not failed. More lightly entertained propositions which are not beliefs are largely within our conscious control. A contingent event can thus be said to induce a reversal when it affects a firmly held belief which is crucial to our well-being or our self definition. (How belief affects the "bi-stable" mechanism is of course, still not clear). A young child paratelicly explores a strange room when its mother is present because it believes itself to be secure. When the child looks round and finds that his mother is not present, a fundamental belief of the child — that he is safe — is disrupted and a reversal occurs. We can morally condemn a failure to reverse (such as Nero's) because such a failure demonstrates that a particular belief is not fundamental to a person's self definition. Nero clearly does not believe that a dreadful tragedy has occurred when hundreds of thousands of people have their homes burned and their lives threatened. If he had believed this he would have reversed. For this reason, we are within our rights to condemn him as a monster.

The fact that firm beliefs cannot be readily voluntarily altered can be used to explain why reversals are also not within our voluntary control. As Apter (1982a pp. 328–329) points out, even indirect means of reversal induction may fail — a fact consistent with our reformulation of reversal theory, as an inspection of Apter's example shows:

> One may, in a telic state, decide to watch television in order to produce a paratelic state, but for some reason, such as that one cannot forget that one has some urgent and unavoidable work to do, the paratelic state is not induced. In this case, the arousal from the television will be added to the arousal level already present, and even more anxiety will be experienced than before (Apter, 1982a pp. 328–329).

The claim that relatively abrupt reversals between motivational states occur is characteristic of reversal theory. Although abrupt reversals do seem to be phenomenologically real, probably only empirical research (e.g., Walters, *et al.*, 1982) will settle the issue between reversal theory and theories which also postulate transitions, but much more gradual ones (Eckblad, 1981). One area of research which may be relevant to this issue is the phenomena investigated by "opponent process theory" (Solomon, 1980) — a much more limited theory (and more empirically based) than reversal theory. Most of the phenomena discussed in opponent process theory can be reformulated in reversal theory terms. For

example, whatever a baby's base state, feeding a baby will either increase the felt excitement of a paratelic state or induce a paratelic state. Taking away the breast before the baby is satisfied will naturally induce a reversal to the telic state, and since the baby is aroused, the telic state will be associated with distress. Clearly, giving the baby food and then taking it away will leave the baby more distressed than it was before being fed—just as opponent-process theory predicts. What is here of interest in opponent process research is that most transitions between states take place relatively rapidly, supporting reversal theory rather than more gradual theories.

The mechanism of bi-stability clearly explains abrupt reversals—and does so rather more clearly than such alternatives as "catastrophe theory" (Zeeman, 1976; Stewart & Peregoy, 1983), although, if catastrophe theory is really as general as its proponents claim, all bi-stable mechanisms must be reformulable in catastrophe theory terms. However, the mechanism of bi-stability does entail one general difficulty: it does not justify the principle of quality which is so central to reversal theory. The mechanism of bi-stability is a development of, or generalization from, the homeostatic mechanisms which have long been familiar with psychology. There is nothing to prevent the further generalization of such mechanisms—for example, tri- and quadratically-stable mechanisms. And reversals would not arise except under conditions of bi-stability. Indeed—if studies of the effects of three equal voting blocks with different objectives in democratic systems (Blair & Pollak, 1983) are anything to go by—conditions of tri-stability should give rise to cyclic changes rather than abrupt reversals. The further generalization of cybernetic control theory, therefore, leads to the conclusion that bi-stability is as much a special case as is homeostatis. For this reason, it does not seem as though the mechanism of bi-stability can provide anything more than an arbitrary justification for the principle of duality in reversal theory.

To the charge of arbitrariness, Apter (personal communication) replies:

> I agree that the development of reversal theory might require reference to n-stability (and at some point it might become necessary to drop the name "reversal theory", referring more generally to "structural phenomenology" instead). But the principle of parsimony demands that one moves in theorising to the next level of complexity, i.e., from homeostasis to bi-stability, and only moves on to more complex ideas when the simpler ones have broken down. In any case "bi-stability" is not just arbitrary... since many naturally occurring systems (e.g. the autonomic nervous system) are bi-stable in some sense or another, as are many cultural systems (according to structural anthropologists) and psychological systems (see Apter, 1982a Ch. 2).

It seems then, that the justification for the principle of duality is, at least partly, that the physical and social world just is constructed in this way—a theme characteristic of French "structuralism" as a movement in French intellectual thought. It therefore seems appropriate that we consider reversal theory as an example of a structuralist theory.

* * *

The similarities between the objectives and methods of reversal theory and those of structuralism are impressive (for accounts of structuralism, see, e.g., Caws, 1968; de George & Fernande, 1972; Ehrman, 1970; Gardner, 1976; Lane, 1970; Piaget, 1971). Structuralism seeks to penetrate beneath the surface of a particular cultural, social or psychological phenomenon and thereby find underlying structures, which in turn will link together many apparently disparate phenomena. Thus a distinction between "surface phenomena" and "depth phenomena" (or structures) is central to structuralism. Similarly reversal theory attempts to penetrate beneath the surface of experience and to find underlying states. It is for this reason that reversal theory refers to these states as "meta" states. For example, the telic and paratelic states are called "meta-motivational" states in reversal theory, and reversal theory draws a strong distinction between two phenomenological levels: behaviours and goals (on the one hand) and the way in which these goals and behaviours are interpreted (on the other hand).

> It will now be appreciated that the relationship between these two phenomenological levels is something like that between the level of behaviour and that of the intended goal of behaviour. That is, the more "superficial" (sic) level does not in itself express the "deeper" (sic) level. The same goal-and-behaviour in the individual's phenomenal field may be related by him to one or other of two different mutually-exclusive interpretations of the kind I have described. . . . Since these (deeper) phenomenological states are not themselves motivational but are *about* motivation they are referred to in the theory as "meta-motivational states" (Apter, 1979, pp. 50–51).

Structuralism attempts to detect deep-seated regularities (e.g., in behaviour) and then tends to argue that people are only partially—if at all—aware of these regularities. Similarly reversal theory detects deep-seated regularities between, say, boredom and excitement, and relates these to states of being which are not under voluntary control and are not fully understood by the person having the experience.

Structuralism seeks to isolate the "elements" of particular activity sets, where different arrangements of these same elements lead to or define different activities, or different stages of a single

activity. The rules of transformation between the possible arrangements of elements becomes a pivotal concern of structuralist analysis. Reversal theory also seeks to isolate the elements of experience—for example, it argues that "orientation towards a goal" is an essential element of motivation. When a goal is seen as essential the telic state occurs; when a goal merely gives form to an activity but is not seen as essential, the paratelic state occurs. Reversal theory is also pivotally concerned with transformations between states. It is worth noting, again, that most structuralist theories employ the principle of duality (or dichotomisation) in order to isolate the elements of an activity—to define by contrast. This technique is especially associated with the work of Levi-Strauss, but is also found in structuralist linguistics (especially phonetics). The kinship with reversal theory is extremely obvious here. In general, the need to isolate the fundamental elements of experience provides a much firmer "structuralist" justification for the principle of duality than does the mechanism of bi-stability.

Structuralism tends to isolate those features of a situation that remain constant (synchronic), those features that change back and forth regularly with time (diachronic reversible) and those features that change permanently (diachronic irreversible). Such an analysis can easily be fitted to reversal theory. For example, an orientation to arousal and an orientation to a goal is a feature of every motivational situation. However these orientations can take on one of two values (goal essential; goal not essential; arousal sought; arousal avoided) and there are continual reversals between these two values. Finally, with the passage of time, one state out of each pair can become *dominant*, i.e., the person is much more frequently in this particular state than in the other. This change is (generally) irreversible—i.e., it can be considered a "trait" of that person. Thus a person can be telic dominant, paratelic dominant, or somewhere in between, depending on the proportion of time he spends in one state rather than the other. In looking at diachronic irreversible changes, reversal theory enters the realm of personality theories, for it begins to describe what makes an individual distinctive.

A final point worth making is that all structuralist theories postulate "structures" which are seen as universal, and which give *form* to the set of phenomena which the theory is attempting to explain. Structures are said to have three characteristics: an internal coherence or wholeness; a dynamic transformational power whereby they give form (or structure) to the material they process; and a power of self-regulation, whereby they maintain themselves, and resist external disturbances (Piaget, 1971). In reversal theory, of course, the structures are metamotivational states. They are

universal in that they apply to universal properties of experience. They clearly meet Piaget's criteria for structures, for each of the metamotivational states has an internal logic or coherence that makes it a whole; and they are dynamic transformational entities, for they determine the character of our experience of particular events; and, finally, they are self-regulating, since each metamotivational state constitutes a homeostatic system in its own right — even though it can be switched on and off by the larger bistable system.

Generally it can be seen that it is quite helpful to view reversal theory as an example of structuralist theory in the French tradition, for such an approach helps to explain why the theory is constructed as it is, and what it aims to accomplish. The paradox of a structuralist phenomenology — paradoxical because of the opposition of these approaches in France — will be discussed in the conclusion of the paper.

* * *

Reversal theory is theoretically much richer than we have had space to set out here. For example, other metamotivational states (e.g., the states of negativity and conformity — Apter, 1982a) and even "metarelational" states (the "I" and the "E" states — Lachenicht, Note 2) have been proposed. But these can be seen as direct extensions of the existing theoretical apparatus. The concept of "synergies", however, although derived by means of the same phenomenological techniques as the other concepts in reversal theory, cannot be predicted from the existing theoretical framework. Since this concept, in addition to being unique, has led to prolific applications of reversal theory, it is worth discussing here.

The concept of "synergies" reflects reversal theory's preoccupation with the contradictory character of our experience. When we perceive an object — or a phenomenon — as having two contradictory meanings either simultaneously or successively then we are experiencing a synergy. According to reversal theory, synergies are phenomenologically real, and from this it follows that our experience does not obey the logical law of the excluded middle.

Apter offers a religious example of a synergy:

> A sacred object (or person, or place) is experienced by a religious person as having two opposite sets of attributes. It is at one and the same time both material and spiritual, natural and supernatural, of this world and not of this world. The peculiar fascination which such identities exert on some people would appear to derive at least partly from this paradox. A holy relic, for example, may at one level be no more than a material object — an ancient bone, let us say, or a tattered

> article of clothing—but to the believer it also has a transcendent spiritual essence (Apter, 1982b, p. 57).

Phenomenologically, synergies can occur in two ways. In the first process the contradictory meanings of an identity may be divided between the fringe and the focus of awareness. A synergy then occurs when the meaning which was marginal in our awareness becomes focal, and the meaning which was focal becomes marginal. A rapid alteration for each meaning between fringe and focus can occur, producing a synergy. The subject is aware of both contradictory meanings, as the alternation occurs. An analogy here might be the strong impression of reflected light that one receives when a stereoscope combines a black area of one photograph with a white area of another slightly different photograph. Applying this phenomenological analysis to the example of the religious relic, one may divide the believer's perception of the relic into a number of stages. Initially, the believer may just see an ancient bone. This is at the focus of his attention. However, when he realises that the old bone he sees actually belonged to a saint and has otherworldly properties, the spiritual essence of the bone dominates his focal awareness, while the physical properties of the bone become more marginal. Still, before long, the spiritual aspects of the bone become marginal, and the physical reality focal. In this way, the believing observer is continually aware of the contradictory properties of a single object, as the contradictory properties alternate between fringe and focus.

The alternative synergy process occurs when a new (and contradictory) meaning becomes focal in rapid succession to an old (and contradicted) focal meaning. Crucial to this process is the claim that a new focal awareness can be imposed before an old one completely vanishes. Again the mutually exclusive meanings are experienced simultaneously. An example of this process could be when an unmarried friend abruptly ("out of the blue") tells you that she is married. One's perception of her as "married" is almost instantaneous; but one's perception of her as one's available single friend still lingers. One is, for a time, focally aware of her both as married and single. During this time she constitutes a synergy, an arousing object of special interest that, for the moment, embodies a contradiction.

There are many examples of synergies: toys, for instance toy horses, which are both small and useless lumps of plastic and at the same time the large living objects which they represent; a representational painting, which is both paint on a canvas and a marvellous landscape; and a soccer match which may be both predictable (it occurs in a predictable setting, involves predictable teams, and follows well-known rules and unpredictable (for one

does not know the course and outcome of the game). Of special interest are jokes in which one meaning gives way unexpectedly to an opposite meaning. Reversal theory holds, however, that for humour to be experienced, the new meaning must be evaluated less highly than the original meaning, so that the meaning is downgraded by the exchange.

> Customer: I have been waiting here for ten minutes.
> Waiter: That's nothing sir. I have been waiting here for twenty-five years.

Synergies are arousing—partly because they involve the unexpected (which has long been known to increase arousal) and partly because increased arousal may be required if the subject is to resolve the contradiction they embody. Certainly many classes of objects, from art works to jokes, can be understood as synergies—as objects of special interest because of their special arousing properties. With the concept of synergies reversal theory begins to be able to deal with the effects of complex stimuli, and to make contributions to experimental aesthetics, the study of humour, and even religion.

Each of these applications, of course, must be assessed on their own merits. For example, the idea that a work of art is a synergy accords with our intuition that we "experience" a work of art, but it has little to say about the intellectual significance and theory of art —or even about the fact that art is often experienced in a calm contemplative way. Nevertheless, the concept of synergy greatly broadens reversal theory.

The concept of synergy differs from other reversal theory concepts in that it involves a relatively much greater input of phenomenological rather than structural insight. In this sense it does not seem fully integrated into reversal theory as a whole. Nevertheless its relations with the metamotivational states can be explored. It has already been pointed out that synergies are arousing. This means that they may be experienced as unpleasant in the telic state. When a serious attitude is required—for example at a funeral—a joke may not only be inappropriate but irritating. In the paratelic state, synergies will be experienced as pleasant. This is an important observation, since most consistency theories in social and personality psychology (e.g., cognitive dissonance theory) assume that people will eschew contradictions, and act to eliminate them. But clearly people in the paratelic state will welcome and cherish them, for they will offer intense and arousing experiences. Another implication is that synergies (e.g., works of art) may require secure conditions in order to be appreciated. This is because the paratelic state can only be maintained if a person does not feel

threatened, and the paratelic state is necessary for the appreciation of synergies. The association of synergies with the paratelic state, are, of course, well documented. Series-minded people (telic dominant) seldom love paradox, verbal wit or contradictions. Paratelic dominant people, however, thrive on them. A final point is that synergies may, of course, precipitate reversals. Jokes, while not universally successful, can often change our mood.

* * *

Even in a largely theoretical paper, some mention must be made of the application of reversal theory. After all, the original phenomenological (experiential) insight which led to the development of reversal theory arose from the effort to understand the contradictory behaviour of psychological patients. Valuable empirical support for reversal theory can also arise from successful applications of the theory.

The simplest application of reversal theory is to subsume a particular activity within one or other of the metamotivational states. An example of this is the claim that sexual activity is undertaken in the paratelic state (Apter, 1982a). Despite appearances, this is more than a simple categorization, for it has empirical consequences; for example, that sexual activities will be affected by reversals; and that the mental state on which sexual activity depends, will behave dynamically in the same way as any other paratelic state. The claim that sexual activity is undertaken in the paratelic state also illustrates how the phenomenological or experimental side of reversal theory is used to dominate empirical facts: objectively, sexual activity is biologically based; nevertheless, such activity is *experienced* paratelicly, and since the metamotivational states are self-perception determined, the activity must be characterised as paratelic.

Normal sexual activity/experience exhibits all the characteristics of the paratelic state: sexual arousal is felt as excitement rather than anxiety, and therefore, it is prolonged and heightened as far as possible; its object is immediate sensual experience, and this experience is enjoyed for its own sake rather than its relation to any essential goal; the mood governing the activity is playful, and free exploration is more exciting than "tried and tested" methods; the activity is not normally experienced as imposed upon one, but is freely and happily chosen; and the time orientation of the participants is narrowed to an immediate "here and now" focus. The case for calling sexual experience paratelic is strong: nevertheless, of course, any particular sexual activity can be seen as embedded in a larger telic frame — for example, as part of an effort to have a child. Still, if such larger "telic" goals intrude during sexual activity *per se* they are likely to be dysfunctional, for they

may precipitate a reversal.

Inappropriate reversals may therefore be seen as the source of sexual dysfunction. A reversal from paratelic excitement seeking behaviour to telic anxiety avoidance behaviour will ensure that sexual arousal is experienced as unpleasant anxiety, thereby inhibiting the sexual exploration, the desire to prolong the activity and the narrow "here and now" focus of the subjects, and possibly making sexual activity impossible. In this way, reversal theory can help us understand sexual dysfunctions such as impotence and premature ejaculation in men, and frigidity in women.

If one recalls that the paratelic state depends upon a sense of security (one is free from immediate severe threats) then it is not difficult to understand inappropriate reversals as arising from a number of different threats: threats to self-esteem; threat of non-completion; threat of partner's behaviour (e.g., when with a highly conventional partner); and threats instrinsic to the situation (e.g., falling pregnant) (Apter, 1982a). For example, a threat to self-esteem, or what Masters and Johnson (1970) called "performance anxiety", may arise if one is afraid that one will not be able to give one's partner sufficient pleasure. This illustrates earlier remarks concerning fundamental beliefs about safety and self-definition, especially when put into question, as having a crucial role in precipitating reversals. The example of sexual dysfunctions also serves as good evidence for the duality principle: there is no half-way station between sexual potence and impotence, for one must be either one or the other, and therefore, either paratelic or telic.

