THEORIA

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This issue of *Theoria* includes an unusual number of contributions from colleagues at other South African universities: an indication of the increasing volume of material from which the editors now have to make their selection. We assure our colleagues at the University of Natal, however, that *Theoria*'s editorial policy continues to have as one of its main aims the intention to reflect the life of our own university in a special way, and we encourage them to submit material from the whole range of interests in the arts, humanities and social sciences.

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ROBERT FROST'S 'BUILD SOIL': A MODERN TEXT BASED ON AN ANCIENT MODE, THE PASTORAL

by JO-MARIE CLAASSEN

Pastoral is the most artificial of all literary genres, exceeding in artifice even the modern 'detective novel'. Its roots go back to the Greek Alexandrian, Theocritos of Cos. Each of its subsequent exponents has added something of his own, so that to attempt a definition is rather like trying to catch a falling star, or to be more classical, 'to pin down Proteus'.

It is easier to say what pastoral poetry is *not*. Pastoral poetry is not georgic, that is, poetry concerned with practical agricultural matters: it is not the-Farmer's-Weekly-in-verse. Nor is it bucolic poetry written for their own edification by country labourers.

Pastoral poetry is not even rural poetry, celebrating the beauties of the countryside apart from man. It is about man-in-nature, but strangely enough it is very seldom about satisfied-man-in-peaceful-nature. It is essentially concerned with the tension between different aspects of man as reflected against the perfection of the peace of nature: a kind of song, in short, about a world 'where every prospect pleases, and only man is vile'. But not truly 'vile', at that: rather man 'more sinned against than sinning'.[1]

The secret of appreciation of pastoral is to realise that as a deliberately artificial genre it is written by intellectuals for intellectuals about simple farmers, shepherds and goatherds, who would be perfectly happy, 'if only . . .'. The aspect within which the 'If only . . .' differs from poem to poem and poet to poet, is the allegorical portrayal of some complex problem which the poet has chosen to cast into the pastoral mode. The 'If only . . .' carries the 'message' of the poem. Pastoral offers an ostensibly simple approach to the complex within a framework of 'make-believe'. This framework lends distance, and the distance lends clarity. This clarity leads to illumination and a possible solution of the problem.

The Roman poet Virgil took over the trappings of Theocritan pastoral,[2] complete with Greek names for his simple serfs, bees buzzing at perpetual noontime in the summer sunshine, effortless husbandry, amoral sexuality as part of nature and natural man, a nature that feels with its human population (the so-called 'pathetic fallacy') and vague hankerings after a better life or a golden age, either distantly past or gloriously future. As his predecessor did, Virgil employs the epic metre, for the ancients considered pastoral a minor offshoot of the epic genre. As with other aspects of the classical tradition, allusions to and echoes of older writers form part of the linguistic fabric. Virgil's characters frequently enter into set

verbal competitions, or 'amoebic dialogues', in which each tries to cap the other's song. The language is conversational but 'elevated', with no attempt at bucolic naturalism in dialect, vocabulary or deviant pronunciation.

Poetics, that is, the philosophy of the function of poetry, is an important, if rather narcissistic aspect of pastoral. To Virgil's pastoral protagonists the function of poetry is not only to celebrate happiness but also to relieve the unhappiness caused by loss and exile. Virgil stresses tension and this is his major contribution to the tradition of the genre. To him the tension lies between city and country, between a political 'new deal' and the lasting ravages left by war. His *Eclogues*, first published soon after Philippi, portray among other things the distress of the countryside caused by protracted civil war.

In Virgil's first 'Eclogue', a serf, Tityrus, continues living in carefree servitude, watching his flocks and playing his flute. This pastoral 'freedom' was given to him by the new leader whom he praises as the 'epiphany of a god'. He met this leader when he went up to Rome in search of legal freedom. He has enough to live on, so that he can even offer temporary hospitality to the dispossessed Meliboeus whose farm was forcibly taken over by a retired war-veteran. The 'message' is clear: 'one man's epiphany is another man's nemesis'. This is rather crude, and can be restated in simpler and more explicit terms: 'Octavian has brought peace to Italy, but at the cost of suffering to many.'

So, right through his ten *Eclogues*, Virgil peoples his pastoral world with guileless shepherds and not-so-guileless politicians: Pollio, Varus, Gallus, Octavian himself.[3] The theory here is that a visit to the pastoral world refreshes the politician and strengthens him for his real task in the real world. Yet the pastoral world of Virgil is not wholly untouched: in several cases its happiness has been violated by the intrusion of 'the City'.[4] These politicians, being the intellectuals for whom the intellectual poet is writing, cannot but take up the message spelt out by the 'If only . . .'. Pastoral is not propaganda. The 'If only . . .' is left to the reader to complete: no explicit programme is spelt out by the poet. Rather, pastoral heals from within. It relieves tension implicitly, and life can go on.

With the fusion of pagan and Christian traditions, a whole wealth of pastoral imagery was brought in from its Judaeo-Christian antecedents: from Ezekiel's bad shepherds to the twenty-third Psalm, and from the Good Shepherd to the Lamb that was slaughtered, a broad spectrum of pastoral encoding was added to the vocabulary of the pastoral mode. Pastoral continued to entertain, refresh, enrich, criticise, amuse or instruct in a new way with each new exponent's exploration of its possibilities and deliberate limitations. Passing over the Italian pastoral tradition, in

English literature we have Alexander Barclay's earliest English eclogues in which criticism of the church ('bad shepherds') plays an important role, a role that was emulated by Spenser in his 'Shepheard's Calendar'. Spenser's characters have been anglicised, with endearing names like Willie, Davey, Cuddie and Colin Clout. Humour and parody become increasingly popular in pastoral, as for instance in increasingly outrageous nomenclature: John Gay's Hobnelia, Cloddipole, Lobbin Clout and Blowsalinda clank their milking pails clumsily through burlesque situations which still have a quaint charm.[5]

The metaphysical poets wrote pastoral lyrics.[6] Shakespeare wrote pastoral plays.[7] Milton mourned the death of his friend Edward King in a most moving pastoral elegy, 'Lycidas', and used pastoral terms to portray two opposing views of life.[8]

But at last the pastoral vein seemed in danger of being worked out. Pope could go through the motions, but the product of his mechanical 'pastoralising' in four seasonal poems,[9] seems limp and flaccid: nature is there, the shepherds are there, but the tension is lost. The artificial mode had suffocated in its own artificiality: on the Continent, Marie Antoinette could wear a 'shepherdess' gown and carry a crook, but life in the Petit Trianon was never 'pastoral' in the classical sense, in either tension or intention. Paradoxically, the intrusion of the City into that 'pastoral' existence lies closer to the realm of tragedy, and its resolution was death. W.B. Yeats attempted pastoral on three occasions but his attempts really underscored the demise of the pastoral mode.

This end is 'finally' celebrated by Robert Frost in 'Pan with us'.[10] The narrator has seen Pan[11] in the woods but Pan throws away his pipes:

> They were the pipes of pagan mirth
> And the world had found new terms of worth.
> He laid him down on the Sun-burned earth
> And ravelled a flower and looked away—
> Play? Play? — What should he play?[12]

From this we must deduce that the pastoral mode no longer speaks to modern man.

Yet Frost himself used this mode once more, explicitly, when he wanted to make a statement about individualism on the personal level, and anti-socialism on the political level. The poem is 'Build Soil'.[13] Frost first read the poem at Columbia University[14] on 24 May 1932, a short while before the national conventions of that year. It is longer than Virgil's 'Eclogue I',[15] from which it takes the names of its characters. Tityrus the poet-farmer is accosted by Meliboeus 'the potato man' (line 2) who is now 'going into' sheep

(line 11). Their conversation is about politics, poetry, commerce and husbandry. Tityrus has answers to all Meliboeus' questions and finally, some advice: 'Build soil. Turn the farm in upon itself' (line 237). Ultimately he applies this advice to all human effort, particularly to thought.

In the early 1930s the U.S.A. was only starting to recover from the great Depression. The new prospect was Roosevelt's 'New Deal' with its promise of socialist-akin Democracy. Frost, although a Democrat, was conservative; and saw in socialism a threat to individuality and an admission of human failure. Attempts at co-operative farming he saw as an unsuccessful 'attempt to imitate industrialism'. On the personal level he strongly advocated withdrawal into oneself: 'drawing in to renew ourselves'.[16]

Knowledge of biographical details of a poet sometimes illuminates a poem, but often obfuscates it. We classicists are usually blessed in that we know the bare minimum about our poets: knowledge that their lives differed from the *view of life* reflected in their poetry might confuse us into misunderstanding their poetry.[17] Without biography, the poetry can speak and we can listen. Not so with Frost: his exhaustive biography, although sympathetically drawn by Lawrence Thompson,[18] leaves us with the picture of a cantankerous old man, a supreme egoist, someone who was ashamed to show religious belief but who was profoundly religious all the same;[19] an American who tried everything, including living in England, and who ultimately settled for the semi-artificial role of a folksy, backwoods intellectual offering the kind of consistent, homespun wisdom that presents 'everybody's thoughts', neatly articulated.

This picture of the poet is of course as false as would be a portrait of Virgil as a dyspeptic literary hack who knew which side his bread was buttered on and wrote sheer political propaganda for Augustus, clothed in fine words.

The opposite is nearer the truth. Frost is a profound poet whose poetic utterances cover the whole range of human experience, although clothed in a fairly consistent 'rural' style. His 'views' differ from poem to poem as he explores different and equally viable points of view. The only fairly consistent strain is his emphasis on individuality and the essential 'aloneness' of moral choice:

> But long before I'm interpersonal
> Away way down inside I'm personal
> (lines 133–134, p. 350)

This 'aloneness', however, is undercut by biographical details: the poet was passionately involved in the vicissitudes of his family. When his daughter Marjorie lay dying, delirious from puerperal

fever, the poet says: 'The only way I could reach her was by putting my hand backward and forward between us as in counting out and saying with over-emphasis: *you and me*'.[20] This is an extreme but obvious example of tension or discrepancy between the poet's life and the philosophy propounded in his poetry.

Thompson tells of an anonymous reviewer who criticised Frost's *Collected Poems* on the grounds that Frost's make-believe world deliberately 'excluded from his attention so many chaotic elements in the real world'. Thompson thinks that this critic had failed to give credit for Frost's attempts to cope through his poetry with these very 'chaotic elements' in his own inner world.[21]

Biographical details can however shed some light on the genesis of 'Build Soil'. In 1929 Frost bought a farm,[22] but he made no great pretension to being a 'farmer' in the georgic sense.[23] He criticised his friend Untermeyer for posing as a 'gentleman-farmer'.[24] During 1931 he was asked to give a series of lectures on poetry at the 'New School for Social Research' in New York City. He was not keen, for he feared for his public image if he entered too much into the socialist-radical stream.[25] His feel for individualism was reacting more and more strongly against socialism as a concept. He saw it as tied to the idea of 'mercy', a giving beyond deserts, rather than 'justice', the acknowledgement of deserts. For him, 'mercy' smacked of 'defeat'.[26]

The above could be the reason why Frost wanted to make a political statement and also why he couched it in rural terms. His classical background would be the reason for the clothing of his thoughts within the pastoral mode which would have sprung phoenix-like from his former negation of its very *raison d'être.* When Frost had 'terms of worth' to expound, naturally he chose 'Pan pipes' to 'play' on. By choosing the names Tityrus and Meliboeus for his protagonists, Frost with two words drew upon a vast and variegated tapestry of meaning, symbol, innuendo, implication, shift of meaning and statement of tension. Clearly, not all of Frost's rural poetry is 'pastoral' in the classical sense,[27] but 'Build Soil' is pure pastoral and is true to every aspect of its underlying literary theory: the final ingredient is innovation within the set framework.