Reversal theory has a well developed counselling dimension (Murgatroyd, 1981). Psychological problems — or "crises" — may arise as a result of one of five conditions: (1) a failure to reverse from the telic to the paratelic when such a reversal would overcome the perceived problem; (2) a failure to reverse from the paratelic to the telic when such a reversal would help overcome a perceived problem; (3) an over-exaggerated or extreme shift within the telic which so distorts the individual's reaction as to make his life extremely difficult; (4) an extreme shift within the paratelic, with similar effects to (3); and (5) inappropriate reversals. Each one of these conditions creates different psychological problems and demands a different form of treatment. The discussion of sexual dysfunction, above, illustrates problems arising from inappropriate reversals. One other example will be discussed briefly in order to convey the flavour of counselling reversal theory.

An inappropriate failure to reverse from the paratelic to the telic states (condition (2)), leads a person to react to a serious situation by trivialising its consequences, refusing to plan a pattern of responses which will enable him to cope, and acting in such way as to deepen the problem and turn it into a crisis. Some typical

behaviours would be insulting the person who is perceived as the "cause" of the problem, creating anxiety in others by exaggerating descriptions of events, and complicating the problem by constantly adding new elements and involving ever more people. Murgatroyd (1981) offers an example of a marketing executive who exaggerated his achievements at work. When the factual situation was revealed, he accused the marketing research team of incompetence. When his subordinate in the firm supported the marketing research team, the marketing executive accused her of conspiring against him in order to take his position. In order to discredit her, he claimed she appeared in a blue movie. She decided to sue him. Even though he knew he had made false claims, the marketing executive decided to fight the case. At this point he felt locked into a situation from which he couldn't escape, reporting for treatment. Real life examples similar to this one abound (see e.g., Green's (1983) biography of William Cobbett). Murgatroyd, as with each of the conditions he analyses, recommends a unique selection of treatments designed to facilitate reversal from the paratelic to the telic state (e.g., Perl's hot-seat technique).

One of the uses of reversal theory in the counselling setting, then, is to provide a basis for selecting among the many available therapies. For example, by classifying "crisis" conditions, reversal theory offers a principal basis for selecting among the many available therapies. Reversal theory also encourages the counsellor to focus on processes — how a patient perceives a situation — rather than on situations. Counselling problems and crises clearly occur because of the way individuals perceive and act in relation to particular situations; they do not — as so much recent counselling work, specialising in such branches as "rape", "unemployment" or "stress" counselling implies — occur simply because particular situations occur.

The Telic Dominance Scale (TDS) (Murgatroyd *et al.* 1978) has been the focus of much applied work and research in reversal theory. The TDS measures the proportion of time a person spends in the telic state — and since the states are reciprocal, it also measures the proportion of time a person spends in the paratelic state. As mentioned earlier, this proportion of time tends to be characteristic of a particular person, and can be considered a "personality trait". The TDS has been applied in many studies of physiological reactions to arousal, many of them demonstrating that high arousal can be exciting — Svebak and his collaborators in cross-cultural research (Chang *et al.*, Note 3) show that Chinese people tend to be more telic dominant than Europeans, who are more telic dominant than Americans — and in studies of stress. In studies of stress, telic dominance is generally thought of as analogous to "Type A" behaviour. However, reversal theory does

offer a much richer theoretical framework. For example, Martin (Note 4), working within the framework of reversal theory, found that paratelic dominant people are unhappy unless they experience at least a moderate amount of life-stress; this contrasts with telic dominant people who are unhappy with any life-stress at all. This remarkable finding has many implications for stress research and therapy, and suggests that the TDS may be a diagnostic instrument for people likely to suffer stress-related diseases.

Clearly there are a large number of well developed applications of reversal theory—including applications to religion, aesthetic appreciation and humour, as indicated above. But reversal theory still has many possible unexplored applications. For example, reversal theory offers a unique, dynamic, understanding of boredom. And boredom is the key to many severe industrial, military, school, health, mental and physical problems (O'Hanlon, 1981). It would certainly be a worthwhile undertaking to explore the practical uses of reversal theory in combating boredom.

* * *

In conclusion, a number of general critical issues will be mentioned. These issues are not meant to "discredit" reversal theory—only to point to areas where the theory needs development. The earlier discussion of the precipitation of reversals revealed some conceptual difficulties associated with the idea that the reversal system is autonomous with respect to consciousness. A possible solution was offered: to view contingent events as capable of precipitating reversals when they put into question fundamental beliefs (as opposed to more lightly held mental contents) of the experiencing subject. Yet this solution requires a much more detailed working out to be really convincing. And, ultimately, it implies that reversal theory will need to examine the characteristics of external situations in relation to belief formation and reversal precipitation. Another implication is that reversal theory will be somewhat closer to personality theories which view personality as depending upon beliefs and cognitions. Some meshing of reversal theory with investigations of self deception will also be necessary (Pears, 1984).

An area of general difficulty for reversal theory is the problem of psychological ambivalence (which must, of course, be distinguished from behaviour ambivalence—the topic of the early sections of this paper). Because reversal theory dichotomises psychological states, it is incapable of explaining conditions in which a person is ambivalent about his experience (we are back with the issue of justifying dichotomies, again). Real psychological ambivalence occurs where a person cannot be sure what his orientation to his experience is (a condition unrelated to external stimuli, but internal

to the person himself). It may be that the problem of psychological ambivalence does not affect existing reversal theory states, for it can be argued that a person suffering from indecision must be in the telic state (see earlier remarks about sexual dysfunctions). But the existence of psychological ambivalence does seem to imply that some areas of experience are simply not amenable to reversal theory explanation — at least of the "bi-stable" variety. A possible route to exploring this area which occurs to the present writer is the investigation of self deception as a source of ambivalence.

Less general difficulties also arise in reversal theory. For example, reversal theory has assigned considerable importance to contradiction and inconsistency in life — but has still constructed scales for measuring traits such as telic dominance. This inconsistency can of course be explained by saying that man can be "consistent in his inconsistency" (Apter, personal communication)!

Questions of identification should be mentioned. It is not always easy to decide whether a particular activity is telic or paratelic (see earlier remarks on psychological ambivalence), or negativistic or conformistic, etc. For example, a long debate has taken place on the issue of whether religion is best characterised as a telic or paratelic phenomenon (see Apter, 1982a; Hyers, 1981; Note 5). Here the influence of the context in which the behaviour occurs, and of how that context is understood by the person, become important, as does the general pattern of the behaviour. For example, one wants to ask, is it not possible to play tennis both in order to enjoy the game *and* in order to win? Admittedly there are very many occasions in which one or the other is primary. But is it not possible to have them more or less equal? And if they are more or less equal, one could only decide which metamotivational state is operative by referring to other behaviours and to the general context in which the behaviour occurs. All this leads us to another issue, discussed throughout this paper: finding a non-arbitrary justification for the principle of duality.

Applications of reversal theory are also not free from difficulty. The most general of these (a difficulty other psychological and sociological theories share) is that the explanation may be imposed from the outside on a phenomenon. One example of this is the reversal theory account of religious doctrine. This explanation has three components: (1) when man ponders existential and cosmological questions he can find no answers; (2) eventually, through frustration, he reverses to the paratelic state and invents playful and fanciful answers; (3) these fanciful answers are then taken seriously in the telic state — which according to Apter (1982a) is the characteristic religious state. The difficulty with this explanation is that if one substitutes other terms it becomes the same explanation that reversal theory offers for creative or, indeed,

scientific behaviour. Apart from taking a definite stand with respect to the philosophical issues underlying religious doctrine, it clearly does not explain or even describe the uniqueness of religious phenomena (Allen, 1978). The point of this is not to deny that reversal theory offers us many valuable insights into a wide range of human behaviour, but rather to reaffirm the complexity of human phenomena, and their resistance to over simple explanations.

All of these issues pale before reversal theory's unique achievement: its seemingly paradoxical capturing of our phenomenological experience in a deterministic structure. How should this achievement be understood? If reversal theory is viewed first as a structuralist theory which attempts to explain how a particular set of phenomena are determined by underlying structures, and secondly as a theory dealing with human experience, its unusual combination of determinism and phenomenological realism is understandable. In a sense, reversal theory is a structuralist theory which has hi-jacked the subject matter of phenomenology. (To say this is not to devalue the phenomenological techniques employed in reversal theory, but to highlight the structuralist presuppositions of the theory). Reversal theory, unlike true phenomenology — which attempts to distance itself from all presuppositions (van Peursen, 1972) — approaches its subject matter in a predetermined, structuralist fashion. Whether its results are comparable with those of true phenomenology, and what the relative merits of the two approaches are, is a philosophical issue which turns upon how we evaluate the original phenomenological enterprise. But certainly, within the discipline of psychology, where "phenomenology" means (a "lowest common denominator" of meaning) a conscious attempt to capture and understand human experience (Ashworth, 1976; Letemendia, 1977; Misiak & Sexton, 1973; Snygg & Combs, 1959) — an approach often associated with anti-scientific psychology attitudes — reversal theory is a startling proof that human experience can be the subject matter of a deterministic theory, and the result can still retain a high degree of phenomenological validity. Although not free from conceptual difficulties, reversal theory is a remarkable achievement.

*University of Natal,*
*Pietermaritzburg.*

## NOTES

1. Svebak, S. *The significance of motivation for task induced tonic physiological changes.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Bergen, Norway, 1982.
2. Lachenicht, L.G. *Reversal theory and language behaviour.* Paper presented at

the International Symposium on Reversal Theory, Gregynog Hall, University of Wales, 2–4 September, 1983.

3. Chang, A., Harrison, G., & Apter, M.J. *Telic dominance in Singapore and Macau Chinese.* Paper presented at the International Symposium on Reversal Theory, Gregynog Hall, University of Wales, 2–4 September, 1983.
4. Martin, R. *Stress, humour and reversal theory.* Paper presented at the International Symposium on Reversal Theory, Gregynog Hall, University of Wales, 2–4 September, 1983.
5. Hyers, C. *The telic/paratelic polarity in religion: some Buddhist examples.* Paper presented at the International Symposium on Reversal Theory, Gregynog Hall, University of Wales, 1983.

## REFERENCES


Allen, D. *Structure and creativity in religion: hermeneutics in Mircea Eliade's phenomenology and new directions.* The Hague: Mouton, 1978.

Apter, M.J. 'Some data inconsistent with the optimal arousal theory of motivation'. *Perceptual & Motor Skills,* 1976, *43*: 1209–1210.

Apter, M.J. 'Human action and the theory of psychological reversals'. *In:* G. Underwood & R. Stevens (Eds.). *Aspects of consciousness, Vol. 1: psychological issues.* London: Academic Press, 1979.

Apter, M.J. 'On the concept of bi-stability'. *International Journal of General Systems.* 1981, *6*: 225–232.

Apter, M.J. *The experience of motivation: the theory of psychological reversals.* London & New York: Academic Press, 1982(a).

Apter, M.J. 'Metaphor as synergy'. *In:* D.S. Miall (Ed.). *Metaphor: problems and perspectives.* Hassocks, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1982(b).

Apter, M.J. 'Structural phenomenology and the practice of counselling'. *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society,* 1983, *36*: A3(a).

Apter, M.J. 'Negativism and the sense of identity'. *In:* G. Breakwell (Ed.). *Threatened identities.* London: Wiley, 1983(b).

Apter, M.J. 'The experience of personal relationships'. Paper presented at *International Symposium on Reversal Theory,* Gregynog Hall, University of Wales, 2–4 September, 1983(c).

Apter, M.J. & Smith, K.C.P. 'Empathy and mastery'. *Self and Society: European Journal of Humanistic Psychology,* 1983, *11*, 40–46.

Ashworth, P. 'Some notes on phenomenological approaches in psychology'. *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society,* 1976, *29*: 363–368.

Berlyne, D.E. 'Conflict and arousal'. *Scientific American,* 1966, *215*: 82–87.

Berlyne, D.E. *Aesthetics and psychobiology.* New York: Appleton Century Crofts, 1971.

Blair, D.H. & Pollak, R.A. 'Rational collective choice'. *Scientific American,* 1983, *249*: 76–83.

Boykin, A.W. Jnr., *Verbally expressed preference and complexity judgements as they relate to levels of performance in a problem-solving situation.* Doctoral dissertation, University of Michigan, 1972. *Dissertation Abstracts International, 33*: 6099B. (University Microfilms No. 73–6793, 1973).

Caws, P. 'What is structuralism?' *Partisan Review,* 1968, *35*: 75–91.

Eckblad, G. *Scheme theory: a conceptual framework for cognitive-motivational processes.* London: Academic Press, 1981.

Ehrman, J. (Ed.). *Structuralism.* New York: Doubleday, Anchor Books, 1970.

Elster, J. *Ulysses and the sirens: studies in rationality and irrationality.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.

Gardner, H. *The quest for mind.* London: Quartet Books, 1976.

de George, R.T. & Fernande, M. (Eds.). *The structuralists: from Marx to Lévi-Strauss.* New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1972.

Green, D. *Great Cobbett: the noblest agitator.* London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983.

Hyers, C. *The comic vision and the christian faith: a celebration of life and laughter.* New York: The Pilgrim Press, 1981.

James, W. *The principles of psychology.* (2 vols). New York: Holt, 1890.

Lane, M. (Ed.). *Structuralism.* London: Cape, 1970.

Letemendia, M.P. 'Problems in phenomenological psychology'. *Bulletin of the British Psychological Society,* 1977, 30: 137–139.

Masters, W. & Johnson, V.E. *Human sexual inadequacy.* Boston: Brown & Co., 1970.
Misiak, H. & Sexton, V.S. *Phenomenological, existential and humanistic psychologies.* New York: Grune & Stratton, 1973.
Mower-White, C.J. *Consistency in cognitive social behaviour: an introduction to social psychology.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.
Murgatroyd, S. 'Reversal theory: a new perspective on crisis counselling'. *British Journal of Guidance and Counselling,* 1981, *9*: 180–193.
Murgatroyd, S. 'The validity of the Telic Dominance Scale'. Paper presented at *The International Symposium on Reversal Theory.* Gregynog Hall, University of Wales, 2–4th September, 1983.
Murgatroyd, S., Rushton, C., Apter, M.J., & Ray, C., 'The development of the Telic Dominance Scale'. *Journal of Personality Assessment,* 1978, *42*: 519–528.
Nietzsche, F. 'Beyond good and evil'. *In:* W. Kaufman (Ed. & Trans.). *Basic writings of Nietzsche.* New York: The Modern Library, 1968.
Oatley, K. *Perceptions and representations: the theoretical basis of brain research and psychology.* London: Methuen, 1978.
O'Hanlon, J.F. 'Boredom: practical consequences and a theory'. *Acta Psychologia.* 1981, *49*: 53–82.
Pears, D. *Motivated irrationality.* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984.
van Peursen, C.A. *Phenomenology and reality.* Pittsburgh, Pa: Duquesne University Press, 1972.
Piaget, J. *Structuralism.* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971.
Polanyi, M. *The study of man.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1959.
Polanyi, M. 'The structure of consciousness'. *In:* M. Green (Ed.). *Knowing and being.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969.
Pollio, H.R. 'Intuitive thinking'. *In:* G. Underwood & R. Stevens (Eds.). *Aspects of consciousness Vol. 1: Psychological issues.* London: Academic Press, 1979.
Snygg, D. & Combs, A.W. *Individual behaviour: a perceptual theory.* (2nd Ed.). New York: Harper, 1959.
Solomon, R.L. 'The opponent-process theory of acquired motivation: The costs of pleasure and the benefits of pain'. *American Psychologist,* 1980, *35*: 691–712.
Stewart, J.N. & Peregoy, P.L. 'Catastrophe theory modeling in psychology'. *Psychological Bulletin,* 1983, *94*: 336–362.
Svebak, S. 'The effect of information load, emotional load and motivational state upon tonic physiological activation'. *In:* H. Ursin & R. Murison (Eds.). *Biological and Psychological basis of psychosomatic disease,* Vol. 42, Oxford: Pergamon, 1983.
Svebak, S. & Stoyva, J. 'High arousal can be pleasant and exciting: the theory of psychological reversals'. *Biofeedback & Self-Regulation,* 1980, *5*: 439–444.
Svebak, S., Storfjell, O., & Dalen, K. 'The effect of threatening context upon motivation and task induced physiological changes'. *British Journal of Psychology,* 1982, *73*: 505–512.
Walker, E.L. 'Psychological complexity and preference: a hedgehog theory of behaviour'. *In:* D.E. Berlyne & K.B. Madsen (Eds.). *Pleasure, reward, preference.* New York: Academic Press, 1973.
Walters, J., Apter, M.J., & Svebak, S. 'Colour-preference, arousal and the theory of psychological reversals'. *Motivation & Emotion,* 1982, *6*: 193–215.
Yerkes, R.M. & Dodson, J.D. 'The relation of strength of stimulus to rapidity of habit formation'. *Journal of Comparative Neurological Psychology,* 1908, 18: 459–482.
Zeeman, E.C. 'Catastrophe theory'. *Scientific American,* 1976, *234*: 65–83.

# CATHARSIS: FROM ARISTOTLE TO MAFIKA GWALA[1]

*by* COLIN GARDNER

## I

Making or attempting to make literary-theoretical statements in present-day South Africa is a complex, perilous but potentially exciting process.

To start with, there is the perpetual question whether, in a society where there is so much oppression and suffering, literary studies can be said to have very much validity at all. Or if they are valid, are they necessarily more so, for us, than other possible activities.

Then (since presumably we do feel that we are spending our time valuably) one confronts the problem of being involved with English literature at this time, at this place. One faces a bewildering variety of literary modes, literary experiences — literature of the present, of the recent past, of the distant past; literature from Britain; from the United States; from the Third World, including the rest of Africa; from different parts of the Commonwealth; literature in translation. And of course, the literature of South Africa, of the past, of the present; and in the present, particularly, we find a striking divergence of modes, of backgrounds, of urgencies, of theories (implicit or explicit) about what literature is for or about. How can one hope to comprehend all this, to do justice to it? Or is it right or sensible to *want* to do justice to all this? These, it seems to me, are questions which should challenge or pain a person who feels the need to try to talk about literature. Are there any general principles or tendencies? Or is what we call 'literature' a conglomeration of disparate particularities? And indeed has the word 'literature' any precise meaning?

The last question plunges me into another area of contemporary conflict and debate. At the moment the world of literary studies finds itself subject (as we all know) to a number of sharp, bracing tensions. Traditional or 'liberal-humanist' ways of approaching literature are challenged in different ways and in varying degrees by approaches which are wholly or partly Marxist, and/or post-structuralist, and/or psychoanalytical, and/or feminist. (This list is not exhaustive.) Where does one stand in this tense atmosphere? How can one attempt to reconcile the various pressures of one's immediate situation with what one may feel to be the nature of the various kinds of literary material presented to one? Can one, should one, adopt an eclectic attitude in these matters, trying (as people always have tried) to seize what may seem valuable in each school of thought? Or is one being less than serious if one doesn't commit

oneself firmly and responsibly to one view, one paradigm?

Some people, of course, have taken sides, rightly or wrongly. And there must certainly be some people here who will have asked: 'Does it make sense, can it be relevant, at this stage, to give a paper on *catharsis* — to trot out all that faded Aristotelian rigmarole?'

## II

I want now to switch to another mode of discourse, and attempt a brief sketch of some of the ways in which the notion of catharsis has been and can be expanded and applied within the broad terms of the traditional Western paradigm of literary reception and appreciation.

The starting-point is indeed, of course, Aristotle. Aristotle's overall theory of literature was both mimetic and formalist. He saw all literature, all art, as imitating or representing reality, as giving some valid vision of reality; it was this link between literature and our immediate world which constituted its seriousness. But at the same time he believed that a successful work of art must be an organic unity.

His remark about catharsis occurs in his discussion of tragedy. One of the features of tragedy, in his view, is that 'by means of pity and fear it brings about a catharsis, a purgation, of such emotions.'[2] The statement is enigmatical, and has been discussed a great deal. Aristotle sees pity and fear as the two major emotions aroused by tragedy; and the purgation that tragedy effects must be understood, I believe, as operating in two senses of the word: in so far as pity and fear were present in the audience or reader in a crude, unfocussed form, they are purged away, and the recipient is cleansed and lightened; but this can only mean, in realistic psychological terms (since presumably nature abhors a vacuum), that those emotions of pity and fear are themselves purged, purified, clarified, given shape and dignity and focus, so that the reader or audience can live with them at least for the time being, with a certain full acceptance and understanding.

Aristotle was talking about the modification or transformation of these emotions within tragedy; but his concept of catharsis has been generalised to take in, with certain obvious adjustments, all emotions and all literary modes. The theory would be, then, and has been, that throughout any work of literature a dual process of intellectual and emotional clarification is taking place, and that, towards or at the end of the work, there occurs an apex or steady climax of illumination which helps to complete the communication, consummate the emotions, and give a final pattern to the work — for meaning and feeling and form are inextricably related.

The view of catharsis that I have sketched is not an unfamiliar

one. And the literature of the main traditions (let me for now limit myself to that) offers many instances not only of works which can without much difficulty be seen in this light but of references to some aspect of the cathartic process itself. Shakespeare's plays, for example, seem to be aiming at catharsis in one way or another; a play like *King Lear* can perhaps be seen as throwing up a succession of evolving cathartic moments. A particular facet of catharsis is highlighted in the celebrated final line of Milton's *Samson Agonistes*:

> And calm of mind, all passion spent.

Until the late eighteenth century, literary theorists tended to talk about the literary text itself and its effects upon the reader or audience. With the Romantics, attention began to be focussed on the psychology of the writer. But the core-notion of catharsis, so far from being dislodged by this new perspective, is in fact given a new implication, a new lease of life. In a remarkable passage in his *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth describes how emotion is 'recollected in tranquillity' until 'by a species of re-action the tranquillity gradually disappears and an emotion, kindred to that which was before the subject of contemplation, is gradually produced, and does itself actually exist in the mind.'[3] This second emotion, of whatever kind, is accompanied by a certain pleasure, and it is from this complex emotion that the poem is brought forth. Wordsworth suggests, then, that for the poet the process of writing is cathartic; the literary work is produced under the pressure of a clarified and therefore manageable version of the original emotion. And of course Wordsworth is bringing to the surface what has been implicit in the theory of catharsis from the first: *our* achievement of insight and fulfilment is our participation in what the artist, through his art, has also in some sense accomplished for himself.

Again, examples of this way of seeing the cathartic process are to be found throughout literature, particularly of course in lyric poetry. A striking case, perhaps, is 'Easter 1916'. Yeats clearly wrote this poem partly in an attempt to come to terms with a momentous and agonizing event which was very close to him — the abortive Irish nationalist uprising. Here, if ever, was an instance of a poet brooding on his thoughts and emotions, recollecting them in tranquillity, attempting to hammer them into a unity. It is interesting that he dated the poem: September 25th, 1916. It took him about six months to work the emotion through, to arrive at this cathartic finale:

> We know their dream; enough
> To know they dreamed and are dead;

And what if excess of love
Bewildered them till they died?
I write it out in a verse—
MacDonagh and MacBride
And Connolly and Pearse
Now and in time to be,
Wherever green is worn,
Are changed, changed utterly:
A terrible beauty is born.

They are changed; but so is the poet; and so in a sense are we. It is a rounded, shaped conclusion, though questions continue to well up. And in the process, incidentally, Yeats has distilled a new definition of the tragic.

Catharsis, in one manifestation or another, can be found throughout the poetry of Yeats. It is there in Eliot too: one thinks of the memorable conclusions of *The Waste Land* and *Four Quartets*. I have picked most of my examples from poetry, because poetry is concentrated and easy to quote from; but one could move into other fields. Consider, for example, the overall shape and the final moments of Joyce's *Ulysses*.

## III

But of course all or almost all that I have said about catharsis has been, implicitly or explicitly, queried or denounced in one way or another in the past forty or fifty years. And in saying this I am not referring to the kinds of partial disagreement or qualification that one finds within the broadly liberal-humanist tradition—differences of opinion about details, or the obvious insistence that catharsis isn't all, that many aspects of a literary work need to be seen in quite different terms. The thrusts that I am referring to are distinctly more radical.

It would be impossible to enumerate them all. Some critics have affirmed that we have misread or responded unwisely to the works of the past. Others—mainly writers—have implied that the reading may have been correct, but that the *text* needs to be changed—that writers of the present century need to throw off the bad habits and delusions of the past.

A notable challenge is that offered, in his theory, by Brecht. In propounding his 'alienation effect', he was reacting not so much against Aristotle as against the emotional orgies offered by the sentimental drama of the late nineteenth century; indeed a certain degree of emotional distance, of artistic detachment, is implied in any notion of catharsis. But of course Brecht wanted people to leave the theatre not in a state of awed emotional fulfilment but in a condition of intense mental activity: the completion of the drama

was to take place in some form of social action. And one of the main emphases in the Marxist critique of traditional aesthetic orthodoxy has been an elaboration of Brecht's point: catharsis (the actual word is not often used) is seen as 'bourgeois closure'; the suggestion is that any rounded conclusion, any arrival at a condition of seemingly calm plenitude, is likely to serve the interests of the ruling classes.

A very different line of attack is one that we might associate with another of the century's outstanding dramatists. Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* can be thought of as an enacted refutation of the world-view that perhaps lies behind the very idea of catharsis — the view that the universe and human life have meaning which we can gain access to; the view, indeed, that meaning and fulfilment, to at least some degree, are realities. (It has of course been argued that, for all their protestations and seeming intentions, *Godot* and Beckett's other fictions do in fact show some shape and development.) I have taken Beckett, a little arbitrarily perhaps, as representative of the many modes of 'anti-literature', 'anti-art', that have emerged at certain moments in the twentieth century.

In the last 25 years or so certain works of theory and certain works of literature — sometimes functioning in partial co-ordination — have brought forward even more radical critiques of traditional notions. It has been variously suggested (and here I am summarizing and conflating fairly boldly) that it is a mistake to view literature in terms of emotional effects produced or seemingly produced; that it is the task of criticism to distance itself from literary works, in such a way that anything cathartic or supposedly cathartic is analysed as merely one aspect of the work's total contexts, the context of the production and the varying contexts of reception; that it is naive to try to imagine, or think in terms of, a work's *author*, or to suppose that a text can be said to *contain* material, intellectual or emotional or moral, which is 'out there' or 'in there', independent of what a reader brings to it (which would mean that catharsis, if the word retains any meaning at all, would be something that readers choose to *do* to texts); that, even if one holds to a more traditional view of a text as a relatively stable phenomenon, this phenomenon has to be seen as offering not, or not mainly, an organic unity, a coherent graph of emotional fruition, but discontinuity (whether intended or not), disunity, gaps and silences which provide crucial pointers for the reader or critic. In alluding to these varying critiques, I am touching briefly on theories and standpoints that are fairly well-known.

## IV

I have tried to offer the bare bones of the problem of catharsis, as I see it — the thesis, then the various counter-theses or antitheses. Is

any kind of synthesis possible?

I think it is. I step warily, at least at first. I believe the so-called liberal view of catharsis, as I have outlined it, is too deeply related to the experience of innumerable readers and critics — not only in the past, but now too — to be something that can be summarily discarded. Emotional and imaginative structures can't be scrapped in quite the same way as political structures can be (and often need to be), even though the inner structures may at times have some relationship with the outer structures.

But at the same time every one of the counter-theses or antitheses that I have enumerated seems to me to have at least some degree of point or validity. It would take hours to attempt a comment on the implications of each one. Some of the counter-theses seem to be of a sort that can be, and need to be, accepted at the same time as at least some aspects of the more traditional notion: they offer new perspectives that don't cancel out the previous view. Other counter-theses seem to me to be partially rather than wholly valid. Brecht's formulated aims, for example, for all their admirable sharpness, presuppose ultimately a slightly simplistic view of political motivation. The view seemingly proposed by Beckett, if accepted entirely, might well bring about the end of both art and theory. The various post-structuralist assertions seem to me to convert — not always without a certain self-regarding panache — rich and intelligent perceptions into unjustifiably extreme positions.

All this doesn't amount to saying, however, that I see the idea of catharsis as emerging unmodified, unqualified. Clearly one must recognize that catharsis needs to be seen as one effect, one area of interest, within a complex field of concerns. It must not be thought of as necessarily a universal or blanket phenomenon, or as one which precludes or disqualifies elements of discontinuity or ambiguity. It must be able to be viewed in communal as well as in personal terms. One must be constantly conscious of it as offering (as so obviously in Shakespeare, in Wordsworth, in Yeats) strenuous moments of visionary fullness rather than an easy bourgeois contentment. And one must recognize, too, the significant degree to which literary experiences are made and produced by our work as readers, by our input (with all that that implies), not simply provided by the text as by some objectively-functioning mechanism.

I've reached a conclusion, then — a sort of tentative synthesis. But I don't want to end on quite this note, with what might strike an unfriendly listener or reader as the patched-up compromise of a mildly updated liberal. I'd like to say something a little more positive.

What I want to suggest is this. The notions of some kind of catharsis and of some degree of organic unity or coherence (the two

ideas entail one another) — these notions seem to me to make a good deal of sense in both logical and psychological terms. Of course if one's approach is sufficiently disenchanted or deconstructive no position can stand. But if one finds that degree of scepticism or relativism to be untrue to one's experience both of literature and of life, one must recognize, I believe, that any statement, if it is to count as successful, must have an internal logic; and that it is reasonable to see a work of literature as (among many other things of course) an extended and complex statement. Its viability is likely to depend, then, to some extent, on an overall cogency. Then too it could be argued that emotion — if one is prepared to see it as central — assumes or aims for some degree of fruition or fulfilment; and it is therefore to be expected that a work of literature should normally trace some such path. In this respect many works of literature can be considered as having a rhythm, a progression and a structure, broadly similar to and akin to what we discern in other spheres of experience: we might think of the movement up to and including sexual climax, or mystical illumination, or political resolve, or any of the other emotional curves which are the stuff of psychic reality. It might be argued further (to invoke a Jungian perspective) that catharsis represents the point in the experience of a literary work at which — or the element through which — the conscious mind and the unconscious finally mesh, and a certain emotional and intellectual integration is achieved.

Let me go further. I suspect that the very life of literature — its continued existence as a significant human phenomenon — depends upon a proper recognition of its cathartic function.

And I'd like to conclude by returning briefly to the contemporary literature of South Africa, and to our specific responsibilities here. It seems to me important to acknowledge in the variety of our literary modes a range of cathartic projects, a range which stretches from the most intensely personal to the deeply communal — and of course the communal may often be in some relationship to implied social action, even though that relationship may not be quite what Brecht supposed.

Catharsis, then, I believe, in its differing manifestations, can be seen as a significant feature of the literature not only of Milton and Wordsworth and Yeats, but also of Livingstone and Serote and Gwala.

## APPENDIX

By way of postscript, and as an elaboration and illustration of the point made in my final sentence, I offer — each with a brief commentary — extracts from Milton and Wordsworth, and short

poems by Douglas Livingstone, Mongane Serote, and Mafika Gwala.

> Now came still evening on, and twilight grey
> Had in her sober livery all things clad.
> Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,
> They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
> Were slunk; all but the wakeful nightingale:
> She all night long her amorous descant sung.
> Silence was pleased. Now glowed the firmament
> With living sapphires; Hesperus that led
> The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon
> Rising in clouded majesty, at length
> Apparent queen unveiled her peerless light,
> And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw.
>
> (*Paradise Lost*, Book IV, ll. 598–609)

This passage is a part of Milton's description of the Garden of Eden before the Fall. The outline of the cathartic graph seems to me unusually plain; in this case the curve can be thought of as moving fairly steadily upwards until the last line. The process of clarification is reinforced by the fact that the rising of the moon through the clouds, subtly prepared for by an emotional movement bound up with delicate visual and aural effects, brings about a climax of literal clarity as well as what is apprehended as a regal gesture of harmonizing magnanimity.

It might perhaps be objected that the passage is atypical as it presents almost a small play-within-a-poem and is in any case something of a set-piece. But its specific qualities — the way, for example, the unfolding of the content is enacted within the modulations of the blank verse — represent a heightening and a tightening of processes that recur throughout the epic.

> The brook and road
> Were fellow-travellers in this gloomy strait,
> And with them did we journey several hours
> At a slow pace. The immeasurable height
> Of woods decaying, never to be decayed,
> The stationary blasts of waterfalls,
> And in the narrow rent at every turn
> Winds thwarting winds, bewildered and forlorn,
> The torrents shooting from the clear blue sky,
> The rocks that muttered close upon our ears,
> Black drizzling crags that spake by the way-side
> As if a voice were in them, the sick sight
> And giddy prospect of the raving stream,
> The unfettered clouds and region of the Heavens,
> Tumult and peace, the darkness and the light —

Were all like workings of one mind, the features
Of the same face, blossoms upon one tree;
Characters of the great Apocalypse,
The types and symbols of Eternity,
Of first, and last, and midst, and without end.
(*The Prelude*, 1850 version, Book VI, ll. 621–640)

The scene, the tone, the pace, the sense of divinity or infinity are quite different from what we found in the previous passage (though they are not, of course, totally different from everything in *Paradise Lost*); but again the specific cathartic contour of these lines is clearly visible. A number of powerful and paradoxical impressions are vividly juxtaposed. The passage records and generates a dynamic, accelerating movement, both within the psyche and, seemingly, outside it — a movement which embodies the drama of passionate, clairvoyant perception, and in the process throws up some startling evocations and personifications. The last five lines, making explicit what has been latent in the patterning of the verse, articulate a wild sense of unity, of fulfilment, of a revelation that transfigures our everyday awareness and expectations.

Some post-structuralist critics[4] — reacting against what they see, perhaps understandably, as an excessive proclamation or worship of unity and harmony, either in Wordsworth himself or in many of his critics — have suggested that the effects produced by his language are (whether deliberately or not) more problematical than has often been supposed, that his metaphors, viewed shrewdly, fail to achieve the emotional resolutions that they grope or gesture towards. Such views are challenging and need to be considered carefully; they indicate that the possibilities and implications of Wordsworth's are (of course) very far from being exhausted. But I think one would have to be a totally-committed deconstructionist, and indeed a sceptic about the very phenomenon of catharsis in literature, to deny the passage that we have been examining a distinctively cathartic intensity.