Critics who know little about the pastoral tradition as grounded in ancient literary theory, can understand very little of Frost's modern practice of this theory. Such a critic is apparently Yvor Winters.[28] He condemns with faint praise Frost's 'nostalgic looking back to the rural life which predominated in this [sic] nation a generation or two ago'.[29]

He deprecates Frost's conversational tone and differentiates sharply between 'poetry' and 'conversation'. Apparently he did not notice that Frost's use of the elliptic tendency of normal

conversation is a literary trick. He misunderstands Frost's puns and literary echoes, or does not notice them. He is very critical of the following:

> Steal away
> The song says. Steal away and stay away.
> Don't joint too many gangs. Join few if any.
> Join the United States and join the family—
> But not much in between unless a college.
>
> (lines 278–282)

The full quotation should read 'Steal away *to Jesus*', and it is there by implication. With this implication the reader is offered another complete set of philosophic symbols to live by. We are unsure whether this is meant ironically, but then it is undercut by repetition and alliteration: 'Steal away and stay away'. This is followed by an exploration of the facets of meaning of the word 'join'. (One does not 'join' a family in the same way as one 'joins' a gang, and so on . . .) Political and individual norms are implied: 'Patriotism and family loyalty are paramount, and intellectual nurturing can do no harm.' This is complex and richly textured thought—it is no mere 'farmer's talk'. It is the complex stuff of pure pastoral.

Humour of a gentle kind is one of the elements of the pastoral tradition. Frost is gently ironic:

> Some minds are so confounded intermental
> They remind me of pictures on a palette:
> Look at what happened. Surely some God pinxit.
> Come look at my significant mud pie
>
> (lines 151–154)

The texture is close: 'intermental' is a neologism coined by Frost to define excessive intellectual mingling. 'Pictures' are not usually found on a 'palette', only daubs of paint placed in a certain order. 'What happened' conveys the subject's own surprise at what he has achieved: it was accidental. 'Surely some God pinxit' is a part translation of the first line of a semi-humorous lyrical poem by Virgil's late contemporary Propertius, describing a picture of 'Amor' where the god is painted with wings.[30] By employing a capital G, a new tone is given to the phrase and a Christian view of Providence is implied. The imagery of 'painting' is continued. By retaining the Latin 'pinxit' the poet reaffirms his classical roots and implies that his reader, with a similar background, will understand the scope of the classical reference. 'Significant' is a catchword in many cultural circles, but by its juxtaposition with 'mud pie' it has been deflated and the poet has exposed intellectual pretension. 'Mud pie' finally negates the grandeur of 'pictures'—these

intellectuals' mighty exchanges of thought are colourless and unclear, something children usually produce. The ironic flavour here is typical of Frost, and is part of his contribution to the continuation of variety within the pastoral genre. 'Pied' picks up from 'mud pie', but means variegated (Afrikaans: 'bont'). There may be a fleeting allusion to the Pied Piper of Hamelin.

Frost had on occasion explained: 'Irony is a kind of guardedness. So is a twinkle. It keeps the reader from criticism'.[31] The irony in 'Build Soil' appears to have been lost on Winters[32] and it did not keep him from criticism. Frost suggests:

> Suppose someone comes near me who in rate
> Of speech and thinking is so much my better
> I am imposed on, silenced and discouraged.
> Do I submit to being supplied by him
> As the more economical producer,
> More wonderful, more beautiful producer?
>
> (lines 249–254)

Winters says 'It does not occur to Frost that he might learn from his betters and improve himself . . .'.[33] He has not noticed that Frost speaks of someone 'who *in rate/Of speech and thinking* is better' (my italics), and that the poet is actually deriding such a being as the tout of 'inferior products'. The repetition of 'producer', linked to polysyllabic adjectives, echoes Longfellow's 'Hiawatha', one of the poems most subject to humorous parody in the American corpus.

Critics have sometimes equated Virgil with his own Tityrus, in 'Eclogue I', secure in his happy serfdom, piping a happy tune in the shade. Where Virgil's Tityrus is admired by Meliboeus because he is left happily engaged in pastoral pursuits, Frost's Tityrus is told:

> The Muse takes care of you. You live by writing
> Your poems on a farm and call that farming
>
> (lines 17–18)

and he counters:

> O Meliboeus, I have half a mind
> To take a writing hand in politics.
>
> (lines 26–27)

Here Tityrus must be Frost himself, spelling out his intentions in lucid poetics. As with Virgil's poem, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish the speakers, as the dialogue is not marked. Frost later stated explicitly: 'Both those people in the dialogue are me'.[34] So, we deduce, the tension is within the poet himself. But again, the poet when writing prose was known not always to keep to literal truth — in Thompson's careful words, 'not entirely candid'.[35] The

poet also claimed that the poem had been written before the New Deal was heard of: 'All I had heard of was the Old De'il' (Devil).[36]

In sum, points of similarity between Virgil's pastoral and Frost's are: the names of the protagonists and their elaborately simple 'conversation', a setting of economic dispossession versus new political hope, poetics and the poet's intention, a closely woven verbal texture, elusive humour and tension. Finally, there is significant difference in the 'If only . . .', that is, a difference in the message conveyed.

Frost is, as with his poetics, more explicit than Virgil in his political discussion. He has given himself the right to be so by using as sub-title 'A political pastoral'. Frost labours under the disadvantage that, like Shakespeare, he is eminently quotable. One of the most quotable political comments in 'Build Soil' is:

> . . . and what are wars but politics
> Transformed from chronic to acute and bloody?
> (lines 29–30)

This is simply restating Virgil's exclamation '*et quo discordia civis/produxit miseros!*'[37]

Critics who read only a narrow-minded disapproval of socialism into the poem, do it less than justice. The sweep of its political comment is broader. Frost himself explained later 'I'd rather cast an idea by implication than cast a ballot'.[38] It is significant that 'Build Soil' precedes a poem entitled 'To a Thinker', addressed to the Democratic president, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, which comments on politicians' tendency to veer between extremes. This the poet castigates as not 'thinking' but 'walking'. Reference to a living politician within the pastoral setting itself was familiar practice with Virgil.

Frost's exposition of tension is however not quite Virgilian. With Virgil it was tension between city and country, between political actions and rural suffering. His Meliboeus had become one of the homeless poor, a drifter. John C. Kemp spells out the tension in Frost as a 'relationship between strongly regional characters and less-experienced individuals, often outsiders or newcomers'.[39] Frost's Meliboeus is the less experienced, the 'potato man' who is next 'going into' sheep. He is staying in the rural setting but making a change, perhaps even for the better. So, unlike Virgil's first 'Eclogue', the tension is between the *settled* and *unsettled* within a rural community, and not in the *settlement*, or lack of it. Frost's unsettled is also the inexperienced who has fewer intellectual resources to fall back on. He urges the settled who in his view is not truly a farmer as he is able to live by his poetry, to put his poetry to some 'practical' use, such as:

> Why don't you use your talents as a writer
> To advertise our farms to city buyers,
> Or else write something to improve food prices,
> Get in a poem towards the next election.
>
> (lines 22–25)

Line 23 is directly counter to the condition portrayed by Virgil — *his* Meliboeus had not wanted to be ousted by a usurper. Virgil's Tityrus enjoys his happy security and plies his pipe. His wholly integrated pastoral world lives on by itself around him, for him, and only incidentally through him. Frost's Tityrus counters his friend's distorted view of poetics by replying that he is unsure whether the state of the country really warrants leaving the familiar stuff of poetry for a sphere where right and wrong are not easily distinguishable:

> I prefer to sing safely in the realm
> Of types, composite and imagined people:
> To affirm there is such a thing as evil
> Personified, but ask to be excused
> From saying on a jury 'Here's the guilty'.
>
> (lines 48–52)

One remembers that Frost apparently once considered writing a play with the idea of the tension between two opposite points of view as central theme.[40]

But, strangely, a little later in the poem Meliboeus' view of poetics has been marvellously expanded. Perhaps influenced by Tityrus' analogue equating 'socialism' and 'love' as equally indivisible, he declares (or comments): 'Poetry itself once more, is back in love' (line 89). Here we seem to get confirmation of the poet's claim to be 'both characters'. In the aspect of poetics, at least, tension has been allayed.

Ultimately the tension in 'Build Soil' lies in the 'If only . . .'. Virgil's 'If only . . .' was comparatively easy to unravel: '*True peace has come to Italy and life can go on happily under a new political regime. All would be well,* if only *there had not been painful dispossessions too.*'

Frost actually did spell out his 'If only . . .' in a letter to Louis Untermeyer which is almost a prose paraphrase of the poem.[41] Apparently it was aimed at redirecting what Frost considered Untermeyer's unacceptable pose of being a 'gentleman farmer'. The letter ends: 'All you have to do to be saved is to sneak off to one side and *see whether you are any good at anything.* Can you cook can you make butter can you write can you think can you shoot can you sleep?' This could be re-phrased: '*If only you would sneak off . . .*'

One might want to object to Frost's rating 'cooking and butter

making' equally with 'writing and thinking' and these latter activities with 'shooting and sleeping'. The emphasis is however on '*can you*'. It is an emphasis not so much on creativity as on individuality. It is an affirmation of the individuality of man and the need for him to do alone what he alone can do well. Whether it be deed or thought, it is creative. John Robert Doyle sees this as a plea to civilisation to escape from 'mass thinking', to listen, pause and consider.[42] This is what Frost's 'soil-building' metaphor means: *ploughing in of ideas, like the ploughing in of a crop, will enrich the 'soil' of thought, and in due time will produce a better crop.*

This 'better crop' in due time will then be ready for market. The theme of 'going to market' is a familiar metaphor in Frost's vocabulary. In an interview in 1931 Frost said: 'Most of the iceberg is under the water. Most of oneself should be within oneself. A man must do that in order to be somebody when he comes out to market with other folks.'[43] According to Doyle, in 'Build Soil' Frost is *not* 'castigating marketing a product, but [castigating] going with a product not yet ready for market'. He quotes from Frost's prose 'Introduction to King Jasper' in which the poet criticises his age's quest for 'new ways to be new'. Doyle explains that this is in reality an 'attack on mistaking experiments for a finished product'.[44]

'Going to market' in Virgilian pastoral also is used as a symbol. It is the point at which city and country meet. It is the place to which the products of Tityrus' world are sent (or not sent)[45] and to which the dispossessed but not completely homeless peasants of 'Eclogue IX' take a kid to sell at the behest of their new master.[46] It stands as the symbol of change, of intrusion of something alien, and of violation of the integrity of the pastoral existence. For Frost it is all this and more: it is the symbol of exposure to the public eye of an unformed, premature product which should still be private and in the process of gestation: 'If only people would wait with their ideas, political or personal, until they have been enriched by repeated turnings-in . . .'. With this 'If only . . .', Frost has used the pastoral convention to say something new.

In conclusion: Frost's sense of the timeless quality of poetry was very real. In a letter, apparently never sent, to the young 'New Deal' liberal, Ferner Nuhn, Frost answered the latter's criticism of his political stance in 'Build Soil'. Although he does not state it specifically, one can from this deduce a final reason for his choice of the pastoral mode: its ancient roots and its timeless freshness.

> Your crowd had better treat me with respect because my poetry (while it lives) will keep alive the sentiments from which their theories spring. I describe a more classless society than they will bring to the world again in a thousand years of trying. Maybe it can't be gone back to. Maybe the only way to it is forward the thousand years. All right. Better hang on to my verse as a thousand-year plan.[47]

In his use of pastoral, Frost has in fact added another facet to a poetic '*two-thousand-year plan*'.

University of Stellenbosch,
Cape.

NOTES

1. The best treatment of the subject is to be found in Rosenmeyer, Thomas G: *The Green Cabinet*, Los Angeles, Univ of California Press, 1969. Other useful titles are the following: Cody, Richard: *The Landscape of the Mind*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969. Empson, W: *Some Versions of Pastoral*, London. Chatto & Windus, 1935. Segal, Charles: *Poetry and Myth in Ancient Pastoral*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ Press 1981.
   On Frost's pastoral I found the following title: Toliver, H.E.: *Pastoral Forms and Attitudes* (quoted in *Essay and General Literature Index 1970–1974*, no further details given).
2. *Eclogae* or 'Selections', ten poems first published ca 41 B.C.
3. Asinius Gallus, a friend of Mark Antony, was commander in Octavian's legions who was involved in the redistribution of land after Philippi. He is mentioned three times in the third 'Eclogue', and the fourth is dedicated to him. He also dabbled in poetry. Varus was a 'self-made man', no poet, and was also concerned in the appropriation of land for redistribution. He apparently exceeded the limits of his instructions. He is mentioned in the sixth and ninth 'Eclogues'. In the ninth the connotation may be negative: Menalcas had begun *but not finished* a poem in praise of Varus. This may imply criticism of his dealings with the peasants during redistribution of land. Cornelius Gallus was well known as a love poet, but politically he was also famous. He was the prefect of Egypt who was deposed by Augustus for the assumption of too many 'royal' privileges. Of his poetry only a few fragments survive. He is important in the sixth 'Eclogue', and the tenth 'Eclogue' is devoted to the pangs of love experienced by Gallus.
4. In 'Eclogue IX' the two peasants walking to town discuss the inability of the singer 'Menalcas' to get their farms back for them by means of his songs.
5. A good selection is to be found in Chambers's: *English Pastoral*, London Blackie and Son, 1895. The Introduction, although reeking with Victorian archness, gives a good overview of the development of the English branch of the drama.
6. Cf. Marlowe's 'Mower' poems and 'The Garden'.
7. *A Winter's Tale, A Midsummer Night's Dream, As You Like It. The Tempest* is more of a fairy tale or fantasy than true pastoral. Shakespeare also uses pastoral scenes to offset tragedy in his historical plays.
8. 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso'.
9. Written in 1704 when the poet was 16, but printed in 1709. Chambers says of Pope that he was 'untouched by the spirit of the thing' and had not realised 'how the full stream of bucolic poetry had overleaped those narrow banks, to make vocal with its murmuring the lyric meads and the tangled woods of comedy'.
10. From *A Boy's Will* published in 1915. Further discussion of this poem is to be found in an essay by M.S. Edwards in a volume entitled *Frost: Centennial Essays* (pp. 108–20) which the present author has not yet been able to obtain.
11. Since Spenser, 'Pan' has often been equated with Christ but I think Frost's Pan is solely the pagan god of the wilds. His goat's feet and horns would in primitive shamanistic religion have been connected with the fertility of the flock, and his Classical 'Pan pipes' make of him the pastoral singer-player-poet par excellence.
12. Frost, Robert, *Complete Poems*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1951, pp. 43–44.
13. First published in the collection entitled *A Further Range*, 1936. For the purpose of this article I have had recourse to the version published in the *Complete Poems* (n. 12) pp. 346 to 355. Further discussion of this poem by L.

Perrine is to be found in *Frost: Centennial Essays* pp. 230–5 and also in Toliver, op. cit, pp. 334–60 who explains that Frost's insights into pastoral can aid one in understanding those aspects of pastoral that have survived and been translated into modern terms.

14. As 'Phi Beta Kappa poet'.
15. 295 verses as opposed to 83.
16. Lathem, Edward Connery (ed.): *Interviews with Robert Frost*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966: p. 76: re-publication from the June 1931 issue of the periodical *Rural America* of an interview by Benson Y. Landis.
17. The clarity of Seneca's philosophical letters is clouded by what we know of his life.
18. Thompson, Lawrence: *Robert Frost, the Years of Triumph, 1915–1938,* London, Jonathan Cape, 1971, the second volume in a series of three biographies. In a review of William H. Pritchard's new biography of the poet *Frost: A Literary Life Reconsidered* (Oxford 1984) Christopher Porterfield says that 'Thompson replaced the cracker-barrel sage with a monster' (*Time Magazine* 46: 1984).
19. Cf. Thompson op. cit, p. 624 on Frost's admiration for Lucretius: the modern poet's morbid fear of death (Thompson 567) apparently was allayed by the classical poet's denial of its influence.
20. Thompson, op. cit, p. 408.
21. Ibid., p. 385. M.L. Rosenthal in '*The Modern Poets*' (pp. 110–111) labels Frost as a 'complete or representative poet' — in other words his poetry encompasses the broad sweep of life and man's responses to it.
22. See Thompson op. cit, p. 366, for a quotation from a letter to Louis Untermeyer, 6 January 1929.
23. Thompson op. cit, p. 381 gives a longer quotation from a letter to Untermeyer, 6 June 1930, where the poet objects to a critic's implication of a 'greater claim on my part to being a farmer than I had ever made'.
24. Thompson op. cit, p. 431.
25. Ibid., p. 379.
26. Ibid., p. 459.
27. This is true even though Empson (n. 1) argues cogently that all statement of the complex in terms of the simple is a version of pastoral.
28. See his essay: 'Robert Frost, or the Spiritual Drifter as Poet' in Cox, James M. (ed.) Robert Frost: *A Collection of Critical Essays,* Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1962. As counter to this, see Lynen, J.F. 'The Pastoral Art of Robert Frost' in the same volume.
29. Cox op. cit, p. 59.
30. Propertius: II: 10.
31. Thompson op. cit, p. 254. A quotation from a letter to Untermeyer, Amherst 10 March 1924.
32. See n. 28.
33. Cox op. cit, p. 67.
34. Thompson op. cit, p. 460.
35. On this point a review by Genevieve Taggard quoted by Thompson, op. cit, p. 388 is interesting: 'Frost is too cussedly non-conformist to trust even his own words as texts five minutes after he has uttered them . . . He trusts his poems as poems, as metaphors spread to catch meaning . . .' See n. 34.
36. Thompson op. cit, p. 459.
37. Virgil: 'Eclogue I', 71, 72.
38. Lathem op. cit, p. 83. Quotation from an interview with Frost published in the *Baltimore Sun* on 26 February, 1936.
39. Kemp, John C.: *Robert Frost and New England.* Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 194.
40. Ibid.
41. Written on 12 May 1932. See Thompson op. cit, p. 431 and also his '*Selected Letters of Robert Frost*'. London, Jonathan Cape, 1965, p. 386.
42. Doyle: John Robert, Jr.: *The Poetry of Robert Frost.* Johannesburg: Witwatersrand Univ Press, 1962. So too in an interview for *Life* magazine in 1961 (Lathem op. cit, p. 271) the poet stated: The most creative thing in us is to believe a thing in, in love, in all else. You believe yourself into existence . . .' Synonyms for 'believe' would here be 'think' or 'trust'.

43. Interview in the *Rural American*, Lathem, op. cit, p. 77 (see n. 16).
44. Doyle op. cit, pp. 232, 233.
45. *Ecl.* I: 33–35.
46. *Ecl.* IX: 72–73
47. Thompson: op. cit, p. 461 (cf. Toliver op. cit, as set out in n. 13).

DOUGLAS LIVINGSTONE IN CONVERSATION

WITH TONY MORPHET*

LIVINGSTONE: I am absolutely a white African.

That's an odd thing to be—and I think it shows, particularly in the later work. What it seems to involve, in your writing, is very many different voices looking in different ways, at experience of being in Africa. I'm thinking of the animals and the animal poems which are a very important strand in your work, and more recently looking at people; people doing ordinary jobs, ordinary work in the cities (I guess in Durban in particular) and elsewhere.

> Cold evenings: red tongues and shadows
> spar under this dangerous thatch
> rust-patched; one weather wall of planks;
> long-limbed tools, wood, coal in smoke-dimmed stacks;
> a hitched foal's harness musical.
>
> The grindstone's rasped pyrotechnic
> threatens the stopped-dead angled tip
> of a stripped Cape cart that waits on
> the return of its motivation;
> a sudden hiss as quenched irons cool.
>
> Two cowled purple-cheeked bellows-boys
> pump, or jump for smiths or furies;
> files of elders sucking pipestems,
> ordered by fire's old feudalism,
> squat: wrinkled jury on this skill.
>
> Horseshoes, blades, shares and lives: all shaped
> to the hoarse roar and crack of flame,
> by the clang of metallic chords,
> hammer-song, the anvil's undertone;
> nailed to one post a jackal's skull.
>
> 'Mpondo's Smithy, Transkei'[1]

A poet, say, writing in Europe or North America perhaps, he's *got a very clear strong tradition to draw on, he's got a role—there's a* role *for a poet—poets* know, *I mean they serve their apprenticeship and they develop themselves in a particular way, it would seem; and that role doesn't seem to exist, at least in* South *Africa.*

* This transcription was made and is published by kind permission of the South African Broadcasting Corporation, Durban. The interview was first heard in the series, 'In Conversation', of the English Radio Service in July 1984, produced by Don Ridgway.

LIVINGSTONE: No, there's a vast disdain for poetry generally in South Africa. The main strands of religion here are property and sport. There aren't many poets around and it's probably a good thing. They are at the cutting edge of a country's language after all; there's not much in the way of recognition. It's just as well because I think—here's *you* talking about the British, American and European thing—I think there's quite a strong poseur element in these older civilizations; whereas a bloke who loves words so much in southern Africa cannot get away with a cloak and a wide hat and stroll down the street with a sign on his back saying 'I am a poet'.

Campbell had to go to Spain to do that.

LIVINGSTONE: Ah yes, God rest his soul, but here in Durban and presumably the rest of South Africa, if not Africa, the white poet is some kind of quaint anachronism, barely tolerated, probably read by other writers.

You're a man who pretends to be very ordinary; there's a kind of fierce preoccupation with being an ordinary citizen, but you're actually not. *Doesn't that impose quite a lot of strain? I mean, most poets construct themselves as emblems—your emblem seems to be 'I'm just an ordinary man'.*

LIVINGSTONE: I don't know what to say to that. I believe I am an ordinary man.

The poems don't show that at all.

LIVINGSTONE: Surely they're an articulation of Mr Everyman's sensibilities?

But Mr Everyman doesn't actually think like that and read like that. Mr Everyman is slack and careless in his speech, careless in his thinking; and those poems, all of them, are very, very tightly crafted and they've got layer upon layer of meanings inside them. So how is it that the poems are about Mr Everyman?

LIVINGSTONE: Well, there is a certain amount of the 'artefact' you know, the craftsman—the wordsmith—hammering, chiselling and compressing the stuff; I'm sure I don't talk as well as my poems probably read because I'm a lot slacker in my speech. It's also important to me not to walk around sounding like some kind of stuffy pedant.

Loving you I love
drowsy substrata of
an unsullied earth,
the elements and compounds
that shaped your birth.

Holding you I hold,
nervous in their flowing,
ineluctable tides
trembling in you but surely felt
within your sides.

Knowing you I know
—o, grass as hair, skin as sun—
the latency to which there is a key:
behind your tranquil breasts
subtends a sea.

'Loving'[2]

Everyman would like to speak like that, but doesn't. Women, earth, sea, it's hard to know which you're most in love with.

LIVINGSTONE: I think they are all manifestations of the one force.

Where did that come from?

LIVINGSTONE: I don't suppose you can live as long as I have and not find, for instance, a kinetic resemblance between the sea and its various moods, a woman and her various moods, the vulnerability and acceptance of animals; the vulnerability, acceptance and underlying threat that the earth carries. The human male is the almost redundant outsider, at the same time: the full exploiter.

So those are where the layers come in the poems.

LIVINGSTONE: Probably, yes. It's not a conscious process.

But you work hard to get those various layers of meaning into each poem.