The three South African poems that I am going to look at are artistically rather slighter, less ambitious, than the richly-orchestrated pentameters of Milton and Wordsworth. But each seems to me to offer a clear instance of catharsis.

STEEL GIRAFFES

There are, probably, somewhere
arms as petal-slight as hers;
there are probably somewhere,
wrists as slim;
quite probably, someone has
hands as slender-leafed as hers;
the fingers, probably
bare of rings, as thin.

Certainly, there is nowhere
such a dolour
of funnels, mastings, yards,
filaments of dusk ringing shrouds
woven through the word goodbye,
riveted steel giraffes
tactfully looking elsewhere,
necks very still to the sky.

(Douglas Livingstone)[5]

The originality of this poem lies in the affectionate and good-humouredly ironical suggestion that the special quality of the woman that the poet loves, and of his love for her, is not really to be located in her physical beauty — though it is made clear that she *is* beautiful. The uniqueness lies elsewhere. In the first stanza, then, the poet seems gently to go against one of the main traditions of Renaissance love poetry.

How is the quality of the love to be delineated? In a most surprising way: not through the animate but through the inanimate, not through the natural images of stanza one but through the details of a dockyard. The scene is conjured up in such a way that — as in a subtle painting — each form in the harbour seems to carry its own emotion and significance; and perhaps lifeless shapes of various kinds are the most effective ways of conveying sadness. But this isn't the whole story, for there is some suggestion of movement or rhythm in the 'funnels, mastings, yards' and the 'filaments of dusk ringing shrouds/woven through the word goodbye'; and the cranes, at the end, are transformed into giraffes (so that we are back into nature after all). The word 'riveted' contains a piquant ambiguity: the giraffes, as cranes, are held together by rivets, but at the same time, as beings suddenly endowed with human or superhuman sensitivity, they are 'riveted' by what they see or pretend not to see. The final almost preternatural stillness of the scene — the hush of wonder and deep sympathy — is the poet's way of defining the love relationship.

The poem progresses, from the first, in a quietly cathartic arc. The word 'probably', repeated several times in stanza one, leads on, firmly and deliberately, to the 'certainly' which launches stanza two, and gives it its greater intensity. After the suggestions contained in 'dolour', 'dusk', 'shrouds', a climax is reached in the word 'goodbye' — which tells and sums up so much. From that we pass into the last three lines, with their 'calm of mind' in which 'all passion' seems to be not so much 'spent' as momentously distilled.

FOR DON M. — BANNED

it is a dry white season,
dark leaves don't last, their brief lives dry out,
and with a broken heart they dive down gently headed for the earth.
not even bleeding.
it is a dry white season brother,
only the trees know the pain as they still stand erect,
dry like steel, their branches dry like wire.
indeed, it is a dry white season,
but seasons come to pass.

(Mongane Serote)[6]

This is a poem, as the title makes clear, about a peculiarly South African form of suffering: a person, who has no doubt felt an urgent humane need to respond in some way to the country's fierce socio-political injustices, finds himself immobilized and silenced by arbitrary governmental decree. It is a kind of death, but the victim is still alive.

The poem expresses both tender friendship and political solidarity: both implications are to be found in the word 'brother'. The political or communal aspect of the poem is important; one has a sense that Serote's voice, though very personal, is representative too.

The 'dry white season' offers an admirable sketch of a drought-stricken South African winter, but it is also of course a metaphor for the banned man's condition. Tethered to his own stillness and silence, he can bring forth nothing that will live; yet the many deaths in his wintry life are muted, undramatic — the leaves 'dive down gently headed for the earth, / not even bleeding'. The images of dryness — thrown up as a counterpoint to the speaker's tone of tough kindness — become more and more grim: 'pain', 'steel', 'wire'. We are moving towards a climax.

But the last lines are unexpected:

indeed, it is a dry white season,
but seasons come to pass.

The emotion is summarized and resolved and transformed in five words. This moving and disarmingly simple denouement has been prefigured from the first: the word 'season', we now recognize, carried with it the suggestion of change, of the natural cycle, of the inevitability of at least one kind of revolution. Seasons 'come to pass': they come, in order to pass; their progression and their temporariness are the law of their life. But 'come to pass', the phrase itself, with its memory of the biblical formulation, contains an additional hint of divine providence. The meaning is clinched,

completed; and the poet has offered both consolation and a spur to future action.

IN DEFENCE OF POETRY

What's poetic
about Defence Bonds and Armscor?
What's poetic
about long-term sentences and
deaths in detention
for those who 'threaten state security'?
Tell me,
what's poetic
about shooting defenceless kids
in a Soweto street?
Can there be poetry
in fostering Plural Relations?
Can there be poetry
in the Immorality Act?
What's poetic
about deciding other people's lives?
Tell me brother,
what's poetic
about defending herrenvolkish rights?

As long as
this land, my country
is unpoetic in its doings
it'll be poetic to disagree.

(Mafika Gwala)[7]

The cathartic pattern in this poem is rather similar to that of the previous one: it is through a surprising but justifiable twist at the end that the feelings and suggestions that have informed the whole poem are clarified, distilled, fulfilled.

Some readers may wonder whether the first long section of the poem, with its elaborate list of political evils, can be said to embody emotion at all. Is it not a straightforward indictment? No. The title and the opening line, and the multiple repetitions of the word 'poetic', make it clear that the piece is a discussion of the meaning of poetry. And the discussion is both passionate and ironical: the rhythm and the stabbing questions establish the flux and reflux of human feelings; and the whole edifice of the poem is consciously and paradoxically built from 'unpoetic' stones. How is this accomplished? The 'stones'—'Defence Bonds', 'Armscor', 'long-term sentences', and so on—become available for poetry when they are seen for what they are, through angry and satirical eyes. Left to themselves and considered as phenomena that take

themselves seriously (so to speak), the outrages of official political thinking are indeed unpoetic; but Gwala bathes them in humanity and in poetry.

He transforms them by an act of opposition, of what Blake calls 'mental fight':

> I will not cease from Mental Fight,
> Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand
> Till we have built Jerusalem
> In England's green and pleasant Land.[8]

Gwala's conclusion is in some ways similar, though his manner is considerably lighter. The meaning is completed in the word 'poetic', which is what we started with: it brings with it a catharsis which promotes 'resolution' in several of its different connotations — emotional, intellectual, moral, political.

*University of Natal,*
*Pietermaritzburg.*

**NOTES**

1. The main body of this article represents a slightly modified version of a paper read at a conference of the Association of University Teachers of Southern Africa held at the Rand Afrikaans University, Johannesburg, in July 1984.
2. *Poetics*, chapter 6. (My rendering.)
3. *The Poetical Works of Wordsworth*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson and Ernest de Selincourt (London: Oxford University Presss, 1936), p. 740.
4. See, for example, Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', *Interpretation: Theory and Practice*, ed. Charles S. Singleton (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969), pp. 173–209.
5. *Eyes Closed against the Sun* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1970), p. 25.
6. *Tsetlo* (Johannesburg: Ad. Donker, 1974), p. 58.
7. *No More Lullabies* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1982), p. 10.
8. From the Preface to 'Milton', *Blake: Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), pp. 480–481.

# 'HAMLET' WITHOUT THE PRINCE OF DENMARK: SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM 1930s–1960s

*by* D.P. EDMUNDS

The achievement of the new Shakespearean criticism that rose in the 1930s and gathered momentum in the 1940s and 50s hardly needs to be argued. Our understanding of the plays advanced enormously—perhaps more than during any other phase in the history of Shakespearean study. But yet there is seldom gain without loss, and the prime of critics like George Wilson Knight, L.C. Knights and D.A. Traversi now seems sufficiently part of history to invite detached evaluation of their work. At any rate that is what this essay sets out to do, more especially to describe and analyse tendencies that qualified their success. I look at their readings of *Hamlet* and *Othello* in particular and find various weaknesses confirmed in the trend to downgrade these tragedies to works of the second rank.

The critics that I am concerned with, the so-called 'School of Knight', dismissed the Bradleyan conception of the Shakespeare play and set up in its place a new model. Wilson Knight found the 'essential reality'[1] of Shakespeare in the imaginative or poetic life of the play. This constituted the dramatist's vision, to which all the elements of the play were contributory. Here, then, is the decisive shift which more than any other development set the course of the new movement. Whereas Bradley found the centre of Shakespeare's tragedies to lie in 'action issuing from character, or in character issuing in action'[2] Wilson Knight rejects the view that locates the essence of Shakespeare in what are abstractions from the play. He stresses instead the dramatist's vision which all the elements of the play bring to embodiment.

To illustrate his idea, Wilson Knight uses the figure of a metaphor. The Shakespeare play, he says, should be seen 'as an expanded metaphor, by means of which the original vision has been projected into forms roughly correspondent with actuality'.[3] L.C. Knights and D.A. Traversi share with Wilson Knight this conception of the Shakespeare play. All speak of the play as a metaphor of some kind—an expanded metaphor, or a complex metaphor,[4] or an expanded image.[5] Likewise the American critic, R.B. Heilman, conceived of the Shakespeare play as 'a large metaphor'[6] and sympathisers with the new movement like Una Ellis-Fermor[7] and L.G. Salingar,[8] to name just two, also subscribed to the metaphor model.

Wilson Knight formulated this model as a counter to critical expectations which he felt were wrong and inhibiting to a proper understanding of Shakespeare. Opposing the tendency of Bradley

and the Victorians to relate the play to the fixed categories of character and plot, his model laid an almost opposite emphasis which freed character and action and made them relative to the play as a whole. Released from the circumscription of the old terms of reference, criticism set about discovering a new Shakespeare.

The reaction against Bradley was at the same time a reaction against the romantic way of looking at literature. Critics complained about the 'subjectivism' of their predecessors. Wilson Knight's emphasis on the all-inclusiveness of the play, on the contribution of every word and gesture to the total life and impact, claimed for the Shakespeare play a new objectivity and autonomy. It existed independently of the biography of the dramatist or the disposition of the reader, as a work of art which required the closest study, interpretation and discussion.

At best this approach was very rewarding. The decades just before and after the war stand out as possibly the most fruitful phase in the history of Shakespearean scholarship. No single critic has emerged more recently of the stature of Wilson Knight, Knights or Traversi.

And yet the new model did not save these same critics from error and even aberration. Wilson Knight, for instance, regarded Claudius as a kindly uncle to Hamlet, as a 'good and gentle king'[9] whose humanity was preferable to Hamlet's diseased mind and uncompromising honesty. Knights did not fare much better with *Hamlet*; the prince's problem, as he sees it, is an undue concentration on evil which turns out to be negating to the point of near-paralysis. The awareness 'that he embodies is at best an intermediate stage of the spirit, at worst a blind alley'.[10] Traversi brackets *Hamlet* with the problem plays rather than the great tragedies and believes that Hamlet's indecision proceeds 'from a flaw in Shakespeare's personal experience' which he could not 'project into a dramatic sequence adequately corresponding to it'.[11]

Wilson Knight writes a good essay on *Othello* — contrary to the trend. He focuses for the main part on the poetry and the characters established by the words and effects. The Othello who emerges is not the pathetically flawed character of, say, Traversi, but a simple man of heroic dignity. Wilson Knight is plainly sensitive to the beauty of the verse — 'the dominant quality in this play is the exquisitely moulded language, the noble cadence and chiselled phrase of Othello's poetry.'[12] However, the essay is not wholly successful; it falls off when Wilson Knight moves on to a symbolic level and tries to read the play as a visionary statement. Knights says very little about *Othello,* which in itself suggests that he did not feel much drawn to it. He confirms this suspicion in one or two asides: he refers, for instance, to Bradley's idealization of Othello which misses 'the critical "placing" determined by the play as a whole',[13]

and in another context he mentions Othello's 'romantic self-dramatisation' which he judges to be a barrier against knowledge.[14] Of all Othello's detractors the harshest judgement comes from Traversi:

> One can detect from the first in Othello's every assertion a note of self-dramatization, as though each action beyond its intrinsic importance must also be regarded as a contribution to the rhetorical fiction whose justification is a main purpose of his life.[15]

Two other powerful opinion-makers of the time found much in common with these evaluations. They were T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis. Neither of them is a Shakespeare critic as such, yet of the few essays Eliot wrote on Shakespeare one is on *Othello*[16] and another on *Hamlet*,[17] and he damns both plays. Leavis for his part sees no 'tragic self-discovery' in Othello,[18] and he apparently finds nothing wrong with D.H. Lawrence's aversion to Hamlet.[19]

Mention of Leavis brings to mind the part played by the journal *Scrutiny*. This provides another point of reference for characterizing the trend and grouping of critics being considered. They all, directly or indirectly, have associations with *Scrutiny*. Knights served on the editorial board of *Scrutiny* from its early days until its last issue. As a young man he felt his debt to Leavis was so great as to be beyond acknowledgement. Traversi too could look back on a long association with *Scrutiny*, and in prefatory notes to several of his books he acknowledges the presence of material that first saw the light of day in *Scrutiny*. In fact Leavis, in his retrospect on *Scrutiny*, claims some credit on behalf of the journal for Traversi's achievement.[20] Wilson Knight did not write for *Scrutiny* and he was critical of some aspects of the journal, but he influenced the *Scrutiny* critics. Leavis expresses gratitude for Wilson Knight's 'services to literary criticism'[21]; and he writes that the publication of *The Wheel of Fire* was an 'important event in Shakespeare criticism'.[22] The nature of this commendation suggests that Wilson Knight's originality was fructifying, and this is borne out by the acknowledgement of younger critics. Looking back at 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?' some thirteen years after it was written, L.C. Knight's remarks that the new approach demonstrated in his essay 'shows clearly an extensive indebtedness to the early work of Mr Wilson Knight'.[23] Elsewhere he notes that as far as any one book can be said to have heralded the new movement away from the Bradleyan emphasis, 'it was G. Wilson Knight's *The Wheel of Fire* (1930) shortly to be followed by *The Imperial Theme* (1931)'.[24] T.S. Eliot's early writings were a pervasive influence, both directly and as mediated through the pages of *Scrutiny*. 'Mr Eliot has not only refined the conception and the methods of

criticism', wrote Leavis in the second number of *Scrutiny*, 'he has put into currency decisive re-organizing and re-orientating ideas and valuations.'[25]

The critics whose work we are studying, then, have links with *Scrutiny* and *Scrutiny* was the most exciting and influential journal of the time. It assured them of an important public. Insofar as there was a consensus among its contributors, the approach and valuations of *Scrutiny* show themselves, in varying degree, in their work on Shakespeare.

* * *

The new model, I have said, did not save these critics from error and worse. Obviously it could not sustain the claims made for it, and we might turn now to consider why. Once Wilson Knight's interpretation of his own model is examined, it will be seen that a potential for error is built into it. It will be recalled that he describes the Shakespeare play in the following terms:

> Being aware of this new element we should not look for perfect verisimilitude to life, but rather see each play as an expanded metaphor, by means of which the original vision has been projected into forms roughly corresponding with actuality, conforming thereto with greater or less exactitude according to the demands of its nature.[26]

Taking into account references elsewhere in his writings, we can gloss this passage in the following way. 'Verisimilitude to life' is not a major concern of the dramatist but is more the business of the novelist and of literal statement. Shakespeare is concerned with deeper realms of experience which express themselves in other ways. We should rather then 'see each play as an expanded metaphor'—'metaphor' because the metaphor pre-eminently brings to realization, or embodies in form, the insights of the imagination, insights which are not available otherwise because they illuminate what is hidden and obscure and hence are beyond the range of literal expression. So the play, acting as a metaphor, projects 'the original vision . . . into forms roughly correspondent with actuality'. Shakespeare's 'forms'—which presumably include the plot, the people of the drama or the play as such—while roughly approximating to actuality, comply in the first place with a greater reality, that of the poet's vision of life, insights of the imagination. The 'vision' comes first: the 'forms' of the play are the means of its expression. By its employing certain 'forms', not for their own identity but in the interest of projecting something else, the play conforms to the action of a metaphor.[27]

Several criticisms can be brought against Wilson Knight's statement. They centre on his assumption about the action of

metaphor. Wilson Knight does not see the metaphor as creating meaning by the interaction between its terms; he sees it rather as a vehicle for a vision, for insights already possessed. The metaphor by his reasoning is illustrative rather than constitutive.

The idea of significant experience that *precedes* expression, which therefore controls expression and is hence ultimately more important than the expressed form, is ironically more compatible with romantic ways of looking at literature than with theories of the impersonality of art. The romantic or expressive view of literature puts at the centre of its theory the artist himself: poetry, Wordsworth writes, is the overflow of powerful feelings. And the theory tends to take as criteria the quality of the poet's sensibility and questions of how fully and how sincerely his feelings are embodied in the work of art. This theory of art tends 'to pose and answer aesthetic questions in terms of the relation of art to the artist, rather than to external nature, or to the audience, or to the internal requirements of the work itself.'[28]

Wilson Knight's conception of the Shakespeare play does just this: it sees the play in relation to the artist, to his vision. But at the same time Wilson Knight believes he is giving priority to the play as a highly-organized work of art, that speaks for itself, that poses and answers aesthetic questions in terms of the relation of art to the internal requirements of the work itself. He does not see these two perspectives as incompatible or contradictory. He equates one with the other, as the following confirms:

> It will be found that each play . . . expresses a particular and peculiar vision of human existence, and that this vision determines not alone the choice of the main plot, but the selection or invention of subsidiary scenes and characters, the matters brought up for discussion within the scenes, and the very fibre of the language in allusion, choice of imagery, metaphor and general cast of thought.[29]

On the one hand he sees the play as expressing a vision, and on the other hand he sees the vision as determining the play. These positions exclude each other. However, it is the latter emphasis which is the stronger in his writings, which means that without realizing it Wilson Knight returns to the very position which he thought he had rejected.