LIVINGSTONE: I cannot honestly confess to that. I work hard to compress the poem. I work hard to get at 'the truth'. The truth is actually very hard to get at, yet I think everybody carries it within them. You have to go down in a sort of bathyscaphe of the intellect, down to mine that truth. It's not that people are walking around foxing themselves, it's just there's a lot of imprecision attached to expressing the truth.

Do you often go about finding that truth in an odd way? I mean you have a character who's becoming more present in your later poems, Giovanni Jacopo no less. He's a mask under which you can conduct all manner of scurrilities. I think perhaps we could look at one of those:

When my Corpse and Soul unwind
In that final Dialysis
& my case is being divined
Will the Charge be 'Satyriasis'?

At the Moment of Trans-shipment
When the Bench takes Quill & Vellum,
Will 'Sins' head such Equipment
As this Leg-hooked Cerebellum?

Are 'Napes of Necks' an Issue
To be raised at my Correction?
Is 'Dawn's erectile Tissue'
An inadmissible Connection?

Will there be an outraged Ripple,
Forensic Chins in Lapels tucking,
As each non-maternal Nipple
Is called where I've lain sucking?

Should the First-Cause prove Feminist
— Madame-Generalissimo? —
Will the Alternates be 'Chauvinist',
'Oral Hang-Ups' & 'Machismo'?

At the End of this Compacture,
In my new Rôle of Deponent
I must plead Non-Manufacture
Of each happy strange Component.

'Giovanni Jacopo Meditates
(on his Weighting in The Last Great Scorer's Book)'[3]

You have two careers, you're also a scientist, and that's always been visible in your work and in the poetry. Does the poetry go into the science as well?

LIVINGSTONE: I'd say there's an interchange of precision of expression in both. Each hones and supports the other.

And imagination in science?

LIVINGSTONE: I think imagination is the lost component in science; when I say 'lost', it's not as prominent as it should be. I think it is

extremely important—not, I hasten to add, in reporting one's findings but in one's directives, one's goals. I think imagination gets rather short shrift which is a pity because it is the beginning and the end of science, scientific enquiry, I would say.

You've made a lot of use of the Adamastor myth. Sometimes it's very prominent in your writing, other times it's very much implied. That seems to be a way in which you can draw on Greece and Greek antiquity and Africa. Do you intend to go further with that? Is that a 'master myth' for you?

LIVINGSTONE: I have to go back a way now. Even as a kid I noticed that various bits of the earth, various terrains seemed to have their own personality. The obvious, highly visible components—shall we say—are the animals, the topography, the flora and fauna, the accents and languages of people; and I've always been aware of this. I believe everybody's aware of it . . . if they become conscious of it.

Scientifically? Theoretically?

LIVINGSTONE: No, just as civilized man. Africa has, or various parts of Africa have got, various moods. There are some parts of Africa with extremely masculine hills, rugged rocky sort of tortured visages to be seen in the cliffs and so on. Other parts of Africa have got extremely feminine hills—soft, green, undulant and some of them of course recollect certain aspects of female anatomy for me. I had a kind of craze to find a connection between this continent and Greek mythology; and I went a bit demented researching this. And great joy when—I suppose I was about 26—I discovered Luis de Camoens's *Lusiads* and that remarkable three or four pages of a canto on Adamastor in which the giants assaulted heaven and the gods called upon Heracles, a mere mortal, and Heracles clubbed all the giants to death and the biggest and initially the gentlest was Adamastor. Camoens and I think Campbell tend to set his head down towards where the Cape is. A lot of things gelled for me when I absorbed this, I lived with it for days and I dashed off an epic poem on the subject which didn't work and so I eventually turned it into a radio play which worked a bit better. It's a living metaphor for me; I live on the back of a concussed giant. Obviously if I was filling in some kind of an official form I would say I live in Africa, or I might even say that I live *on* Africa; but in my consciousness, I am one of these irritants on the back of this massive and fascinating giant that keeps struggling back into consciousness and then lapsing into unconsciousness. Heracles didn't manage to get rid of him altogether, and I believe he's not the same as Europe and America which are—I guess—fairly dead.

(Laughter) You can recover from concussion. Do you see him coming to full consciousness?

LIVINGSTONE: Yes, with personality changes. As to his future I don't know. There is a kind of apocalyptic vision of this man-thing-beast getting up even to its knees and giving itself a shake, possibly slumping back in a new position, which would be a very interesting thing to happen.

And could be viewed from a distance, ironically, with the help of the Greeks and the Romans?

LIVINGSTONE: Well, rightly or wrongly, these are the stem of our culture, in our major religions, major *western* religions which are, after all, part of our culture. I'm all for compulsory education in religion, especially if it's the King James version involved, because sometimes it's the only literature a lot of kids are exposed to.

Sure. If you were confronted by a young poet, somebody who's just beginning where you were in '57 or further back, and he was saying, or she was saying, 'What should I read and how should I develop?' and 'What should my work be?'

LIVINGSTONE: I would warn them, I would warn them seriously, 'Don't do this, try something else, try something safer like deep-sea diving or hang-gliding or something.' And I would seriously say 'You are risking your life and your sanity and your consciousness, your perceptions, your relationships with other human beings'; that it's a terribly demanding and destructive side and I would warn them against developing it. But if they wanted to press on I would say, 'Read everything and the best of luck and pay no attention to the critics.'

Earlier on, partly when we were talking about your sense of being on or in Africa, you made mention of the animals; and you've been very widely anthologised, particularly with the animal poems, and I would imagine that readers know particularly, 'Gentling a Wild Cat'. Animals seem . . . they have a double life in most of your poems. They are both very real, very specific, that animal and no other, but they have a larger life than that. Do you mythologize them? Could you say a bit more about how you have managed to develop that sense of the animals?

LIVINGSTONE: There is an aspect of my character, a limitation perhaps, where I find the personification of animals in so much poetry fairly ridiculous—it can only be done ironically. Some poet

has a hawk roosting with an inner soliloquy going on about being monarch of all he surveys. Getting back to the word 'truth': it may make a pretty picture, it may be supremely clever deployment of language, but it's untrue. I mean it's fair to assume that a hawk, most of his life, is his stomach: spotting, hunting and the rending and tearing of flesh. And of course we're not so far from that ourselves, satisfying this terrible mortal equipment that we carry around with us, our digestive tract. There's been a few centuries and a little bit of technology but if certain external circumstances changed, we'd be back there fairly swiftly. I wouldn't altogether agree that there's a kind of myth element to my particular bestiary. I am actually trying to demythologize animals. A lot of people . . . you know there's a kind of suburban type that goes out on to the nice, mowed lawn and sees their well-trimmed cannas and the clipped hibiscus borders and they say 'Gosh, isn't nature wonderful?' Nature's a tough scene. We're part of nature and nature is survival. This probably excites, or at least sparks, quite a bad element in me.

But there's another element as well. In 'Gentling a Wild Cat', you intervene.

LIVINGSTONE: Ineffectually I intervene.

Start a cycle or two?

LIVINGSTONE: Yes, well, that's what a farmer's doing when he puts a plough down, doesn't he?

Yes. I wonder if you would just read it?

Not much wild life, roared Mine leonine Host
from the fringe of a forest of crackles
round an old dome-headed steam radio,
between hotel and river — a mile of bush —
except for the wildcats and jackals.

And he, of these parts for years, was right.
That evening I ventured with no trepidations
and a torch, towed by the faculty
I cannot understand, that has got me
into too many situations.

Under a tree, in filtered moonlight,
a ragged heap of dusty leaves stopped moving.
A cat lay there, open from chin to loins;
lower viscera missing; truncated tubes
and bitten-off things protruding.

Little blood there was, but a mess of
damaged lungs; straining to hold its breath
for quiet; claws fixed curved and jutting,
jammed open in a stench of jackal meat;
it tried to raise its head hating the mystery, death.

The big spade-skull with its lynx-fat cheeks
aggressive still, raging eyes hooked in me, game;
nostrils pulling at a tight mask of anger
and fear; then I remembered hearing
they are quite impossible to tame.

Closely, in a bowl of unmoving roots,
an untouched carcass, unlicked, swaddled and wrapped
in trappings of birth, the first of a litter stretched.
Rooted out in mid-confinement: a time
when jackals have courage enough for a wildcat.

In some things too, I am a coward,
and could not here punch down with braced thumb,
lift the nullifying stone or stiff-edged hand
to axe with mercy the nape of her spine.
Besides, I convinced myself, she was numb.

And oppressively, something felt wrong:
not her approaching melting with earth,
but in lifetimes of claws, kaleidoscopes:
moon-claws, sun-claws, teeth after death,
certainly both at mating and birth.

So I sat and gentled her with my hand,
not moving much but saying things, using my voice;
and she became gentle, affording herself
the influent luxury of breathing—
untrammelled, bubbly, safe in its noise.

Later, calmed, despite her tides of pain,
she let me ease her claws, the ends of the battle,
pulling off the trapped and rancid flesh.
Her miniature limbs of iron relaxed.
She died with hardly a rattle.

I placed her peaceful ungrinning corpse
and that of her firstborn in the topgallants
of a young tree, out of ground reach, to grow: restart
a cycle of maybe something more pastoral,
commencing with beetles, then maggots, then ants.

'Gentling a Wildcat'[4]

Douglas, earlier on you said that you thought that your only readers were other writers. That's not wholly true; I for one anyway, am not

another writer but certainly a reader and I know of many *others. And you're writing in an unusual culture, a mixed culture, a culture with a lot of different strands which must raise problems for you. Would you like to comment, even in passing, on who you think reads* you, *who you write for, how it fits into South Africa?*

LIVINGSTONE: One of the reasons I write—I suppose why most people write or pursue any art form—is an attempt to civilize myself; and I think you're tiptoeing around the accusation there that writing poetry is an elitist proposition. I'd be the first to agree with you. I know and indeed am very fond of, all the major black poets writing. I know their work well. A couple of them I get on particularly well with. I like them, I feel that there's an ancient and mystical order of poets. I think we're all—it's like our red blood corpuscles—all the same colour.

But their work's very different to yours.

LIVINGSTONE: Yes, well, I've got a different tradition. I've got a different purpose. Mine's almost purposeless. I'm writing to entertain, I suppose. I respect people who believe that their poems can change the world, politically. I respect that, but I don't believe it. I think totalitarianism, force, even democracies, are not really affected by their artists. I'm probably trying to do something a little more subtle and futile, I suppose—hopefully, entertaining and therefore enhancing consciousness, sensibilities, the soul—if we can use such grandiose terms. I love the idea of man. The idea of man I find fascinating. Humans are reputedly the last form of creation at the moment, so far as we've discovered; which also fills me with despair. I am not enamoured of the so-called masses—their hatred, oppression, deceit, derision, slander and smut; their violent ignorance, their lack of steely originality. I find them to be enemies of promise, indeed—above all, the proletariat's love of a dictatorship. Look at the millions flocking to the support of Adolfs and Ayatollahs. I'm not too keen on the masses, nor their bloody dictators.

That's very *clear. You've been dealt with by many critics both here and abroad. Have you found* that *to be an issue, that you are elitist—a white poet writing for a white readership, ignorant of the fate of fellow countrymen?*

LIVINGSTONE: No, I'm not writing for whites, I'm writing for human beings; I'm not ignorant of the fate of my fellow countrymen. I'm a mere person. My energies are in pollution research and playing with words. I'm a fairly helpless cipher in the State.

One last thing. Looking ahead and taking a long look scientifically and poetically, how do you see man, the planet?