The confusion has consequences, but before detailing these it is worth mentioning that a similar confusion is at the centre of T.S. Eliot's thinking about the nature of art. In fact Wilson Knight's description of the Shakespeare play and Eliot's theory of the objective correlative have a point-by-point correspondence.

> The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words a set of objects, a situation, a

> chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.[30]
>
> Being aware of this new element we should not look for perfect verisimilitude to life, but rather see each play as an expanded metaphor, by means of which the original vision has been projected into forms roughly correspondent with actuality, conforming thereto with greater or less exactitude according to the demands of its own nature.

Eliot's 'objective correlative' is equivalent to Wilson Knight's 'forms roughly correspondent with actuality'. Related to the figure of the metaphor, 'vision' and 'emotion' would coincide. In both statements there is postulated an experience of some kind that *precedes* expression. The 'vision' or the 'emotion' then achieves expression through the medium of an external symbol. Eliot's requirement that the symbol should be equivalent to the 'emotion' is paralleled by Wilson Knight's qualification that the 'forms' are ultimately determined by the nature of the 'vision'.

Eliot's conception of 'a particular emotion' which is sufficiently distinct to find its equivalent in the exactly appropriate external form is a survival of the view that puts a premium on the relation of the work of art to the artist. And yet, like Wilson Knight, Eliot had rejected the romantic position and had strongly asserted the impersonality of art. It was Eliot who spoke of the poet as in a state of continual surrender of himself to something more valuable, and this progress as a continual extinction of personality. 'It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science', he said.[31]

No critics did more than Wilson Knight in his methods and Eliot in his judgements to set the direction of Shakespearean studies in the decades under consideration. Both speculated about the nature of Shakespeare's art and both were convinced they were proceeding from a much sounder theoretical base than their predecessors. On the contrary, their base was very shaky indeed; there was contradiction and confusion where they thought there was clarity and hence a false assurance. The consequences of this error concern the standing and implications of the emotional and cognitive experience that, according to the theory, precedes expression. Critics wrote about this 'emotion' (Eliot) or 'vision' (Wilson Knight) or 'personal order' (Traversi) with a confidence derived from the belief that they were considering the play objectively, as in itself it really was. Instead they were contemplating a hypothetical antecedent to the play, and this area of the model provided a refuge for a subjectivity different from that of the Victorians but at times hardly less personal and eccentric.

The criticism with which Eliot reduced *Hamlet* and which at the same time exemplified the theory of the objective correlative points the trend:

> . . . *Hamlet,* like the sonnets, is full of some stuff that the writer could not drag to light, contemplate or manipulate into art. . . . Hamlet (the man) is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible, because it is in excess of the facts as they appear. And the supposed identity of Hamlet with his author is genuine to this point: that Hamlet's bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem.[32]

If Eliot explored Hamlet's conduct, the initiatives taken and the responses, as the play developed, and formulated his criticism in terms of, say, consistency or proportion, his statement would comply with the objectivity he claims for art. But he doesn't; he moves into the area of the relationship between artist and work of art, and he hazards a pronouncement in terms of the artist's state of mind and his failure to find a sufficient embodiment of those feelings. He cannot, then, invoke the authority of the play in support of this statement. This is Eliot's private hunch that Shakespeare was going through a phase of emotional disorder.

Traversi's downgrading of *Hamlet* echoes Eliot. He repeats the confusion when he says:

> In their various ways the critics of *Hamlet* agree that the subject of the play is a frustration. . . . A frustration like that expressed in *Troilus* or *Hamlet* can never achieve total clarity of dramatic presentation, because it implies that experience has not been mastered, not dominated by the poet's creative activity.[33]

Again, it is in terms of artist/work of art that Traversi makes his summarizing generalization. In fact what Traversi dismisses as authorial frustration has more to do with a critical confusion than with a failure by Shakespeare.

Going hand-in-hand with this potential for unacknowledged subjectivism is a loss of grip on the play itself. Ironically, critics felt they had a better understanding of Shakespeare's language than ever before. This, I believe, is true; they had. But their experience and sensitivity are more or less vitiated by the temptation to give a decisive value to the emotion or vision that the play is said to focus or embody. This of course does not always happen, but it tends to occur with the more problematic plays like, for instance, *Hamlet.* While, say, Traversi can maintain a disciplined attention to the word in his study of the history plays and produce a very good book,

the same rigour does not characterize his treatment of the tragedies.

The word 'vision', which was widely current, added something to the confusion. This word sets up certain expectations, it has a certain logic, and these expectations have little to do with the play as a dramatic experience. This is to say that the word 'vision' does not encourage a full responsiveness to the dramatic and theatrical potentialities of the text. It favours instead a formulation of meaning in terms of a revelation of some kind, spiritual or moral. Hence a word quite basic to the very way in which the Shakespeare play was conceived, itself exacerbated the trend towards an undermining of the control of the text.

Wilson Knight gives some indirect support to this viewpoint. Complaining that his work has not received due recognition, he says the new methods and findings have been accepted up to a point, but not in all their implications, more especially in their claims for spiritual revelation.[34] The truth is that the choice of the word 'vision' and the constitution of the model which gives pre-eminence to 'vision' as determining the shape of the play, offer tempting scope to Wilson Knight to evade the discipline of the text and to indulge a personal tendency to eccentricity in spiritual matters. His complaint about the revelations he disclosed makes my point.

Wilson Knight's treatment of *Hamlet* reflects this bias only too clearly. In the initial stages of his essay the appraisal of symptoms and the assembling of evidence impose on the critic some discipline of objectivity and logic. But as Wilson Knight's imagination becomes more stimulated, the controls of the text are seen to weaken. Aspiring to the realm of higher truth, of 'vision', he comes less sensitive to the body and point of the 'forms', extravagant in expression and metaphysical in inclination. 'A balanced judgement', he concludes, must prefer Claudius's values to Hamlet's: better 'life' and the healthily second-rate than 'death' and 'nihilism'.[35] This surely stands the play on its head.

* * *

Let us turn now to L.C. Knight's particular partiality. What does he make of the new model in practice and what does the word 'vision' elicit from him? An answer to the latter question is not far to seek:

> In short we take seriously Coleridge's remark that Shakespeare was 'a philosopher'; the vision of life that his plays express is, in a 'certain sense', a philosophic vision.[36]

We take the qualifications of the inverted commas round 'philosopher' and 'certain sense'; these go with Knights's insistence that the Shakespeare play is a dramatic poem and we start with so

many words on the printed page. Despite this caution, however, it does happen that Knights's conception of Shakespeare's vision, which is for him primarily a moral illumination, comes between him and the printed page. An article of Knights's literary faith is that art has consequences, which is to say that an artist's moral insight transcends the situation from which it arises and can profitably be discussed in more general terms. Hence the statement that Shakespeare is a philosopher.

The danger of this philosophical bent is that Shakespeare's meaning is sought in terms of a system of values felt to underlie the whole structure of the play, and one's reading becomes partial instead of inclusive of all the elements of the play. Knights touches on this issue here in the course of taking issue with Bradley over the audience's attitude to Macbeth:

> ... to concentrate attention thus on the *personal* [his italics] implications of these lines is to obscure the fact that they have an even more important function as the keystone of the system of values that gives emotional coherence to the play. Certainly those values are likely to remain obscure if we concentrate our attention upon 'the two great terrible figures, who dwarf all the remaining characters of the drama' ... or if conventional 'sympathy for the hero' is allowed to distort the pattern of the whole.[37]

Knights affirms the importance of the whole, but his greater concern is to redress the emphasis, from the area of character to that of values, or morality. The latter, it is implied, forms the ground of the play—'gives emotional coherence to the play'—whereas considerations of character do not.

Knights's preoccupation with moral considerations reflects the *Scrutiny* connection. A comparable shift, from character to morality, is discernible in the following quotation from an important essay by Leavis, in which he sets out to define tragedy:

> It is as if we were challenged at the profoundest level with the question, 'In what does the significance of life reside?', and found ourselves contemplating, for answer, a view of life, and of the things giving it value, that makes the valued appear unquestionably more important than the valuer ...[38]

Leavis is trying to establish the distinguishing characteristic of tragedy, and he finds it in a view of life (a 'vision'?) which makes a moral challenge and which upholds values as being more important than people.

Knights could surely ask for no more telling validation of his moral perspective on Shakespeare than this disclosure of what lies

at the heart of tragedy. Moreover in this self-same essay on the essential nature of tragedy, Leavis uses *Othello* to illustrate what is not tragedy. And in doing so he makes a passing reference to the essay in which T.S. Eliot condemns Othello for taking up an aesthetic attitude rather than advancing to a clearer moral consciousness.

*Othello* and *Hamlet,* then, share the fate of being demonstration pieces in terms of which two of the leading figures of the time worked out their ideas. In the course of developing their viewpoints and valuations, they used these two plays to discriminate between the imperfectly articulated work of art or the failed tragedy and the attributes of the successful. It was a placing of *Hamlet* and *Othello* that proved decisive to their standing for decades. And yet these judgements emanated from a flawed model, on the one hand, and a bias on the other for a view of life that offered certain potentialities.

However, Knights developed the moral perspective even further than (one would imagine) Leavis and Eliot would allow. His conception of the Shakespeare play as a metaphor is related to this perspective; Knights claims from the metaphorical attribute a warrant to draw moral generalizations from the particular terms of the play. The artist's insight transcends the limits from which it arises, Knights holds, and it is the 'metaphoric process' that raises this insight to the sphere of more general reference. The artist's vision of life finds embodiment in a particular form which, functioning as a metaphor, renders its truths applicable to new contexts. Or, as Knights has it:

> The metaphoric process . . . is therefore the central drive of all literary creation (the making of a living image of experience that goes beyond the immediate representation . . .[39]

Knights's treatment of *Hamlet* is a revealing demonstration of these ideas.[40] Initially he takes a sighting on *Hamlet* in relation to several other plays, and he finds a theme running through them. He sees Shakespeare as preoccupied with questions of how men come to make the judgements that they do make or, in other words, the relationship between what a man is and what he knows, between 'being' and the self's estimate of the world. Then he shortens his view, focussing first on the play as a whole, and next on the figure of Hamlet himself. But the more general speculation, Knights's construction of the moral framework in which Shakespeare was working, proves decisive to his interpretation, and we witness a relative insensitivity to the mould and press of the play as a consequence. Just as the Victorians tended to concentrate on the character of Hamlet at the expense of the play as a whole, the *Scrutiny* critics have tended to concentrate on the moral ground of the play at the cost of Hamlet. Values replaced heroes.

It remains to show Traversi's partiality. The first significant move that Traversi makes in his critical commentary on *Othello*[41] is to define the quality of Othello's love. He finds it inhibited and circumscribed, something less than the expression of the whole man. Traversi's major evidence for this is Othello's meditation over the sleeping Desdemona (V.ii.1—). He detects a coldness and remoteness which co-exist with intensity and sensuous feeling. The imagery, moreover, is said to be never fully emancipated from the conventional vocabulary of love. This inhibition Traversi contrasts with the amplitude of Antony's expressive range in his relationship with Cleopatra. Traversi concludes that Othello's love lacks the potential for true fulfilment. And the nature of the inadequacy — a coldness holding in containment passionate heat — makes it all the more corruptible.

Reading his account, one senses some deficiency of response to the play and especially to Othello, the man. Traversi seems unable to be moved to a sympathetic awareness of the circumstances that confound Othello and the emotions that drive him. A possession of the experience of the drama is what the writer seems to be lacking. For instance, he leaves out of account the fact that during the meditation over the sleeping Desdemona, Othello is tensed to the highest pitch. The poetry indicates an almost inhuman suppression, a restraint, which is part of Othello's effort to objectify his feelings as a concern for a larger justice. The detachment he attempts, however, is insecure, and the strife between a personal response to Desdemona and the desire to enact retribution validated by some impersonal sanction is always apparent.

It is surprising that Traversi should take Othello's pulse at this moment and consider it an accurate reading of his disposition. Traversi's disregard of the extremity of Othello's feelings, his imperviousness to the great effort that Othello is making, slights the context, especially the ordering power of plot. Traversi is ignoring the dramatic situation. This indifference makes it impossible for him to 'believe' in Othello and to respond to him as a presence — a presence of great resources of feeling which are deeply stirred this very moment.

Essentially one can bring the same charge against Traversi as the others. The partiality of his reading arises from his priorities. Traversi sees the Shakespeare play as a 'reflection',[42] which typically subordinates the life of the drama to the inner life of the dramatist. Add to this Traversi's theory that Shakespeare lived at a time when the medieval synthesis had fragmented and Renaissance man was faced with the challenge of forging his own personal order and philosophy of life. The result is a view of the plays as a record of Shakespeare's personal development; his growth to moral and psychological maturity is the determinant and the plays are

expressions of various phases in this progress ('A frustration like that expressed in *Troilus* or *Hamlet* . . . implies that experience has not been mastered . . .')

* * *

What emerges from all this is that *Hamlet* and *Othello* are casualties of a critical approach which in varying degree makes secondary 'the full living immediacy of our direct experience of the plays'.[43] While upholding the importance of the poetry, it has tended to regard the experience of the play in the same way as it has regarded the terms of the metaphor, as a means to the discovery of the author's insight into life, and to this it has directed its most intense interest. As a consequence, character and dramatic situation have been reduced; in fact the very authority that these critics claimed for the text has been undermined. A premium has been put on a tragic value, on a vision of life sought in terms of spiritual or moral or psychological illumination. A major consequence has been to inhibit response to heroic potentiality and generally to impoverish our readings of *Hamlet* and *Othello*.

*University of Stellenbosch,*
*Cape.*

## NOTES

This article is based on a doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Southampton. It was further developed during overseas study leave financed in part by the Human Sciences Research Council.

1. 'The Principles of Shakespeare Interpretation', *The Sovereign Flower* (London, 1966), p. 288.
2. A.C. Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London, 1914), p. 12.
3. 'On the Principles of Shakespeare Interpretation', *The Wheel of Fire* (London, 1960), p. 15.
4. L.C. Knights, '*King Lear* as Metaphor', *Further Explorations* (London, 1965), p. 184.
5. D.A. Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare* (London, 1957), p. 181.
6. *This Great Stage: Image and Structure in 'King Lear'* (Washington, 1963), p. 12.
7. *Shakespeare the Dramatist,* ed. Kenneth Muir (London, 1961), p. 23.
8. '*The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Morality Tradition', *Scrutiny* (Cambridge, 1937), Vol. VI, No. 4, p. 414.
9. 'The Embassy of Death: An Essay on *Hamlet*', The Wheel of Fire (London, 1960), p. 35.
10. *Some Shakespearean Themes and An Approach to Hamlet* (London, 1966), p. 218.
11. *An Approach to Shakespeare,* p. 81.
12. 'The Othello Music', *The Wheel of Fire,* p. 106.
13. 'The Question of Character in Shakespeare', *Further Explorations,* p. 190.
14. *Some Shakespearean Themes and An Approach to Hamlet,* p. 168.
15. *An Approach to Shakespeare,* pp. 133–4.
16. 'Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca', *Selected Essays* (London, 1961).
17. 'Hamlet', *Selected Essays.*
18. 'Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero', *The Common Pursuit* (London, 1958), p. 155.
19. *English Literature in our Time and the University* (London, 1969), p. 154.
20. '*Scrutiny:* A Retrospect', *Scrutiny* (London, 1963), Vol. XX, p. 12.

21. Review, 1933, *A Selection from Scrutiny* (London, 1968), Vol. I, p. 289.
22 *English Literature in our Time and the University,* p. 162.
23. Preface, *Explorations* (London, 1958), p. xi.
24. *Further Explorations,* p. 187.
25. 'What's Wrong with Criticism?', *Scrutiny* (Cambridge, 1932), Vol. I, No. 2, pp. 132–3.
26. 'On the Principles of Shakespeare Interpretation', *The Wheel of Fire,* p. 15.
27. Wilson Knight's ideas are analysed in detail in my article 'Wilson Knight's Model of the Shakespeare Play', *English Studies in Africa* (Johannesburg, 1980), Vol. 23, No. 1.
28. M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York, 1953), p. 3.
29. 'The Principles of Shakespeare Interpretation', *The Sovereign Flower,* p. 291.
30. 'Hamlet', *Selected Essays,* p. 145.
31. 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Essays,* p. 17.
32. 'Hamlet', *Selected Essays,* p. 145.
33. *An Approach to Shakespeare,* p. 81.
34. 'New Dimensions in Shakespeare Interpretation', *Shakespeare and Religion* (London, 1967), p. 209.
35. 'The Embassy of Death: an Essay on *Hamlet*', *The Wheel of Fire,* p. 40.
36. 'The Question of Character in Shakespeare', *Further Explorations,* p. 192.
37. 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?', *Explorations,* p. 36.
38. 'Tragedy and the Medium', *The Common Pursuit,* p. 128.
39. '*King Lear* as Metaphor', *Further Explorations,* p. 172.
40. *Some Shakespearean Themes and An Approach to Hamlet.*
41. Chapter V, *An Approach to Shakespeare.*
42. *An Approach to Shakespeare,* p. 3.
43. The phrase comes from Knights, 'The Question of Character in Shakespeare', *Further Explorations,* p. 193.

# HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CHRONOLOGY IN LATIN AMERICA

*by* ROGER GRAVIL

The most striking feature of cultural development in Latin America since the sub-continent obtained political independence from Spain and Portugal between 1808 and 1825 has been the very pronounced social commitment of the region's cultural exponents. A remarkable number of them have seen themselves as activist members of society rather than as academics inhabiting an ivory tower far above it all. Most have displayed a collective concern about the development of their countries and have been deeply involved in national affairs. European ideas about the neutrality of art, the notion that its purity should not be contaminated by involvement in prevailing social issues, have never occupied the mainstream in Latin America. A prime feature of Latin American culture is a deep concern with society's development and improvement which means that artistic figures tend to instruct the moral conscience of the region. Various historical factors can be invoked to help account for this pronounced social commitment.

Throughout the colonial period, up to the independence struggles of the first quarter of the 19th century, the imperial governments in Madrid and Lisbon banned the writing of novels in their American colonies. Other forms of self-expression were also discouraged and close censorship was maintained over literature imported into Latin America from Europe. Politically contentious subject matter was kept out of the colonies so far as possible and these laws appear to have been enforced more strenuously than some other categories of imperial legislation. As a direct result of colonial suppression of imaginative literature, not a single novel was written in Latin America for over three centuries. Consequently, the novel simply did not function as a source of moral notions. Yet the need for some form of critical commentary on Iberian imperialism was glaringly obvious and it was met, in practice, by a new literary genre. Since works of imaginative fiction were prohibited, works of factual information abounded. Colonial Latin America produced an astonishing number of encyclopaedias, journals, travelogues and guide books, which were non-fictional and, therefore, legal. Many of these works contained surreptitious political and social criticism. A handbook on estate management might contain a thorough exposure of the notorious *encomienda* system under which Indian peasants performed forced labour for Spanish masters on land which had formerly been their ancestral territory. A geological textbook might condemn the working conditions of Indian silver-mine workers under the atrocious *mita*

system, which imprisoned them permanently underground like pit-ponies in British coal mines. Some of these works were actually written by colonial officers using pseudonyms, their private view being that colonial reform must be treated as urgent if the American empires were not to be lost in some appalling bloodbath. Thus, in colonial Latin America censorship itself effectively turned most writing into opposition literature. The tradition that writers were opposition spokesmen was three centuries old by the time political independence finally came. It is not surprising, therefore, that this function of literature carried over into the national era.

A second historical factor giving writers a prominent position in Latin America was the need to establish a national identity for the new republics. As in Africa, so in Latin America, the boundaries of these infant nation states were for the most part artificial and had little or no ethnic validity. By and large, under the doctrine of *uti posseditis*, the new national frontiers followed the old colonial boundaries and these, in turn, had ignored the shape of indigenous civilisation ever since the European Conquest. Part of building a nation, therefore, was creating a patriotic culture; so that the circumstances of political independence assigned to the cultural establishment a prime responsibility in national development. The old commitment to oppose colonial dictatorship was superseded by a new commitment as critical commentators on the infamies of the client, semi-puppet regimes, which arose in this New World where so much hope had been misplaced by over-confident liberals from Jeremy Bentham onwards.

There thus arose in Latin American artistic endeavour a marked practical concern, which has meant that movements in cultural development are primarily responses to given political, economic and social situations. In Europe movements in culture tend to be identified with changes in artistic technique and that will be what a particular generation is known for. Expressions like Cubism, Impressionism and Symbolism all refer to types of technique in artistic work. But these have no strict counterpart in Latin America. There cultural movements have names like Modernism, New Worldism and Indianism, all of which define, not technique, but prevailing attitudes to practical national issues. This makes for a tremendous difference between the cultural development of Europe and that of Latin America. In Europe one generation arises smoothly out of its predecessor, since the impetus for change comes from influences internal to cultural development. This is emphatically not the case in Latin America where cultural changes are anything but smooth. What happens in Latin America is that a new political, economic or social situation arises and the cultural tradition is broken as decisively as politics by a revolution.

After fifty years of isolation from the world at large following the

disaster of political independence, Latin America began serious economic modernisation in the last quarter of the 19th century. Thus, in the national situation the key-note was modernisation; to achieve modernity was the political objective. Correspondingly in culture the parallel movement was Modernism, a celebration of the virtues of progress and openness to the brazing influences of the wider world. Modernism was really Latin America's first true artistic movement and it was a definite cultural accompaniment to the contorted modernisation of the New World republics. Following on the heels of the repression of the colonial era and the anarchy of early independence, there arose this much-vaunted Modernism, a term coined by Ruben Dario, whose *ouevre* and personality form, perhaps, the best illustration of this artistic correlate of modernisation. Born in the socio-cultural backwater of Nicaragua in Central America, Dario surmounted his provincial limitations through a visit to Santiago de Chile in 1886. Life in this sophisticated, pseudo-European (and white) metropolis so impressed this young country boy that within a year or so he had published Modernism's founding work, the collection of poems and stories known as *Azul* (Blue) as well as making his debut as a bard of public events with *Canto épico a las glorias de Chile* (Epic Hymn to Chile's Glories), glorifying the — hardly edifying — theft by Chile of Peru's richest nitrates provinces, Tacna and Arica, during the War of the Pacific in 1879. He then moved across the Andes to the even more sophisticated, pseudo-European (and white) metropolis of Buenos Aires, capital of Argentina, where he joined the staff of the leading newspaper, *La Nación*, which energetically championed modernisation and whose proprietors supplied one of Argentina's outstanding modernising presidents, Bartolome Mitre. True to his vocation as bard of public events, Dario's routinely entitled *Canto a la Argentina* (Hymn to Argentina) eulogised the republic's cosmopolitan oligarchy on the centenary of the coming of independence to Buenos Aires and the eastern provinces (though not to the indigenous interior) in 1810. A sojourn in Paris and diplomatic service as Nicaragua's ambassador in Madrid completed his prostration before European society and culture and his constant travelling between Europe and Latin America amounted to a re-enactment of the journeys of the apostles. In fact, Dario's idealisation of Europe was a surrogate religion, which explains his total personal collapse when his citadel of refinement erupted into the barbarity of the War of 1914 to 1918. Confronted with a hideousness never seen among the indigenes of the New World, he fled from the cosmopolitan city to the tiny island of Mallorca, from Europe's true face to the veil of alcoholism, and from his panacea of Modernism cum modernisation to the Christian faith in which he died, along with Old Europe, during the First World War.

What was most striking in Modernism was the enormously inflated expectations of the period, the excessive confidence which was placed in modernisation as a panacea. The War of 1914 to 1918 and the inter-war crisis brought that expansive illusion to an end and Latin America passed into chronic dislocation and poverty. The artistic conviction then appeared that the last generation had been full of illusions and that what was urgently needed was realism, a realistic assessment of the possibilities. The social reality of Latin America was mass unemployment and widespread poverty: the cultural accompaniment was the Social Realist novels of the 1930s and 1940s. A literature of protest exposed the injustice of the prevailing social systems in Latin America. The writers who had earlier been the champions of economic progress were replaced by a new generation who served as spokesmen for the masses left impoverished in that economic progress. Actually, though, Mexico had already displayed a precocious social realism prompted by dismay that the popular potentialities of the Mexican Revolution of 1910 were being lost, just as had happened in the wars of Mexican Independence starting in 1810. A medical doctor acutely aware of social evils, Mariano Azuela, pioneered the Social Realist novel in the whole of Latin America. Even before the Revolution he had written three novels on social problems, but the trilogy which he wrote after 1910 revealed his true stature. These are *Los de abajo* (1916, literally meaning Those from Below but usually rendered as The Underdogs), *Los caciques* (1917, The Political Bosses) and *Las Moscas* (1918, The Flies).

While most of his contemporaries saw the prevailing social order as the norm and the Mexican Revolution of 1910 as an extraneous disturbance, this perceptive participant recognized the Revolution as the established fact to which the Establishment would have to adjust as best it could. It can almost be said that in Azuela's novels the Revolution itself is the main character: certainly its life is larger than that of any single personality. But while abstractions can be great, human beings can be despicable and Azuela's disappointment with the personal limitations constraining the revolutionary ideal is bitterly portrayed in the execrable creatures — The Flies — hovering around the bandit chief cum guerrilla leader, Pancho Villa. In short, it was not only the middle class who aborted the Mexican Revolution, for that would have been impossible without treacherous turncoats among the popular forces. Mercifully, consolation for political disappointment could be found in the surviving satisfaction that this father of Social Realism carried Hispanic American literature light years away from Modernism's swan-necked goddesses perched on velvet furniture in marble halls. Azuela's work was of fundamental value in swinging the literary focus away from oligarchic salons to the earth-floored shacks of the

submerged majority. This achievement enabled such successors as the Ecuadorean, Jorge Icaza (particularly noted for *Huasipungo*, roughly, Serfdom) and the Peruvian, Ciro Alegría (*El mundo es ancho y ajeno*, Broad and Alien is the World) to continue the good work with powerful exposures of the treatment of America's aboriginal man by the European-descended elite, which reflected an ethnic divide quite as stark and appalling as the forms of racial discrimination current at that time in pre-Apartheid South Africa.

Social Realism was intimately bound up with the analysis that Latin America's plight stemmed from subordination to the outside world. Artistic duty was, therefore, to sustain protest about the unrelenting pressure imposed on the region by overwhelming external forces. The aptness of this diagnosis, however, became somewhat questionable in the middle decades of the twentieth century. For with the close of World War Two Latin America's strategic position seemed less crucial and her economy more peripheral. First World industrial efficiency diminished the demand for raw materials, which in many cases became synthetic substitutes for natural products, while the renewal of European agriculture reduced sales of the region's foodstuffs. The consequent impoverishment decreased Latin America's attractions as a market and the fastest growing sector of world trade was now that of the industrial countries with each other. To this extent, the new dilemma was not so much foreign pressure as general indifference to Latin America which, until the Cuban Revolution of 1959, was relegated to the margin of the world's concerns.

Many Latin American artists responded very positively to this isolation of their sub-continent and some even gloried in the peculiarities of *nuestra América* as if finding relief and reassurance that the resemblance to the outside world was not so close after all. Certainly, Latin America has a tremendous capacity to surprise visitors: tortoises can be as large as cabin trunks; frogs reach the height of dogs begging for bones; an average-sized European is a tall man in Ecuador and meets discomfort in a country not built for him. Latin America's true situation at certain points not merely outdoes exotica but supplies far-advanced bases from which flights of fancy can be launched. It formed, in short, ideal terrain for the Myth and Fantasy movement. A path-breaker of this new genre was Leopoldo Marechal's *Adan Buenosayres*, a thoroughly Argentine approach to giving Buenos Aires the sort of treatment which James Joyce gave Dublin. This huge New World city normally inspired novels amounting to informative cultural guides to its fascinating nooks and corners, but Marechal's fictionalisation of Argentina's capital soars into poetic fantasy and whimsy, far removed from the concrete vision of Buenos Aires' more conventional celebrants. Miguel Ángel Asturias applied similar techniques to the

Guatemalan countryside, most famously in *Hombre de Maíz* (Man of Maize), portraying the sorry remnants of the once glorious Ancient Maya. For it must be said that the Myth and Fantasy movement was immersion in Americana, rather than a complete rejection of reality. Social themes are sometimes discernible in the fabulous extravaganza and some novels placed the action in a key period of Latin America's past, or gave contemporary characters prolonged reminiscences about where their history took a wrong turning. But still the 'mythical' overcame the 'social'; what else can be said about a fictional plot involving a family called Good Day, whose entire efforts for three generations were directed into avoiding the birth of a child with a pig's tail? The author of *Cien años de soledad* (One Hundred Years of Solitude) defined it later — with regret — as pure entertainment.

The feeling of the region's isolation from the outside world was frequently conveyed in the invention of remote communities cut off from external contact. Juan Carlos Onetti's 'our town' of Santa María or Gabriel García Marques' Macondo (insistently distinguished from the real Colombian town of that name) are offered or, at any rate, interpreted as microcosms of the Latin American sub-continent, while Julio Cortazar's ship or Mario Vargas Llosa's boarding school can also be seen as symbols of closed societies. Within them there operate brutal regimes against which human values are pitted, usually ineffectually, forming a scenario which can be just as suggestive of 'games people play' as transcendental continent-wide dilemmas. Regardless, however, of the strength or importance of the social message, the Myth and Fantasy movement produced a literature so remarkable that it scored two not readily compatible successes. Whereas all previous generations had needed prior recognition abroad, these writers found their prime readership within Latin America. Yet notwithstanding its very theme of cultural isolation, Latin America's Myth and Fantasy movement captured the imagination of the world through either its wonderful inventiveness or the basic universality of its concerns. In artistic terms, it was undoubtedly the region's most impressive venture to date.

Yet misgivings nevertheless arose about the Myth and Fantasy movement, though not concerning its literary merits and not among the reading public. Doubts about the *political* validity of this new literature were increasingly aired by the writers themselves. It was no less a figure than a Nobel Prize winner, Gabriel García Marques, who agonised publicly that all their literary labours had not brought down a single dictatorship in this politically grim sub-continent. Many went on to proclaim the immorality of publishing literary distractions when the political struggle was so pressing. Instead, they should devote their talents to revolutionary journalism, while

literature could wait until acceptable political conditions had been fought for and permanently established. In short, in Latin America's predicament a writer's first duty was not to literature at all, but to politics. In their very moment of triumph many of the region's most mature novelists thus turned their backs on hard-won recognition and deliberately descended to a level of writing aesthetically incomparable with their accomplishments in the modern Latin American novel. What accounts for such self-abnegation among a generation of writers, who might have felt justified in resting on their laurels and enjoying their success?

In the background lay the Cuban Revolution of 1959. Fidel Castro's 26 July Movement was remarkable for the almost total absence of educated people from its ranks. Indeed, the Argentine guerrilla adviser, Ernesto Che Guevara, devoted much of his time to teaching basic literacy to soldiers of the Cuban Revolutionary Army. The crying need for change in Latin America was, arguably, nowhere more acute than in Cuba, which has the grimmest history of the entire region. It was the very first place to be colonised by the Spaniards in 1492; Las Casas' famous defence of New World Indians was prompted by the total annihilation of the island's Caribs; negro slavery, consequently, was more central and draconian in Cuba than anywhere else in the Hispanic World and abolition did not come until the 1880s; though the Spanish American mainland attained political independence by 1825, Cuba remained under colonial rule until 1898; Jose Marti's vision of an independent Cuba was subverted by that over-bearing ally, North America, so that after the Spanish-American War, Cuba was a seedy appendage of the United States until Fidel Castro came to power on New Year's Day 1959.

Yet this microchip of Latin America's general oppression had scarcely engaged the attention of the region's artistic figures and it had been left to plain men like the Castro brothers, Camilo Cienfuegos, Ernesto Guevara and unread workers and peasants to create the first socialist republic in the Western Hemisphere. Far from testifying to the power of the pen, Castro's Revolution faced the challenge of actually fostering a cultural renaissance in Cuba. To this end remarkable educational reforms dissolved the distinction between adult and child, so that all attended school and total literacy was credibly claimed within a decade. The establishement of the Casa de las Americas annual prize gave a powerful boost to literary effort, not only in Cuba but throughout the sub-continent. Law No. 169 of 1959 set up the Instituto Cubano to encourage film makers into the production of such masterpieces as Tomás Gutierrez Alea's *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (Memories of Underdevelopment), while Cuban television made great strides away from the previous diet of old U.S. soap opera. In short, artists

had reason to experience guilt sensations about reaping where they had not sown.

The same decade or so witnessed in Chile a remarkable flowering of the arts, which has recently been movingly portrayed in Joan Jara's *Victor: An Unfinished Song*. Literature, drama, cinema and music reached a crescendo under the patronage of President Salvador Allende, world pioneer of the parliamentary road to socialism. But the military coup of 11 September 1973 introduced a savage repression which has been sustained to this day and its intensity clinched the conviction of many Latin American artists that they had more urgent duties than public entertainment. In a context of torture, nocturnal disappearances and unmarked graves their historic commitment to society was reaffirmed in its most extreme form yet, with the abandonment of works of the imagination in favour of factual exposure of the harsh brutal reality of modern Latin America.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Kurt V. Levy 'The contemporary Hispanic American Novel' in *Latin American Literary Review*, Vol. III, Fall-Winter, 1974, No. 5.
Jean Franco, 'The Spanish American Novel' in Claudio Veliz (ed.) *Latin America and the Caribbean: A Handbook* (London, 1968).
Jean Franco, *The Modern Culture of Latin America* (London, 1967).
Jean Franco, *An Introduction to Spanish American Literature* (London 1969).
J. M. Cohen (ed.) *Latin American Writing Today* (London, 1967).
D. P. Gallagher, *Modern Latin American Literature* (London, 1973).
Mariano Picon-Salas, *A Cultural History of Spanish America* (Berkeley, 1962).
John S. Brushwood, *Mexico in Its Novel: A Nation's Search for Identity* (Austin, 1966).
Joan Jara, *Victor: An Unfinished Song* (London, 1983).
Homero Alsina Thevenet, 'The Latin American Cinema' in Claudio Veliz (ed.), *Latin America and the Caribbean: A Handbook* (London, 1968).
Frank Dauster, 'The Latin American Theatre' in Claudio Veliz (ed.), *Latin America and the Caribbean: A Handbook* (London, 1968).