LIVINGSTONE: There's a very dangerous process going on. The *real* elitist nations: their technology is getting literally beyond this world, whereas man and the need to fill his belly, his situation has not progressed much at all. And so we have this, shall we say, dichotomy of the everyday and the super technology; and the gap is increasing daily. I think—I fear—that there is some form of disaster ahead. Talking about the cost of medicine alone, whether everybody (shall we say) from the 'officer caste', everybody from the rank of (shall we say) 'ward sister' and above, may have to put themselves in fortresses and survive, treating each other, handling their stock exchange for each other and producing the soap and the food and the shelter for each other, at the expense of the starving masses outside. Whether that nightmare should come about, I don't know. You see you've trapped me because I *do* care for the masses. Of course I do. I feel there should be a bending back of the technology towards bread and butter issues, while I am the first to concede that the technological spinoffs from space exploration have been marvellous and most useful. It probably boils down to too many people on earth with not enough food for all. Although there are some mighty brains and there's some mighty technology on earth, I don't feel too good about the future—this planet's future.

Dark Ages?

LIVINGSTONE: I think we are already well on our way to the 13th Century again, where more and more people will go on the streets armed while the technology of international weaponry gallops towards an apparently bleak future. I must make it clear that as regards my will, I am an optimist but as regards my imagination, I am a pessimist.

There are times almost free from
certainties of disaster;
from awareness of mangling

by men and machines of men;
from knowledge of domestic
cruelties and suppressions.

There are times I benignly
walk the afternoon sunlight
balancing constellations

in the peaceable kingdom
of my spiritual and
temporal lack of success.

There are times, sometimes, these days
when for one minute or two
I am not even in love.

'There are Times'[5]

NOTES

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1. *The Anvil's Undertone*, Johannesburg,© Ad. Donker, 1978, p. 7.
2. *A Rosary of Bone*, Cape Town,© David Philip, 1983, p. 18.
3. Ibid., p. 8.
4. *Eyes Closed against the Sun*, Cape Town,© Oxford University Press, 1970, pp. 18–19.
5. *A Rosary of Bone*, p. 23.

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KING LEAR AND ANCIENT BRITAIN

by GUY BUTLER

John W. Hales gives a succinct summary of the place of Lear in popular British history in Shakespeare's time.

> Now King Lear was a reality to the ordinary Elizabethan. The narrative of his reign had a place in the ancient British history then commonly received ... It was first brought into general currency by that very dubious work, Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Britons*, where in a veracious list of monarchs stretching from Brutus, the great-grandson of Aeneas, down to Cadwallader, who died at Rome in 689 A.D., appears, tenth in order, King Lear, who, we are told, reigned sixty years somewhat before the times when the prophets Isaiah and Hosea flourished, and Rome was built on the eleventh before the kalends of May by the two brothers, Romulus and Remus. So Lear was definitely located in the first half of the eight century before Christ. Through the middle ages this dynasty of which he was a member was universally regarded as something substantial![1]

When the play was first performed the doubts of historians like Camden had not yet eroded the belief, particularly among poets, that this British dynasty derived (like the Caesars) from Ancient Troy. London was a rebuilding of Troy, Troinovant.

Where Hales and almost all his critical successors have erred is in the cultural level they ascribe to this ancient British society. They have fathered upon the elevated medieval view of that dynasty modern notions of savagery and barbarism, which have distorted our reading of the play.

> In this play the poet has, for a certain purpose, travelled back into the ages of darkness and barbarity ... into a land where the rays of civilisation were only just beginning to glimmer, where the passions of men yet raged in all their violence, untamed and unshackled, and nature still reigned, wild, unredeemed, ferocious ...[2]

Again:

> The King himself, with his swiftly kindled furies and terrible curses, seems at times scarcely human as Shakespeare for the most part drew humanity. Goneril, Regan, and Edmund—what strange, savage figures are these, whose eyes burn with mere hate, and feet are swift to shed blood.[3]

And yet again:

> An age unruly and turbulent, only now emerging from barbarism, in whose ears the still voice of conscience was scarcely yet audible, when

> passion was yet lord of all, and the influences that broaden the division between men and brutes were as yet but faintly exercising their divine dominion . . .[4]

The uncritical parroting of this view would take many pages to document.[5]

Shakespeare came to the writing of *King Lear* shortly after *Troilus and Cressida*, that other great, but very different, probing of the nature of human values. The Trojans of that play are not savages (nor are the Greeks, although they 'begin to proclaim barbarism'). There is no suggestion in Holinshed that the Trojan dynasty of Brut declined, or that life in the kingdom he founded collapsed into barbarism. From the first reign to the last, however, it was prone to civil wars, thus providing Tudor dramatists with several texts for political moralities: *Gorboduc* (performed 1561), *Locrine* (published 1595), *King Leir* (published 1608) and *King Lear* (performed 1606, published 1608).

Let us glance at *Locrine*, a play on the reign of the first of the line of Brut. The kingdom of Britain is divided against itself because the monarch makes a faulty last will and testament. It opens with the old king Brut making his final dispositions. His epic leadership of his Trojans from Italy to Britain is rehearsed (particularly I.i.82–124). He names Locrine as his heir and blesses him; he then marries him to Gwendoline, daughter of his brother Corineus. He hands over the South to his son, Camber, and the North to Albacant. On his death, he is buried in Troinovant. Britain is then invaded by people variously called Barbarians, Scythians and Huns. Their leader, Humber, has fought his way from Scythia across Europe to settle an old score with the Phrygians (Trojans) in Britain. He rants in the vein of the Scythian shepherd, Tamburlaine. Albacant attacks Humber's invaders and drives them back, but is killed in an ambush. Locrine counter-attacks, and Humber becomes a deranged fugitive living in the forest on roots. Cursing his lot, he drowns himself in a stream which is then named after him. His 'paramour', Estrild, however, captivates the heart of Locrine, who thus betrays his Queen, Gwendoline. This leads to civil war, in which Gwendoline triumphs. The wicked lovers commit suicide, and Madan, Locrine's son, succeeds. The Lear echoes are many and we note only a few.

The culture of Locrine's Britain is not primitive. Strumbo, the clown, enters with pen and paper in his hand, and talks of the four elements and astrology. The gods come from Greece and the myths are classical. The court passes the day in knightly sports, and 'The night in dancing and in figured maskes' (I.iii.123).[6] The army is recruited by press money.

Shakespeare's contemporary, John Stow,[7] provides an outline of the entire dynasty of Brut, according to which Locrine's successors

seem a mediocre lot, until Ganfride who succeeded in 989 B.C., a great founder of cities, including York, 'wherein he builded a temple to Diana' (p. 8). Most interesting for our purpose is Lear's father, who came to the throne in 863 B.C.

> Bladud ... who had long studied at Athens, brought with him four philosophers to keep Schoole in Britain, for the which he builded Stamford, and made it a University, wherein he had a great numbers of schollers studying in all the seven liberal sciences: which University endured until the coming of Saint Augustine.

Odd as the chronology is, this helps to explain Lear's familiarity with Grecian philosophers. Bladud was another great builder who raised a temple to Apollo in Bath 'where He made also the hot baths, and practised his necromancy'. This Faustian figure over-reached himself and died in a tragic and ironic manner. 'He decked himself with feathers, and presumed to fly, but by falling on his Temple, he broke his neck.' (p. 10.)

Whatever era the 'historical' Lear grew up in, for Jacobeans it was not the time of wolves; it was a time of high culture and intellectual daring. Succeeding his father in 844 B.C., Lear founded Leicester, and built a Temple to Janus there. 'He had three daughters, Goneril, Regan and Cordeilla. Cordeilla, for her virtue and wisdom towards her father, succeeded him in the kingdom.' No love contest is mentioned, no civil war, merely that Lear dies after a reign of forty years and is buried under the channel of the river Sore. Cordeilla succeeded him in 805 B.C. She was

> sore vexed by her two nephews, Morgan of Albany and Cunedagius of Camber and Cornwall, who at length took and cast her in prison — where she being in despaire of recovering her estate, slew herself, when she had reigned five years.

The two nephews (sons of Goneril and Regan) plunge the realm into civil war. Cunedagius, son of Regan, gets the upper hand and succeeds. Shakespeare's version contains elements from the three reigns, of Bladud, Leir and Cordeilla; but he need not have used Stow at all. The reign had been the subject of story many times before he put his hand to it.

One of Shakespeare's greatest liberties with his sources does not seem to have been noticed. He terminates the house of Brut: not a soul of that ancient line survives in his version which is entitled the *True Chronicle Historie of the life and death of King Lear and his three Daughters*. The line in fact continued until Gorboduc (559 B.C.), whose reign provided the material for the first Elizabethan play based on the Trojan house of Brut, *Gorboduc*. The similarities of this political allegory with both *Locrine* and *King*

Lear are apparent: a bad regal testament followed by terrible civil war.

> Thus cruelly was the blood of the house of Brute destroyed, when this realm by the space of 616 years had been governed by that lynage. (Stow p. 10.)

The historical knowledge of Elizabethans and Jacobeans was extremely limited and faulty. They were simply not aware of neolithic or ancient Celtic cultures. The Ancient Britons, for them, were little different from the ancient Trojans, Greeks or Romans, or indeed themselves. Illustrations of armour in battle scenes in Tudor histories are similar, whether Roman, or Greek, or Jewish, or Medieval. Sense of period was rudimentary, as is most evident in their depiction of dress. Holinshed's Cordelia is arrayed in early Tudor costume.

* * *

Is there any warrant in the play itself for the common view that *King Lear* is set in primitive and barbaric times? It is hard to find.

First, the battle against external nature has been won. The country has been surveyed and mapped (I.i.35) and is rich in open lands and forests and well watered (ibid., 63–4). Agriculture is established; there are high grown fields of sustaining corn (IV.iv.6); villages, with water mills (II.iii.18); sheep, bred and tended for their wool (ibid.); and dogs of many different breeds (III.vi.66–68). There is still some heath and forest land, and talk of wolves and bears, but they do not figure in the action at any point although the king goes hunting. There are palaces (I.iv.243) in which elaborate state rituals and ceremonies, suitably accompanied by music, are conducted (I.i).

The legal system has judges sitting on benches (III.iv.35ff), who are subject to bribery and corruption (IV.iv.150–168). There are prisons (V.iii.1–19) and people are stock-punished (II.ii.124ff). Other professions besides the Law are being practised. Medical men (a doctor appears in the Quarto) are already studying anatomy (III.vi.74); and diseases are known by learned Latin names (Hysterica Passio II.iv.55). Apothecaries are selling civet (IV.vi.129). Philosophers—Theban (III.iv.155) and Athenian (ibid., 177)—enquire into the cause of thunder; and astrologers are active (I.ii.100ff). The economy, far from being the simple subsistence one of primitive societies, is a highly developed one in which the usurer and cozener flourish (IV.vi.161). It has already produced very wealthy, self-indulgent men (IV.i.66) and poor naked wretches (III.iv.28). The discrepancy is felt as wrong, and ways must be found to see to it that 'each man has enough' (IV.i.65f).

Some people dress in gorgeous clothes (II.iv.266). Gold-plated armour is not unknown (IV.vi.163). Judges wear robes and furred gowns (ibid.). The creaking of shoes and the rustling of silks on the stairs at night assault the senses of susceptible serving men who wear gloves in their caps (III.iv.84). People play cards and gamble at dice (ibid., 89), write letters, and read them with the aid of spectacles (I.ii.35ff). Brothels have signboards with Blind Cupid painted on them (IV.vi.136). The religion is polytheistic, and is already in decline. The age of faith is past. There is much scepticism in the air (I.ii.115ff) and debate about the nature of the gods. Some characters have no religion at all.

If we need an historical model for Lear's Kingdom, we simply step outside the Globe, and it is all about us. Jacobean England, collapsing into decadence after the death of Gloriana.

Primitive societies have a kind of innocence. Lear knows that he is sophisticated (III.iv.104). His education is copious enough for him to conduct a profound and agonising critique of the civilised society whose collapse he has instigated.

One must reject the popular absurdist view that this is a play about a martyrdom inflicted by an alien universe upon innocent humanity. No character in the play is a mere victim, nor sees himself as such for long. Even those inclined to interpret events in terms of Fortune or Fate (like Gloucester) behave with responsibility, and, indeed, noble courage. If terrible sacrifices are made, the victims are wide-eyed volunteers. Cordelia chooses to invade Britain. Nor are the villains instinct-driven beasts of the wild wood. Their actions proceed rationally from naked egotism; they are cool and explicit about their motives. There is nothing primitive whatever about their thought-processes.

In certain productions the heath and the storm are taken as instruments of a bleak and blundering universe in which mankind's meaningless martyrdom runs a haphazard course. But the society of *King Lear* has advanced far beyond an uncomprehending struggle against natural forces. Once man has learnt to build shelters, clothe himself, and produce food in sufficient quantities to store against the winter; once he has tamed certain animals (sheep, cattle, horses, poultry, dogs), and learnt how to cultivate certain plants (fruit and cereals), he no longer walks in terror of nature. For most men life is no longer to be equated with mere survival. 'Allow not nature more than nature needs,/Man's life is cheap as beast's.' (II.iv.264–5.) No one in the play dies of exposure or starvation, or is savaged by a bear or a wolf.

Nature can, of course, exert her old terror, in storm, drought, earthquake, plague — all of which Elizabethans experienced. But in *King Lear* it is not the storm that deprives our hero of shelter; Lear chooses to go into it. Wind and rain can, for a short time, be preferable to man's ingratitude.

For some of the characters, most notably Cordelia, nature is already an ally, and the earth full of blessed secrets which man's wisdom can discover and use. Nature is our foster nurse (IV.iv.11–16). For others, like Edmund and Goneril, Nature has been re-created in their own image: fallen nature, the nature of Cain, who killed his brother Abel because Heaven prized sheaves above wool, agriculture above pastoralism: Cain, rebellious to both Law and Grace, the egotist whose god is his own will. Perhaps the behaviour of these devotees of fallen nature, governed by appetite alone, may deserve the epithet 'primitive'.

The macrocosm, external nature of the heath and weather, does not generate the disaster; it is bred in the microcosm, within human nature itself. It is a profound mistake, therefore, to shift the action into neolithic times, or to the arctic circle (where the rigours of climate have prevented the development of civilised society). The play presents the corruption and collapse of an advanced culture, saturated in western, hellenic and judaic thought — not as a result of a new ice age, but because man is man.

Having said this, it is important to note that powerful men can create an 'absurd' society for those whom they control. Terrible as that abuse may be, it is illogical to place the responsibility upon the gods. Regan, Goneril and Edmund acknowledge no gods. They act for themselves.

Why, then, the critical persistence about a primitive setting? It is a play which externalises the terrors and absurdities within ourselves; showing how fragile our humanity is when faced by the wild beasts and demons that inhabit us, preying upon us, upon our parents, our children, our neighbours, our rulers, our subjects. Shakespeare articulates this feral side of human nature by a lavish use of animal imagery. The characters dread each other's teeth, fangs and claws. Civilised and sophisticated as they are, they see each other as predators on the hunt or attack, or as animals on heat. But they have not got the excuse of amoral beasts. What exacerbates the horror is the unnatural coolness of this human cruelty, the sophistication of this lust. Cornwall blinds Gloucester with the professional detachment of an optician. He is not a hungry carnivore on the hunt, an unfallen animal performing an instinctual act; he acts by conscious choice, takes perverted pleasure in inflicting pain, triumphs by mutilating his enemy, makes a protracted revenge-meal of his victim.

Recent history disproves that such behaviour is the prerogative of primitive men. A generation before the death camps or the Hiroshima atom bomb, civilised Europe had spent four years methodically slaughtering its young by machinegun on barbed wire. Yeats perceived how easily civilised men could change into 'weasels fighting in a hole'.

That is one side of the coin. The same human world contains Cordelia, the Fool, Kent, and Edgar who struggle to save the bodies and souls of two 'useless' old men, Lear and Gloucester.

Rhodes University,
Grahamstown.

NOTES

1. John W. Hales, *Notes and an Essay on Shakespeare*, London, Bell, 1884, p. 243.
2. Ibid., 243
3. Ibid., 246.
4. Ibid., 246.
5. For instance: 'Lear's world is that of a human society hardly emerged from the law of the jungle, living in a state wherein mysterious deities, men and beasts are almost indistinguishable in nature's fellowship.' (p. 189). Shakespeare 'throws Lear back from the modernised world, with which Shakespeare's immediate source had invested him, into the farthest backward realms of time and culture' (p. 188). H.B. Charlton, *Shakespearian Tragedy*, Cambridge, C.U.P., 1949. Also 'It is as if in writing *King Lear*, Shakespeare went back to the time of the wolves (that time whose return King Henry IV dreaded) in order to search out precedents for a later social order' (p. 228). F.T. Flahiff: 'Edgar, Once and Future King', in *Some Facets of King Lear* ed. R.L. Colie and F.T. Flahiff, London, 1974.
6. *Locrine* in *The Shakespeare Apocrypha* ed. C.F. Tucker-Brooke, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1908.
7. John Stow and Edmund Howes, *The Annales or A General Chronicle of England*, London, Meighen, 1631. For a somewhat different summary and calendar, see John Taylor, *The Number and Names of all the Kings of England and Scotland*, London, 1649.

GOD, EMPIRE AND WAR
THE NONCONFORMIST CONSCIENCE AND MILITARISM IN BRITAIN 1850–1900

by GREG CUTHBERTSON

Pacifism in the field of international relations had deep roots in nonconformist (or Protestant sectarian) thinking in Britain which, paradoxically enough, embraced at the same time a militancy in its approach to religious convictions. It is perhaps the existence of these twin strands in the nonconformist make-up which underlay so many of the contradictions in the actions of those who espoused this religious persuasion in the period from the Crimean War of 1854–56 to the outbreak of the second Anglo-Boer War in 1899. For this was the age of burgeoning British imperialism and the militarism which accompanied it became an integral part of popular consciousness, widely accepted as the price to pay for national greatness and in no sense merely a doctrine imposed on a reluctant populace by its appointed leaders.[1]

If pacifism can be regarded as the major moral force in nonconformist attitudes in the late nineteenth century towards disputes between peoples, then the South African war should have provided nonconformists with an opportunity to demonstrate their unity of purpose. There were perhaps signs that this was to be the case in the success of the peace movement in winning overwhelming support for the Czar of Russia's armaments reduction conference at the Hague in July 1899.[2] And, when war in South Africa broke out a few months later, many nonconformists, and not only those who stressed the Calvinist faith they shared in common with the Boers, felt grave disquiet at the turn of events. As John Clifford, the Baptist pacifist put it: 'Are we going from an international peace conference to South Africa to kill Christians?'[3] Yet pacifism rapidly lost ground in Britain at the turn of the century, and nonconformity began to waver on the question of peace in the conflict between Britain and the Boer republics.

The reason for this hesitancy seems to lie in the 'remarkable shift from evangelism and nonconformity to military and political allegiance' which was taking place in public thinking. This striking 'conversion' to the imperialist cause was particularly significant for the dissenting community, even though many played a memorable role in the anti-war agitation.[4] The war compelled free churchmen in both Britain and South Africa to choose between maintaining rather tenuous links with the nineteenth-century peace traditions and continuing to advocate the idea of empire. Many nonconformists chose the latter. The inner contradictions of the

nonconformist conscience can be no more strikingly shown than here.[5]

* * *

As militarist ideology gained popular acceptance, so the peace movement became more vociferous in its campaigns. This movement was essentially a political organisation of middle-class liberals seeking to abolish war by means of education, propaganda and agitation. It had come into existence in 1816, and enjoyed the 'intellectual muscle' of the economist Adam Smith and the philosophers Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill. Despite the fact that the movement was not strictly Christian in origin, it soon became associated with Protestant dissent and particularly Quakerism. The absolute pacifism associated with the pre-Augustinian church was preached by most Quakers, and the powerful influence of increasingly prosperous and politically active families within the Society of Friends added a specifically religious content to the initiatives of the peace movement. Moreover, it was strengthened by support from advocates of the free trade movement which resulted in a fusion of moralism and utilitarianism achieved mainly through the efforts of the prominent English politician, Richard Cobden, and his devout Quaker colleague, John Bright.[6]

The founding of the Peace Society added an element of propaganda to the peace movement and made it more exclusive: it insisted that war was an outright wrong and adopted a harder line than either Cobden or Bright (who were not absolute pacifists) would have advocated. David Bebbington observes that the Society 'was marked by a tone of Evangelical crusading that was both a cause and a consequence of widespread Nonconformist participation'.[7] It was perhaps this close alliance with dissenting evangelicalism that precluded wider support for the Society and made it too dependent upon nonconformist fortunes. Consequently it declined after the 1850s as evangelicalism experienced its theological crisis. To compensate, the idealism of the early peace movement gave way to pragmatism when Henry Richards, ex-Congregational minister and secretary of the Society from 1848, opened the membership to a wider audience.

Whereas Quakers had been at the centre of the movement for peace in the early years, the lobby increased as the number of nonconformists in the British parliament swelled towards the end of the Victorian era.[8] Nevertheless its effect was hardly felt in the face of rising imperialist fervour, and the Society went into sharp decline in the 1870s and 1880s. Only the Quakers could be relied upon for consistent support. Nonconformity as a whole was no longer a recruiting ground for new members because of its increasing

support for Liberal Imperialism. As the pacifist dissenting tradition lost its crusading militancy it became a merely pacific nonconformity, until by the turn of the century it finally acquiesced in an imperialist ideology which espoused an implicit militarism.

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The militarist ethic did not win quick acceptance in nonconformist circles however. Pacifist roots sank deep into the nonconformist conscience, and the most prominent free church leaders refused to relinquish Cobdenite ideas even as late as the 1890s. Edward Miall's *The Politics of Christianity* (1863), for example, provides a number of propositions which commanded wide acceptance among contemporary nonconformists on political attitudes towards foreign policy in the 1860s and 1870s, and which follow the Cobdenite formula. Miall's role as Congregational minister and M.P. for Rochdale (1851–1857) and Bradford (1868–1873) placed him in a position to reflect and dictate general nonconformist political attitudes. He enunciated six guiding principles in foreign policy. First, war was 'a wanton and wicked proceeding' which caused physical and moral suffering; secondly the Christian 'will studiously cultivate a spirit of peace in foreign relations' and abstain from the systematic extension of territory. The third principle was 'to foster and develop feelings of "universal brotherhood"'. Scepticism about the role of governments in promoting peace and brotherhood led to Miall's fourth principle, 'to recall . . . all intriguing diplomats' in order to curb the exorbitant powers of the ruling class. The fifth principle was in effect the nonconformists' alternative to war, namely 'the submission of . . . differences to the arbitration of some neutral authority'. Arbitration was to remain an important plank in the nonconformist platform during the Anglo-Boer War. Finally, the last principle was 'general disarmament', which naturally found a place in the programme of the Peace Society but which proved too radical for most rank-and-file nonconformists.[9] Even when the nonconformists were part of the imperialist mass, they curiously paid lip-service to these fundamental notions. Among pacifist and non-pacifist nonconformist politicians Miall's guidelines informed their decision-making.

Although there was general agreement among nonconformists on Miall's principles,[10] and on the first two of the above interpretations of the religious implications of war, the Crimean adventure in the mid-1850s had generated division on the questions of non-intervention and non-resistance. The great majority of nonconformists were non-pacifists who refused to go any further than prescribing conditions under which resort to arms would be permissible as an 'expedient to restraint' in situations of national conflict. However much they found war abhorrent, most dissenters

saw the sword as the pre-eminent symbol of government in the Bible. Defensive war was approved by many Christians as a last resort. An inner conflict between the notion of muscular Christianity and the gospel of peace underpinned radical Reformation theology.