*University of Natal,*
*Pietermaritzburg.*

# REPRESENTATION, CONTEXT AND COGNITION; AND JANE AUSTEN

*by* THORELL TSOMONDO

Henry James once remarked that the art of the novelist and the art of the latter's 'brother of the brush', the painter, 'share a community of method'; each attempts 'in a manner best known to himself'[1] to 'render the look ... that conveys [the] meaning of things'; each 'compete[s] with' or represent[s] 'life'.[2] Jane Austen makes a similar analogy when she refers to 'the little bit ... of Ivory on which I work with so fine a brush'[3] and she exploits this methodological kinship between the novelist and the painter in structuring her work; portraits, painted or verbal, play a central role in her novels. Her major characters are usually surrogate artists who define self and other in the diction of pictorial art; they are constantly painting someone's 'likeness'; they review, modify, annul or re-create such portraits as circumstances necessitate, and the manner and application of their 'picture-making' serve as illustrations of their attempts to understand the external world. Interestingly, critics of Austen usually either commend her work for the reality of its portrayals or censure it for the limitations of its representational scope.

As James points out, however, 'may not people differ infinitely as to what constitutes ... representation? Some people, for instance, hold that Miss Austen deals with life, that Miss Austen represents. Others attribute these achievements to the accomplished Ouida'.[4] Eric Auerbach defines 'representation' as the progressively inclusive illustration of the various aspects of life and expressions of them, as imitation of reality. Even a work as ambitious as *Mimesis,* however, could not decidedly dispel the dubiety: do we mean by 'representation', a 'copy', 'resemblance'? The insecurity persists. Debates about representation continue to polarize concepts like 'realism' and 'romanticism'. Besides, representation may take various forms: Homer's *Odyssey*, Chopin's *Nocturne*, Coleridge's '*Kubla Khan*', Picasso's *Guernica* and Brancusi's *Torso* are all representations. Yet each exploits different constructional skills and demands different appreciative emphases.

Representation has need of early definition in any study, particular or general, of its nature and application. The novel, the poem, the painting or sculpture are representations in so far as they provide a system of reference to some external other. Still, this definition prompts the question: what makes the symbol or reference intelligible as a counterpart of something else: must the symbol resemble the symbolized, or must the signifier be a duplicate of the signified? One may well ask what is the symbolic

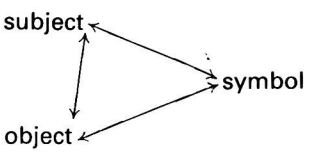
correspondence between revolving windmills and charging armies in Don Quixote's interpretative scheme? If resemblance defines representation, then there would have to be some prior agreement about those features of the object to be highlighted to make the symbol generally and accurately recognizable — since it would be impossible to convey the original in all its intricacies and changes. On the other hand, if representation is imitation then an object with no known and identifiable concreteness could not be pictorially or verbally conveyed. Moreover, judged on the basis of resemblance and imitation, art like Brancusi's *Bird in Space* is incoherent; it depicts, it seems, neither a particular bird nor 'birdness' and is faithful to nothing but to its own manner of expression. It seems, therefore, that neither imitation nor resemblance adequately determines representation.[5]

The major elements concerned in an act of representation are three: the subject (the representer), the object (the represented) and the representation itself. If viewed as an imitation, as a copy, the symbol suggests spatial and temporal exactitude: the sign is a mirror; recognition is linear in perspective. Subject, object and symbol are placed somewhat like this:

subject → representation ← object

Both subject and object look into the mirror to see the other as a perfect replica of itself. Identities become inseparable (the mirror cannot discriminate); the symbol is hollow and redundant; representation is a hindrance to seeing, an illusion. Viewed as temporal entities, the three elements present another problem; one has the task of deciding which comes first; that is, where, in the order of significance and performance, each is placed. This brings to mind the old controversy: does art imitate nature, or nature, art?

What, however, if each element, subject, object and symbol were accorded dynamic properties, if they form a triangular *plot* in their relationship? The process of representation would then be transpositional; the arrangement of its components would be placed, more or less, like this:




Here each element takes on a less dependent spatial and temporal significance. Instead of reducing subject and object to echoes, one of the other, representation gives each added significance by letting each speak. Both subject and object yield and create impressions

that are caught, translated and accommodated in a verbal, pictorial, or other system of reference which, because it has a grammar and syntax of its own, also speaks. The resultant tension between the three produces a dialogue, explicit or inferential, about a plurality of things and about the operation of these things. Thus, representation is a symbol with multiple traces of its sources plus marks of its own mutation. Representation, therefore, cannot be any one thing in particular; neither can it be a copy of anything; it can only be a sign of things.

And since the sign is the interlacement of the traits of subject and object with those of its own, it is an achieved rather than a constitutive product. The artist decides how best to render what he sees. What he sees is 'regulated by need and prejudice'. He 'selects, organizes, rejects, discriminates, associates, classifies, analyses, constructs'.[6] There is, says E.H. Gombrich, no 'innocent eye'.[7] On the other hand, there is no artless object. Objects have shape, colour, texture, dimensions; they change, appeal, repel, challenge, seduce. The object's otherness and the subject's need and anticipatory notions (incited partly by bias and partly by desire for gratification and mastery) enter into a translative discourse: the object evokes response; the subject attributes meaning and re-creates the object to convey that meaning. The act of representation is a construal of text; the 'picture as well as the poem must be read'.[8]

The definition doubles back upon itself to suggest that representation (the text) can only be defined by representing (constructing a text), by representation; that seeing and conveying is purely contextural; that the text is a by-product that carries the transformed subject-object as part of its own configuration.

Jane Austen centres the theme, structure, and dramatic action of her novels on the very nature of representation. Traditionally, 'the triangle' in literature is the complication that results from the love of two people of the same sex for a member of the opposite sex. René Girard identifies another novelistic triangle; that between the subject, the desired object and a mediator who may also be the subject's rival.[8] Austen's 'triangle' occurs between the subject, the object, and the subject's concept or imaging of the object. In *Sense and Sensibility,* for example, the real threat to the intended alliance between Marianne and Colonel Brandon is not Willoughby but Marianne's vision of Brandon: long before she met Willoughby, she dismissed the colonel as forlornly aged and infirm, since 'if he were ever animated enough to be in love, [he] must have long outlived every sensation of the kind' (p. 37).[9] Austen bases characterization and dramatic action on the ironic tension between the representation and the original, and the subject's initial ignorance of the disparity. The inequality between the object and the image of it is endemic to representation: as already shown, the symbol

cannot incorporate fully the complexity of the object; and, further, the sign has its own many-sidedness of which any particular object can be but a part. Thus, the subject who treats the sign as the equivalent of the object is caught in a fallacy: that art, verbal or pictorial, is literally a copy of some isolable, stable, and wholly graspable external reality.

Austen's protagonists must come to recognize the discrepancies between the conceptual and the actual, and as they do, they must modify the image gradually, to make it all that it can become, a progressively adequate reference. Through this procedure her major characters develop critical awareness; they learn to interpret, to appreciate the nature of the symbol or text, and to understand and gauge their own role and place in the constitutive apprehension of the other. The process is cognitive: it leads to knowledge of self and, correspondingly, to knowledge of the world that the self inhabits and continually illustrates. For Austen's protagonists, as for Shakespeare's, action in the world is always preceded by a representative mental act; and the outcome of the former is largely dependent on the manner in which the relationship between the conceptual and actual is understood and treated. In *Hamlet* and *Macbeth,* for example, drama is catalyzed by the hero's vision of his world and of his role in it. Hamlet's world is 'rotten'; he wishes to 'set it right'. Macbeth's world is conquerable; he desires to master it, rule it. In this variance rests the difference between the characters and between the resolution of the plays. Macbeth demands a correspondence between vision and reality: he will be king. Hamlet weighs perception against reality: with the 'play' he tests his 'vision' of the king. In less dramatic, but in equally significant ways, Austen's heroines move through the representational to the actual, defining their character as they go and initiating simultaneously the dramatic action of the work.

*Pride and Prejudice* opens with a telling allusion to the way Austen's system of signs works. The narrator presents the reader with an aphoristic formula and its application, a code typifying the kinds of 'discerning' formulations that the novel will probe and qualify:

> It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.
>
> However little known the feelings or views of such a man may be on his first entering a neighbourhood, this truth is so well fixed in the minds of the surrounding families that he is considered as the rightful property of some one or other of their daughters (p. 3).

The passage goes on to relate Mrs. Bennet's articulation of her desire to have Bingley, the newly-arrived, wealthy bachelor for a

son-in-law. Bingley's appeal—his large fortune, his unmarried status—placed against the backdrop of human desire or need, leads at once to consideration of possession. But Bingley cannot be claimed without ceremony. Alongside the factors that make him attractive are those that set him apart: social tradition, 'his own feelings and views', in other words, his otherness. Bringley can be acquired, however, by design—an idea that echoes brilliantly in Mr. Bennet's response to his wife's insistence on the possibility of a marriage: 'Is that his [Bingley's] design in settling here?' (p. 4). Then with characteristic Austian irony the connotations of 'design' turn upon Mrs. Bennet, the plotter. The next one-third of the novel is devoted largely to observance and discussions of the growing friendship between Bingley and Jane Bennet. Before long, the marriage for which Jane's mother yearns takes place exponentially: as Elizabeth Bennet watches her sister, Jane, in conversation with Bingley at Netherfield, the latter's residence,

> ...the train of agreeable reflections which her [Elizabeth's] observations gave birth to, made her perhaps almost as happy as Jane. She saw her [Jane] *in idea* settled in that very house in all the felicity which a marriage of true affection could bestow; ... Her mother's thoughts she plainly saw were bent the same way ... (p. 98; emphasis added).

'Design' combines conceptually *need, desire,* and *contrivance* to make possible achievement 'in idea', in representation. In this sense, design may be defined as 'representational thought', the 'ability to imagine action', to pursue a 'series of schemes without actually carrying them out in the world'.[10] Such schemes are operational in so far as they enable the subject to survey possibilities and to choose, when necessary, a course of action. The fact that the conceptualized marriage between Jane and Bingley actually takes place later—with some help from Elizabeth—leads to the conclusion that consummation is effected through a series of transformations, from symbolization to actualization. This is a significant postulate in Austen whose novelistic concern with 'proper marriages' is marked. For the concept of marriage is interrelated with representation, the latter being the *union* between distinct but participating entities—subject, object and the medium of their discourse; and for Austen, marriage in mind (representation) leads ultimately to a union based on 'true affection' between characters.

Between the conceptual and the actual, however, there occurs a wealth of cognitive experiences, as Elizabeth will discover. Once Darcy's otherness is established—he is found to be 'proud' and 'above his company'—it becomes almost an obsession with

Elizabeth, the 'studier of character', to take his 'likeness'. The following exchange between them illustrates:

> '... I remember hearing you say, Mr. Darcy, that you hardly ever forgave, that your resentment once created was unappeasable. You are very cautious, I suppose as to its *being created*.'
>
> 'I am', said he with a firm voice.
>
> 'And never allow yourself to be blinded by prejudice?'
>
> 'I hope not.'
>
> 'It is particularly incumbent on those who never change their opinion to be sure of judging properly at first.'
>
> 'May I ask to what these questions tend?'
>
> 'Merely to the illustration of your character,' said she, '... I am trying to make it out.'
>
> 'And what is your success?'
>
> '... I do not get on at all. I hear such different accounts of you as puzzle me exceedingly.'
>
> 'I can readily believe,' answered he gravely, 'that report may vary greatly with respect to me; and I could wish, Miss Bennet, that you were not to sketch my character at the moment, as there is reason to fear the performance would reflect no credit on either.'
>
> 'But if I do not take your likeness now, I may never have another opportunity.'

Irritated, Darcy replies, 'I would by no means suspend any pleasure of yours' (pp. 93–94). Both Elizabeth and Darcy take 'representation' seriously. Elizabeth hopes to find affirmation for her already formed opinions about her subject, the man she 'is determined to hate'; Darcy fears that both the artist and her model will be shown to disadvantage — he in the sketch, Elizabeth in her sketching.

Shortly before the above conversation, Elizabeth sarcastically suggests to Darcy that in her eyes, they both manifest a similarity in the 'turn of [their] minds'. She explains: 'We are each of an unsocial taciturn disposition.' Darcy responds: 'This is no very striking resemblance of your character, I am sure ... How near it may be to *mine*, I cannot pretend to say — You think it is a faithful portrait, undoubtedly.' Elizabeth answers: 'I must not decide on my own performance' (p. 91). There is double irony here. Elizabeth has indeed sketched *her* 'resemblance' to her Darcy-picture inasmuch as her portraiture registers indelibly her *performance*: she wishes to offend Darcy and thereby to confirm her prejudices. The reader will learn later that Elizabeth is only superficially right about her subject. Darcy is more complex than she can comprehend in one study. Besides, as the figure of the artist, Elizabeth is implicated by the 'conceptual habit' which makes it impossible for the eye to be 'unbiased'.[11] To 'represent is to create'.[12] And the 'creation' may assume some autonomy; it may take on a significance that the creator did not intend. The resulting discrepancy between

Elizabeth's intention and what she accomplishes serves to emphasize two points: that representation cannot mirror and that it is not one-dimensional in its denotations.

Austen demonstrates her consciousness of the complexity of the symbol in a telling incident in *Sense and Sensibility*. The 'hair in the ring' which Edward Ferrars wears is the symbolization of a bond, of an informal engagement. For Elinor, the ring is affirmation of his love for her: 'That hair was her own, she instantaneously felt ... well satisfied' (p. 98). However, Edward's reply to Marianne's question about the origin of this token of affection is, 'Yes; it is my sister's hair. The setting always casts a different shade on it ...' (p. 98). Indeed, the 'setting' does; the symbol is not transparent; nor is it homogeneous. The hair, as it turns out later, is neither his sister's nor Elinor's; it belongs to Lucy, Edward's secret fiancée. There is a kind of parallax here. Depending on the 'position' of the viewer, the sign suggests something different. The sign is the source of numerous interpretative possibilities.

The biased eye and the kinship between attempts to understand and attempts to order — and the significant role that these elements play in the creation and interpretation of the sign — contribute to the complexity of representation, giving rise to situations such as Elizabeth's unwittingly self-demonstrative sketch of Darcy, and to Elinor's mistaken assumptions about Edward's ring.

However, if symbolization is a threat to the character's wholeness or correctness of vision, it is also a means to the integration of vision. Because the symbol is achieved, and because symbols can be understood only through 'symbolizing', representation remains in a state of *becoming* as all texts do. The knowledge of any object is gained through acting upon it, transforming it, and through understanding the transformations and their source.[13] Inevitably, then, the process of comprehension leads to conscious review of previous conceptions and, by extension, to self-reflection and development. Development 'consists in the active construction of new structures out of earlier ones, in the steady alteration of a subject's relationship to the external world and in the increasing comprehensiveness and integration of that relationship'.[14] Elizabeth's revision of her Darcy-picture and the effects of this revision on her, on her subject and on the relationship between them both, is exemplary.

Darcy's letter presents a group portraiture in which he re-casts, or presents a reading of, the picture rendered by Elizabeth earlier, when, in rejecting his proposal of marriage, she delineates his 'unjust and ungenerous' use of Jane and Wickham as illustration of his 'arrogance', 'conceit', and 'selfish disdain of the feelings of others' (p. 193). Darcy's version of this portrayal re-defines his relation to other members in the group. Initially, Elizabeth reviews

the letter with an 'eagerness that hardly left her power of comprehension' (p. 204), and is ready to account Darcy's depiction false; his portrayal contradicts hers. For the first time, however, Elizabeth is moved to probe the symbol; she 'examine[s] the meaning of every sentence' (p. 205).

She 'read[s] and re-read[s] with the closest attention' (p. 205). 'Widely different [is] the effect of a second perusal' (p. 208). She finds that she had based her opinion of Wickham on his countenance, voice and manner, on gestures that now appear flawed by 'indelicacy' and 'impropriety'. 'Every line' of the letter 'proved more clearly that the affair, which she had believed it impossible that any *contrivance* could so *represent* as to render Mr. Darcy's conduct in it less than infamous, was *capable of a turn* which must make him entirely blameless throughout the whole' (p. 205; emphasis added). This realization turns Elizabeth's eyes away from her subject, to herself, to see her character, by implication, 'unfolded in [the] recital':

> How despicably have I acted! . . . I who have prided myself on my discernment: — I who have valued myself on my abilities! . . . — How humiliating is this discovery! Yet how just a humiliation! . . . I have courted prepossession and ignorance, and driven reason away . . . Till this moment I never knew myself (p. 208).

This moment of cognition is but the threshold to greater possibilities; Elizabeth replaces her certitude with a quest.

In a gallery of portraits at Pemberley, Elizabeth seeks

> . . . the only face whose features would be known to her. At last it arrested her — and she beheld a striking resemblance of Mr. Darcy, with such a smile as she remembered to have sometimes seen when he looked at her. She stood several minutes before the picture in earnest contemplation, and returned to it again before [she] quitted the gallery . . . (p. 250).