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The Crimean War brought in its wake a dramatic change in British attitudes towards the professional army, and this contributed to a militarisation of British society—troops were hailed as the 'people's army' and idealized notions of 'what they were fighting for' were recited in the press and from the pulpit. The widespread equation of morality with religion also drew nonconformity closer to a more secular view of war. As the image of the soldier improved through public acclaim, so the proponents of the Peace Society suffered their first defeat. The publication of much hagiography of a military kind confirmed the new sense of nationalism which was challenging the peace tradition. These trends 'offered the religious public plausible evidence both that the soldier could be a good Christian and that there could be such a thing as "the Church in the Army" '.[11] British people came to believe that the Crimean War was a 'war of Christian men', not because it was a 'holy' war against non-Christians but because it seemed to approximate closely the scholastic concept of a just war—namely that hostilities should only be entered into as a last resort and only in defence of the moral order.

Justification of war in Christian circles also received impetus during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 when preachers argued that war 'would help to spread the gospel'. The reasoning was along the following lines: We should hold India for God; if we neglect our charge, we shall draw down his judgement on us. God delivered India to the English in order that she could be converted. (This arrangement does not conflict with our national interests.) The war in India was further rationalised on the grounds that it would benefit everyone because it showed that the world was ruled by an omnipotent God and not by chance. It would also expose national sins, according to preachers of the time. In the case of India the national sin appeared to be Britain's failure to Christianise her most important colonial possession.[12] As imperialist cords were tightened during the Mutiny, 'what had basically been a trading Empire' was changed 'into an explicitly military one'.[13]

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In the 1860s Christian voluntaryism became a popular movement. By this means the regular army became less remote from Victorian society and became increasingly domesticated and assimilated to

civilian norms. Olive Anderson argues that the most significant measures in this process were the result of private evangelical initiative, rather than government action. This resurgence of Christian mission within the army meant a closer identification of churches and chapels with organised militarism. Therefore the evangelical movement which spearheaded this religious reform in the army achieved something of a 'nationalisation' of the army.[14] Its effect was also considerably more successful in terms of proselytism than the evangelism of pre-Crimean days when even the Methodist revival had had little impact on the ordinary soldier. This was achieved because by the end of the 1860s the British army recognised and catered for the religious views of non-Anglicans. These factors contributed towards the dilution of nonconformist pacifism. As the army became less exclusively establishment-oriented, so nonconformity improved its status, thereby drawing the support of its middle-class adherents away from the peace movement.

Anne Summers points out that the British army had to be domesticated in order to be integrated into the larger society. Religion was a means to making the army a popular institution, and it is significant that official policy aimed at promoting this perception in the public mind by 'creating an almost ostentatiously Christian army'.[15] In this sense the fundamental change in general attitudes towards war required both the moral impetus which could only be provided by religion, and the official sanction given by governmental support. It is however doubtful whether this change could have been achieved through unofficial religious efforts alone. When militarism became coupled with the official policy of imperialism it gained a new respectability.

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In the 1870s and 1880s, the political attitudes of nonconformists moved away from the Miall formula as R.W. Dale, another Congregationalist and minister of Carr's Lane Chapel in Birmingham, took on the mantle of theological and intellectual leader of the less conservative evangelical dissenters. And again the bone of contention in foreign affairs was intervention. Dale was uncompromising on the issue and insisted that 'to decline the duty of asserting by arms—when all other means have failed—the claims of liberty and justice must bring both shame and disaster'. This combination of self-conscious nonconformist moralism and assertive liberalism mirrored British society's growing acceptance of militarist imperialism. As early as 1863, Dale had spoken of the need to give 'material as well as moral support' to the oppressed Poles in their struggle against Russian domination. And in 1865 he unequivocally stated the case for intervention 'when the

independence and the very existence of a country are threatened by the ambition and selfishness of a foreign state', denouncing those who favoured intervention only when British interests were at stake. But perhaps the most telling pronouncement was that concerning peace. Here Dale exposed the differences of opinion that existed in nonconformist ranks, not only between pacifists and non-pacifists, but also between those who still subscribed to the Miall principles and the many nonconformists who now favoured a more forthright foreign policy: 'I believe in peace — true peace — at any price . . . even at the price of war.'[16] It was this willingness to meet force with force to counter all forms of oppression which became a cardinal characteristic of much nonconformist action during the late nineteenth century. It coincided with similar feeling within liberalism which provided an official channel for nonconformist expression.

R.T. Shannon has demonstrated this new tendency of nonconformity to take up the cause of the oppressed in his study of the Bulgarian agitation of 1876. He shows convincingly how the dissenters made common cause with the Tractarians in support of the minorities under the Turkish yoke. Anglican evangelicals, on the other hand, ranged themselves with the Conservatives on the side of Turkey in order to preserve British interests. The nonconformists were unanimous in condemning Turkish persecution, and the majority thought that force was justified as a means of liberating the beleaguered Bulgarians. Nonconformists eagerly identified with a religion that was discriminated against by the state because it was part of their own recent experience.[17]

The eastern crisis further weakened the peace movement, and in the British parliament John Bright found himself virtually the sole upholder of the principle of non-intervention. Nonconformists had been so successful as a political lobby, and their platform had rested so squarely on intervention, that they were bound to forget old causes like peace. Naturally the doctrine of intervention also became even more widely accepted by nonconformists as they became more actively involved in politics towards the end of the century. Many of them became Liberal M.P.s and consequently were caught up in party political divisions.

Nevertheless, nonconformists' pacifist leanings were still resilient despite the trinity of imperialism, jingoism and militarism. The pride in empire was there, coupled with an awareness of past military prowess and a belief in the superiority of Anglo-Saxon culture. But the nonconformist conscience avoided fanaticism because it was 'underpinned by a strong Christian ethic and leavened by the values of Victorian liberalism'.[18] Not only nonconformity was touched by such influences; this verdict is valid

for British society as a whole, and emphasises that there can be no simple explanation of Victorian militarism.

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Perhaps one of the most profound influences in changing the attitudes of nonconformists towards war in the 1880s was the emergence of paramilitary agencies like the Salvation Army and the Boys' Brigade. The Salvation Army was a variant of late Methodist revivalism. William Booth, the founder, had intended creating a bridge between non-chapelgoers and the nonconformist churches, but what resulted was a separate organisation. Booth consistently protested against the increasing tendency of dissent to become remote from the lives of the poor and to intellectualise the Christian gospel at the expense of saving men's souls. Salvationism's main emphasis was upon a personal relationship with a personal God. Intellectualism and theology were lacking and sacramentalism played no part.[19] In 1878 the Christian Mission (as it was first designated) had reconstituted itself as the Salvation Army, with a highly centralised system of government using the military trappings of bands, uniforms and official ranks. The application of this military form to the evangelistic work of the Army coincided with the Russo-Turkish war.

'War' was to be waged against evil and against what were called the 'dangerous classes' in urban society—a reference to the 'ruffianism' encountered among the urban poor—and so the Salvation Army adopted a 'civilising mission' which it took with it into the British colonies. In fact the Army became one of the most advanced exponents of religious colonisation. It represented the most aggressive form of Christianity and fostered a moral militarism and religious imperialism which epitomised middle-class respectability, and consequently evoked considerable hostile resistance from the working class, who resented the attack on their values and lifestyle. In terms of the militarisation of British society as a whole, the Salvation Army gave aggression a religious connotation and imbued imperialism with a moral justification. 'Onward Christian Soldiers' however was open to various constructions. The new movement caused confusion in the public mind between Christian warfare and imperial warfare, because it preached that 'as a great empire required an imperial race, so a Christian empire required a Christian populace'.[20] It was with even more confusion therefore that the religious public reacted to the Salvation Army's neutral stance during times of national conflict. Such a position was untenable to pacifist and non-pacifist nonconformists alike.

The Boys' Brigade, founded by William Smith of the Free Church of Scotland in Glasgow in 1883, was an attempt to exploit military organisation to win young working-class boys to the Christian cause. According to Bailey, it was the embryo of the first mass youth organisation in Britain. Its dummy rifles and Bibles reflected a muted militarism which filtered into popular consciousness and further sapped the strength that pacifism might have had in winning young hearts and minds. The credo of the Boys' Brigade movement was discipline combined with religion, and it had strong appeal.[21] The Brigade was also regarded as an important agency of social control in areas of urban unemployment and poverty, where there was a high incidence of antisocial behaviour. It was believed that youth organisations could help to inculcate attitudes in the young that would be supportive of church and state.[22] As a result of the perceived self-righteous assault on working-class mores, the Brigade elicited the same kind of resistance as the Salvation Army.

The activities of the Boys' Brigade were also seen as an attack on the principles of the peace movement. The amalgam of militarism and Christianity offered to children was seen by pacifists as a questionable policy, and there were objections to the role of the Brigade as a 'recruiting agency' for the regular army. Bailey shows that pacifist feeling ran high against the Brigade on the eve of the Anglo-Boer War in 1899, when an agitation within the National Sunday School Union, a nonconformist organisation, resulted in the formation of the rival Boys' Life Brigade.[23]

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One cannot discount the influence of the politicisation of nonconformity in legitimising militarism. The 1890s witnessed in certain quarters the rise of Liberal Imperialism, at the heart of which was an implicit militarism.[24] This too influenced the shift in the nonconformist stance. As the Liberal Party imbibed militarism, so nonconformity experienced the side-effects. Many free churchmen took Lord Rosebery's Liberal Imperialism to heart, and the old peace tradition of Cobden and Bright was eroded further.

As the South African war approached, and despite the revulsion expressed at the Jameson Raid of 1895, nonconformist Christianity increasingly accepted militarism. Nevertheless, as in other wars before and since, 'Christ was found in both trenches'[25] and not all free churchmen embraced Liberal Imperialism—some felt, with the controversial radical Liberal politician, John Morley, that it was no more than 'Chamberlain wine with a Rosebery label'.[26] The Little Englander stance was very much in evidence among certain Baptists, elements within Congregationalism and Prebyterianism, and more noticeably in Unitarian, Primitive Methodist and Quaker circles. These groups cautiously pledged their support to Lloyd

George, who represented the anti-war lobby in the Liberal Party. Most nonconformists however took the safe middle course by supporting Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Liberal Party leader after Gladstone's death. The fires of imperialism were stoked by the supporters of his opponent for the party leadership, Lord Rosebery. Rosebery's nonconformist backing was impressive, with the weight of Wesleyan Methodism behind him, led by the formidable preacher, Rev. Hugh Price Hughes, the 'Cecil Rhodes of Methodism'.[27]

Without exaggerating the impact of clerical opinion in the formulation of British foreign policy in the late nineteenth century, it may be accepted that its pronouncements indirectly legitimised aggressive imperialism. The transformation within nonconformity, specifically between 1860 and 1890, from anti-imperialism to nationalistic fervour for empire, can be explained largely—and paradoxically—in terms of humanitarianism. The temper of the social gospel was favourably disposed to government action in foreign and colonial affairs. It is paradoxical that liberalised theology could contribute towards an exploitative ideology, but perhaps the social gospel was itself a product of capitalism. More certain is the fact that underlying humanitarianism was a conscious racism: the view that only the British state could protect native races against exploitation was nothing less than a mutation of the generally held notion that the whites were inherently superior to the blacks and so had the right to govern them. Nonconformists, no less than anyone else, believed that the British Empire was the greatest force for good in a world ripe for Christianity. More and more were even beginning to accept that because the Empire had been won by war, it could legitimately be extended by war. It seems that the 'military virtues were thus considered part of the essence of an Imperial Race'—the aggregate of imperialism, militarism and racism.[28]

Nonconformists preached Anglo-Saxon superiority during the Spanish-American war of 1898 and during the Fashoda incident of the same year. One can conclude therefore that before the outbreak of the South African war the 'racially based nationalism of the time ensured that residual Nonconformist reluctance to use force in support of imperial claims evaporated'.[29] It is not surprising then that the Colonial Secretary, Joseph Chamberlain, credited ministers of religion with winning support for war in South Africa in 1899. He claimed that 'almost without exception' they were on the side of the British government.[30] Obviously this was a generalisation which ignored the small but persistent opposition to the war by some nonconformist denominations in Britain and by the Swedish, German, Norwegian and American missionaries in South Africa.[31] But how much power did the pulpit wield in whipping up

support for the war? Was the sermon still 'the standard vehicle of serious truth'?[32] Did the millions of church and chapel adherents at the turn of the century pay particular attention to the convictions of preachers?