As the painter depicted in Velazquez's *Las Meninas,* framed in the act of representing, looks out to make the spectator his model, symbolically drawing the latter into the enclosed space of the canvas,[15] by analogy, Darcy, caught in the act of modelling, looks out of the picture to make Elizabeth the artist. Elizabeth is, at last, a capable one; she does not *pronounce* 'meaning'; she re-creates the representational act: 'she stood before the canvas on which he was represented, and *fixed* his eyes upon herself' (p. 251; emphasis added). With one subtly aggressive stroke, Elizabeth accomplishes two necessary artistic transactions at once: she fixes the eyes of the portrait or model upon herself, thereby seductively demanding the inclusion of herself in its representational scheme: she paints; and

she submits to the appropriating, never-innocent eye of the other: she models. Her actions indicate that Elizabeth now knows that representation is a complex of active and passive addresses, a discourse between subject, object and their medium of exchange; that in such discourse she is subject and object at once (it is not without significance that in the language of art the object of perception becomes the subject of the work). In the same interpretative space (representation), Elizabeth must know and be known. Such, Austen suggests, is the nature of representational activity.

Following her new insight into 'seeing', Elizabeth becomes retrospective. She thinks back upon Darcy's 'regard', his earlier proposal of marriage, with a 'deeper sentiment of gratitude than it had ever raised before; she remembered its warmth and softened its impropriety of expression' (p. 251). Elizabeth's use of 'memory' suggests that her actions are revisionary—she is reconstructing new, more adequate references out of earlier ones. She no longer treats her material as a substitute for the 'original' but as signs to be translated for their significance. Thus, she 'remembers' the smile on the face of the portrait as one with which, recently, she has been favoured, albeit the picture was sketched many years previously.

Outside Pemberley House, as if actualized by Elizabeth's mental communication within, Darcy unexpectedly appears. Elizabeth finds 'alteration in his manner'—Austen does not allow the reader to witness Darcy's transformation, thus emphasizing that Elizabeth perceives change in him partly because she has learned to 'see'. The modest conversation that follows their meeting is punctuated by an embarrassed silence. Having truly met, that is, having met in self-knowledge and with knowledge of the other, they feel; and what they feel is beyond words, beyond representation.

As it turns out, the man whom Elizabeth is 'determined to hate' at the beginning of the novel, she has gradually comprehended to be 'exactly the man who, in disposition and talents' complements her and, therefore, 'most suit[s] her' (p. 312). Nothing remains between them now but the ceremonial endorsement of a union which, on the representational level, is complete in the characters' newly-found knowledge of self, of each other, and in the resultant integration of their relationship. Paradoxically, it is the tension created by the triangular dimensionality of the representational act that threatened the characters' happiness; and it is through this same tension that they grow to know and to deserve each other. And perhaps of even greater importance is the suggestion that the sign, with its admixture of threat to and facilitation of self, issues from within and must be understood and treated in this context.

Broadly speaking, then, representation is functionally self-reflexive; it is on various levels a biographical-autobiographical act.

It narrates its own constitution, performance and function; it sketches explicitly or by allusion the contexture of subject, object, and symbol; and because subject and object engage actively in the shaping process, from their standpoint also, representation is autobiographical. For the artist therefore, the work of art is representational not as a mirrored reflection, but as, on several levels, an achieved and at the same time, achieving (becoming) subject. This is largely a romantic notion. Austen writes during a transitional period of literary history; the period that witnessed the 'readjustment between the universal and the particular, between the world of traditional mimesis and the world evolved from within the mind of the artist'.[16]

In *Pride and Prejudice* she suggests that knowledge of reality, like representation of reality, is a fluid system of mental acts—simultaneously interpretative and creative—that transform previous acts (perceptions and formulations of perceptions) to make them progressively effective tools of understanding. For Austen, then, representation is important not for what it is, but for what it does, or makes possible. In the words of Nelson Goodman,

> representation is to be judged by how well it serves the cognitive purpose: by the delicacy of its discriminations and the aptness of its allusions; by the way it works in grasping, exploring and informing the world; by how it analyses, sorts, orders, and organizes; by how it participates in the making, manipulation, retention and transformation of knowledge.[17]

*University of Zimbabwe,*
*Harare.*

## NOTES

1. *The Art of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), p. 7.
2. *The Art of Fiction*, p. 12.
3. *Jane Austen's Letters*, ed. R. W. Chapman (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932), II, 469.
4. 'Alphonse Daudet' in *Partial Portraits* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1970), p. 228.
5. I am indebted here to Nelson Goodman's *Languages of Art* (New York: Bobbs Merrill, 1968), pp. 3–43.
6. Goodman, pp. 6–8.
7. Gombrich, p. 298.
8. Goodman, p. 241.
9. All references to Jane Austen's works will be to R. W. Chapman's third edition of *The Novels of Jane Austen*, published in 5 volumes (London: Oxford University Press, 1932). Page numbers will be indicated in the text.
10. According to Jean Piaget's theory of the development of higher cognitive performance in the child, 'representational thought' indicates the ability to synthethize potential action, and to formulate a theory concerning the object simultaneously. Piaget's concept of cognitive function is applicable to Austen's treatment of cognition in *Pride and Prejudice*. See 'Piaget' in Howard Gardner's *The Quest for Mind* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1973), pp. 94–95.
11. Gombrich, p. 298.

12. Gombrich, p. 111.
13. Piaget in Gardner's *Quest for Mind*, p. 97.
14. Ibid., pp. 105–106.
15. See Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 4–5.
16. A. Walton Litz, 'A Development of Self: Character and Personality in Jane Austen's Fiction' in *Jane Austen's Achievement*, ed. Juliet McMaster (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1976), p. 67.
17. Goodman, p. 258.

# PSYCHOLOGY, RELIGION AND HEALING: THE 'AMAGQIRA' IN TRADITIONAL XHOSA SOCIETY

*by* KEN DOVEY and RAY MJINGWANA

Traditional healers, or *amagqira*, have practised in Southern Africa for centuries, but the pejorative labelling of them as 'witchdoctors' by Whites[1] has prevented them from having any effective influence upon psychological practices in the more modernized regions of the country. Modern psychological practice in South Africa is firmly based on theory which assumes a scientific world-view, and the rejection of traditional healing as a manifestation of a magical mind-set appears to be a consequence of such scientific dogmatism. Moreover, Christian rejection of traditional healing as a manifestation of evil appears to have been based upon a political need to discredit a competing ideology, rather than upon an understanding of the assumptions and world-view of traditional religion.

This paper describes some of the principles and practices of traditional healing in an attempt to review these, as well as the possible benefits which they could have for contemporary psychological practice. This description is based upon several interviews which the authors conducted with traditional healers in the Eastern Cape and Transkei, with one of the persons interviewed being the father of the second author.

* * *

Traditional healing rests upon a religious frame of reference, and the *igqira* believes that he or she is 'called' by God to his or her vocation. This calling usually manifests itself through dreams, and sometimes through psychological and physiological symptoms. The person then will approach a qualified *igqira* for an interpretation of his or her dreams. The qualified *igqira* will decide whether this is a genuine calling or not. If the *igqira* decides that this is a genuine calling then the person is taken on as a trainee. Sometimes the person is not yet ready to accept the calling:

> To become an *igqira* you first have to accept the calling which, in most cases, people take time to accept. This was the case with myself. I was told at different times by other *amagqira* that I had to accept the calling but I could not believe yet and so I did not want to become *igqira*.

The prospective *igqira's* traineeship will last for many years until a decision is reached that she or he is ready to become a qualified *igqira*. The training thus takes the form of an apprenticeship during

which the trainee learns the skills and methods of the qualified *igqira* by being with him or her all the time. For example, the trainee learns methods of creating transcendental states which facilitate communication with the shades:

> For the *igqira* the traditional dance is not meant for enjoyment. It is through the traditional dance that an apprentice advances from the lower stages of consciousness to the advanced stages. It is through the traditional dance that the *igqira* reaches the stage where he is able to get hold of the spirit of the shades.

For most of the *amagqira* the message of the calling is accompanied by the experience of a high level of anxiety (*umbilini*). The traditional dance assists the person to work through this anxiety. Furthermore, many of the initiation rituals and ceremonies of the trainees are conducted in the river, which carries a strong symbolic power in the community.

Central to the religious belief structure of the *amagqira* is the existence of God. It is believed that the shades, or ancestors, form the communication link between the *amagqira* and God. The *amagqira* then act as interpreters of God's will for the general population:

> For most *amagqira*, even prior to their acceptance of the calling, they have the ability to communicate with the shades—to perceive phenomena that ordinary people cannot perceive. Even myself, I can not say what it is really that we *amagqira* experience, but I believe it is the spiritual power to communicate with the shades. In my personal experience it is my ability to perceive things which other people cannot perceive. I believe this is due to voices from the shades, though I think to call it voices would be misleading. To put it more clearly, it is as if there is someone urging you to say something. Some *amagqira* are, however, more gifted than others in their ability to perceive supernatural phenomena.

The *amagqira* are unanimous in their refusal to accept personal credit for their power. They believe wholeheartedly that the power is God's and that they are only transmitters of this divine power.

> Before making any contract with anyone my first step is to ask the person to plead with me to God and the shades to be by our side. I believe, personally, that my powers are due to these sources. I do not object to people having confidence in me but I believe my ability is due to powers beyond Man's ability, i.e. God and the shades.

The shades communciate with the *amagqira* mostly through dreams. The interpretation of dreams often poses problems

although, as in modern psychology, the recurring dream has greater significance for the *igqira*:

> The majority of the *amagqira* communicate with the shades through dreams. Even dreams themselves sometimes are misleading. One has to be careful in their interpretation. A meaningful dream is the one which comes often.

The *amagqira* concede that gaining the confidence of the client is very important in the healing process:

> What I have realised is essential in treatment is that people should have confidence in the treatment itself, otherwise the treatment would not be of any benefit. There are cases of people who come here with no confidence at all. With these cases, my role is to act on the person by showing how he can benefit from the treatment.

The *amagqira* use a variety of methods which range from bone throwing and the use of special divine objects, to various rituals. Rituals with strong symbolic significance are the usual method of dealing with psychological problems within the community. The rituals are usually conducted in a group context and thus have as much influence on the people around the 'afflicted' person as on him or her. The person is thus not treated in isolation from the community.

The kinds of problems that people bring to an *igqira* vary but include family conflict, inter-personal conflict, inability to manage one's life (e.g. work, money, relationships), and psychosomatic complaints:

> The kinds of sickness that people always come for are: headaches—including mental disorganization; *amabekelo* (inorganic sicknesses); epilepsy; skin diseases; the victims of evil spells cast on them by family or other members of the community. There are different kinds of people who come here really. It's too difficult to describe all the problems they bring here.

Physical problems are usually treated with herbal remedies. The *igqira* usually asks the shades for assistance in her or his diagnosis and choice of remedy. The answer is given in dreams. For serious physical problems the *amagqira* visits the chemist or a doctor to get medicine, so it appears that modern medicine is gaining increasing credence in these communities.

The *amagqira* concede that, although they are usually successful, there are times when they are unable to help someone. They also concede that some cases require treatment over a long period of time. Their strategy of allowing serious cases to reside with them

during treatment ensures a 'totally' therapeutic environment during the initial stage of treatment:

> In my experience in this calling, which is now a period of more than thirty years, though I cannot remember well, there are so many people whom I think have been helped by me. It is difficult to state exactly how many have benefitted and how many have not. This is because some, when their goal of coming here has been achieved, go and never come back to report. There are those whom after a period of serious attempts, I find I have to tell them to go somewhere else to try for the best. These were cases I had to admit I could not handle. Some people prefer to come and stay here for a period and then return home when they feel better. This occurs most often with serious cases. Most of these people leave here feeling better and continue with treatment at their homes. Others leave here feeling better and when they come back I discover their condition has become more serious again. I also have had a number of people who come with gifts to express how thankful they are.

Although these Xhosa communities have experienced the intrusion of modern medicine, schooling, the mass media (particularly the radio), shops and visitors, they are still fairly tightly knit in their religious beliefs. This is especially true of the more isolated Transkei regions. Migrant labour, however, poses serious problems for the religious cohesion of the community in that the migrant labourer is strongly influenced by the values of modernity with the cities. The *amagqira* have thus developed rituals which attempt to prevent the psychological 'migration' of the worker to alternative world-views. An ancestor is usually requested to accompany the worker to the city and to protect him physically as well as psychologically from the dangers of the city. The *amagqira* acknowledge that many men do come back changed, but they argue that within a few months of being back in the community, they reorient themselves to traditional life and values. One of the rituals described by the *amagqira* which is used to prepare migrant workers for the journey, is the symbolic washing of their bodies with a liquid medication. This is to protect them from the evil influences of the city. On their return their bodies are again washed, this time symbolizing the cleansing of their bodies of these evil urban influences.

The *amagqira* claim that tourists are also a source of problems for they introduce alternative values and lifestyles for view within the community. This was supported by interviews with several traditional women, near Nabara in the Transkei, all of whom saw tourists as having a better relationship with their children, and as being more responsible than traditional parents with respect to the educational preparation of their children. All of these women

claimed that they would like to bring their children up in the way that White urban parents do, except that they would not tolerate the bad manners and lack of respect for other people which these White urban children exhibit.

The *amagqira* do not yet see the school as a threat as they feel that the socializing function of the family is still very strong, and the school would only pose a threat of introducing new values in cases where the family influence had broken down. Secondly, they argue that most of the teachers live in the community and accept the traditional values of the community. The *amagqira* feel very strongly that parents must take the responsibility for being good models for their children — 'the child will become like the parent'. They concede that it sometimes happens that a parent fails in his or her responsibility and is not a good model. In such cases, it is the responsibility of other family members (particularly the brothers of the father) to intervene and take the child into their custody. In the case of a father being away as a migrant worker, it is again the responsibility of his brothers to support and care for his wife and children. The extended family network of support is thus still very strong for individual family members.

* * *

It should be pointed out that the social role of the *igqira* in a traditional society is equivalent to the sum of three modern specializations: priest, medical practitioner, and psychologist.

The *amagqira* live and work in a community which shares a common religious world-view. Within this world-view, the *amagqira* have a socially accepted divine mission: to communicate with the shades and to interpret God's will. This gives them immense power within the community, particularly the power of persuasion, and makes them highly effective as psychologists.

An interesting aspect of social control within these communities is that the role of *igqira* is usually occupied by psychologically 'marginal' people. Marginality (i.e. evidence of psychological 'disturbance') is usually regarded as a sign of the 'calling' to become an *igqira*. Traditional communities thus have a highly effective method of harnessing the creative vision of the culturally marginal members (i.e. those individuals who can see beyond the conventions of the community) within a socially respected role. Similarly the role status ensures that a potentially deviant member becomes an integral part of the community. On the other hand, the 'institutionalization' of these individuals can limit their creative powers and lead to cultural stagnation. This is particularly possible in times of threat, and the defensive tactics of the *amagqira* in the face of the cultural threat of modernization possibly reflects a bankruptcy of creative alternatives within these communities.

Modern psychology faces a huge task in terms of its effectiveness within a society which has multiple world-views, lifestyles, belief structures, and values. Even within the field, there is no consensus with respect to an appropriate paradigm for psychology. Stereotypic labelling, such as the term 'shrink', perhaps suggests that modern psychology also tends to attract 'marginal' people but that the occupational role does not carry high status unlike the case in traditional communities. The 'persuasive power' of the modern psychologist is thus relatively low, and it is not surprising that psychologists tend to lean fairly heavily upon the medical profession for support. However, the study of psychology continues to be a popular choice at universities, and it may yet happen that modern psychology will recognize a paradigm which lends social credibility to its endeavours.

As for traditional healing, its current defensive stance does not augur well for its chances of survival in a modernized setting. An alternative response, and one which may well help modern psychological practice to greater effectiveness, may be for psychologists to learn from traditional practices. This paper represents an attempt to get psychologists to suspend their prejudices against *amagqira* and to review the possibility of incorporating some traditional practices into modern therapy. From our limited study, we suggest that the following traditional approaches may have much to offer modern psychology:

- Do not treat the individual in isolation from his or her reference group. Psychological problems are usually "group" problems and seldom "individual" problems.

- Rituals are powerful psychological strategies which encourage the individual's public commitment to change and enhance his or her sense of community.

- Cherish those who may be psychologically or culturally marginal and attempt to create a constructive role for them in society rather than label and condemn them to institutions. As Stuart Hampshire[2] comments, it is those cultures which have a high tolerance level for eccentrics that are often the most creative.

Although these three points constitute a meagre beginning to this process, they do point to the need for a social frame of reference for psychology. The religious paradigm of the *amagqira* and other traditional groups seems unlikely to hold credence in modern society. At the same time, the scientific paradigm of modern psychology is increasingly appearing to have led to a therapeutic cul-de-sac for practising psychologists. In the light of traditional and modern therapeutic experience, it does appear that some kind of

social paradigm may be a viable alternative for psychological practice in South Africa.

*Rhodes University,*
*Grahamstown.*

## NOTES

1. This prejudice has by no means been confined to South Africa. For excellent coverage of this topic see Torrey, E.F. *The Mind Game: Witch Doctors and Psychiatrists.* New York: Aronson, 1977.
2. Stuart Hampshire. *Thought and Action.* London: Chatto and Windus, 1959.