The militarisation of society through religion also attracted the attention of the publicist William Stead, himself a Congregationalist. His view of the role of preachers in fostering support for the South African war was from the inside. The tenor of his own writings against the war was religious. His Christian pacifist roots caused him to recoil from the pro-war statements of many clergymen. He derisively referred to them as 'Moloch Priests', a term he borrowed from the writings of Coleridge. He seemed concerned that pro-imperialist clergy were profoundly influencing the political opinions of their parishioners. He was also aware of a rising tide of imperialist fever within churches after war had been declared: 'The silence of many Christian pulpits before the War was notable enough, but it is less horrible than the utterances which have been heard in some of those pulpits since the War broke out.' He continued that he could have wished that they had maintained their silence: 'If our pastors and teachers are as dumb dogs, unable to utter a sound, when the nation is threatened by the catastrophe of War, they might at least hold their tongues, when the only use they can make of them is to envenom still more the angry passions and pharasaic pride of their flocks.' His condemnation was stinging, likening parsons to huntsmen eagerly on the trail with the 'hell-hounds of War'.[33] Stead's graphic imagery was directed against religious leaders again in September 1900, when he derided 'ministers of Christ' who 'exult in combining Christ and Carnage' and who offer 'Divine Worship' with hands 'dripping red with their brothers' blood'.[34] Stead gave some weight to this anti-war propaganda through the Stop-the-war Committee which he founded.

While there is no evidence that religious leaders actually shaped British government policies, as Chamberlain seemed to suggest in a speech on the war delivered in Birmingham in May 1900,[35] their role was one of endorsement of policies already decided upon.[36] John Hobson, the anti-war activist, agreed that the part played by clergymen in nurturing the pro-imperialist cause should not be underestimated. For him, the approval of churches had the effect of providing independent testimony to the justice of the British cause in the public mind. He recognised that nonconformity was divided on the war issue, but accused the wealthier and more respectable dissenters of following secular dictates. It was reprehensible to Hobson that religion was being used by the ruling class to stimulate a fanaticism in war by 'representing it as a sacred duty to risk life in trying to punish other people who are either heathen or wicked

peoples, who have deserved to die, and whose land and other property by right belong to us'.[37] Moreover, in Hobson's opinion, the pulpit was responsible 'for manufacturing Jingoism' only marginally less than the 'poisoned press'.[38] Worse still, Hobson declared that Christianity had served the interests of capitalism during the war. There was little doubt in Hobson's mind that the churches and British missionaries in South Africa were incapable of speaking their mind freely because of the hold over them exercised by finance capitalism. He averred that in particular churches were indebted to Rhodes, their 'munificent patron'. Hobson also exposed the propaganda value of claims by Christian ministers and missionaries that the war was being fought to secure justice for blacks in South Africa. In this way they were masking naked imperialism in the guise of a 'sacred war'.[39] Whether or not Hobson overestimated the role of missionaries in marshalling support for the war is outside the scope of this paper, but it could be argued tentatively here that even if they did not initiate such support, many certainly acquiesced in the face of pressure from mining magnates, uitlanders, politicians, and the tide of jingoism which was swelled by colonial expansion.

It must be remembered that behind Hobson's attack on religion during the war was his obsession with capitalism. He was inclined to overlook those nonconformists who like himself were opposed to imperialism, because they constituted only a fraction of society and, in a larger context, had little power. But even socialist nonconformists were divided: some, like Hobson, praised the Boer community as an alternative to 'a decadent civilization dominated by Jewish finance capital'; others defended war and empire as necessary stages in the civilising mission. The former predictably condemned war as the catastrophic consequence of capital accumulation and class rule.[40] Again the vagaries of the nonconformist conscience caused it to provide different answers to the same question.

Whatever stance nonconformists took on these vital issues of militarism, imperialism, racism and capitalism, however, they reflected the beliefs of a wider-based imperialist community. Perhaps Hobson was wrong in emphasising the leadership role of Christianity during the war. If he had played it down, he would have been more consistent with his own argument that even the profession of Christian principles had failed to prevent the British people from sinking to the level of savagery, a view which led to his conclusion that the nation had 'never been moulded or dominated by Christianity'.[41]

The peace movement was again bewildered by the outright sanction that many churchmen and nonconformist ministers gave to war, and by the apparent reticence of the majority to condemn it.

As Patricia Ashman explains, 'for those Christians who saw the war as unjust, it followed that their religious leaders, starting from the same beliefs, should preach its immorality'.[42] The fact that this was not the case provoked anti-war laymen to attack the sermons of pro-war ministers. They obviously felt the need to redress the imperialist tendencies of the pulpit, presumably because sermons were still considered a powerful medium for determining political attitudes. At the turn of the century, sermons of prominent preachers were published in a weekly newspaper called *The World Pulpit*. Therefore the thoughts of clergy were available even to those who were not churchgoers but who perhaps saw religious utterances as part of the larger voice of humanitarianism. Anti-war Christians and humanitarians consequently found themselves united in defence of peace and often made common cause against the 'drum-beating' clergy. The statements of Keir Hardie, the prominent Labour leader, himself a product of nonconformity, epitomised the coming together of these two forces. He argued that 'when clergymen advocate or support a war like the one now being waged they proclaim themselves infidels who do not believe in the Gospel'. As might have been expected from his background, he also joined Hobson in rebuking the churches for being the tools of capitalism by supporting the war.[43]

* * *

By 1899 the nonconformist conscience in general had lost its single-minded commitment to peace. The momentous events of the second half of the nineteenth century, with its wars and the rise of so-called New Imperialism, had diluted the pacifist ingredient which had given the conscience its radicalism. The army had been drawn closer to the hearts of nonconformists as it began to shed its Anglican exclusivity. Nonconformist society was subtly militarised through its participation in the voluntary movement and through its own militant evangelicalism. As its theology and leadership changed, it was transformed stage by stage from essentially non-violent to morally interventionist and to humanitarianly imperialist, until it was finally caught up in the militarist imperialism associated with the Anglo-Boer War. These stages, though discernible, seemed to overtake the nonconformist conscience almost imperceptibly, through agencies like the Salvation Army and through compelling leadership by nonconformist ministers who constantly modified the attitude to militarism.

Nonconformity was also vassal to liberalism and so took its cue from that quarter as well. Ultimately the structural forces at work such as imperialism and capitalism, imposed themselves upon a middle-class nonconformity, which as a result of its changed

material fortunes in British society, had lost its dissenting conscience.

University of South Africa,
Pretoria.

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THE ROLE OF 'CASH' WITHIN THE RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE OF WILLIAM FAULKNER'S 'AS I LAY DYING'

by A.M. POTTER

William Faulkner's work is impregnated with religion references, most of them specifically Christian. 'Reference' is perhaps a misleading term, for frequently lengthy passages, extensive scenes, or even whole books are conceived and structured in terms of the patterns generated by some or other aspect in particular of the Christian story.[1] The richest source 'of the material that Faulkner used to construct his works' was 'the King James Bible, his favourite story was that of Christ's Passion; but he also referred often to the story of Eden, and occasionally to those of Abraham and Isaac, David and Absalom, Joseph and his brothers, and many more'.[2]

Within the general context of Faulkner's use of religious material in his works, *As I Lay Dying* holds a prominent position. P.C. Rule has devoted an essay to the subject of 'The Old Testament Vision' in *As I Lay Dying*',[3] the subject of which is self-explanatory, while H.H. Waggoner in a book-length study of Faulkner, devotes a chapter to *As I Lay Dying* in which he demonstrates, among other things, the extensive use of New Testament patterns in the structuring of the Bundren's epic journey.[4]

As the title of this paper suggests, its emphasis will be on the rôle of Cash within this religious patterning; although a certain amount of additional analysis will have to be done initially to be able to place Cash's function in the context of the concerns of the book as a whole. Adams has placed Cash's rôle broadly but imprecisely within the book's religious framework by saying that 'he, like Jewel and Vardaman, resembles Christ in some ways',[5] but he does not elaborate other than pointing out that Cash is a carpenter, leaving us to work out for ourselves whether the parallels are more significant than this superficial, though highly suggestive one, would imply.

Waggoner is more precise as to Cash's rôle, seeing him to be 'the artist as craftsman, maker, and as the committed man'.[6] Towards the end of his chapter on *As I Lay Dying* he elaborates on this statement in the following way:

> Cash is an artist in his carpentry, respecting his materials, working the wood according to the grain and turning out a good job not for any 'practical' motive but simply because he cares about good workmanship. Cash is the artist seeing, caring, and taking pains, the artist as man and maker. 'A fellow can't get away from a shoddy job.'

He further continues:

> What his approach to life would seem to imply is a sacramental view of nature — all nature — without a specific historical Incarnation: a religious view of life but not one that, in the historic sense of the word, can be called Christian. Divinity in Cash's world is immanent but not transcendent.[7]

Whereas Waggoner's comment points towards Cash's function, greater precision as to the precise nature of the rôle can be obtained than this; for Cash's mode of action stands firmly and clearly within a tradition of attitude to work which is to be found in Christianity (as Waggoner seems to think it is not) and also in other religions, where this attitude has been more fully elaborated on.

To understand the proper significance of this mode of action it is necessary to explore briefly the context of the themes and concerns of the book as a whole, since Cash's function is to act out specific aspects of these overall concerns. A starting-point for the establishment of the nature of these central concerns is to be found in Darl's description of Jewel and Vernon Tull searching in the river for Cash's tools, after the wagon has overturned at the ford:

> Jewel and Vernon are in the river again. From here they do not appear to violate the surface at all; it is as though it had severed them both at a single blow, the two torsos moving with infinitesimal and ludicrous care upon the surface. It looks peaceful, like machinery does after you have watched it and listened to it for a long time. As though the clotting which is you had dissolved into the myriad original motion . . .[8]

The passage seems to express the essence of Faulkner's vision of man in this book — he is seen as a temporary 'clotting' that for a time coalesces out of the 'myriad original motion', which I take to be the flux of the processes of physical creation, and then dissolves back into it at death. With this as the essential basis of his vision, Faulkner questions the purpose of this transitory 'clotting' process, this temporary phenomenon that appears for a time amid the great flow of the river of life, only to disappear again when it returns to the source from whence it came. Questions about the nature and purpose of life are implicit throughout the book and are frequently made explicit, for example in Darl's question:

> How do our lives ravel out into the no-wind, no-sound, the weary gestures wearily recapitulant; echoes of old compulsions with no-hand on no-strings . . . (p. 164)

Since Darl is so little in touch with life and with himself, his sections which make up a large part of the book,[9] are particularly

rich in such questionings. The answer to these questions, if it can be incorporated into a single quotation, given the richness and complexity of the novel, possibly comes out in a statement by Anse:

> 'I do the best I can,' he said. 'Fore God, if there were ere a man in the living world suffered the trials and floutings I have suffered.' (p. 150)

If we forget for a moment the large measure of irony injected into this statement by the nature of the speaker, it could be said that the statement made here lies close to the heart of the book. Man comes into the 'living world', suffers 'trials and floutings' there, and each, according to his ability and nature, does the 'best [he] can' in response to the tests placed upon him. The whole book is structured with vision of human existence like this in mind, for the journey the Bundrens undertake presents classic archetypal trials which man has to undergo. Faced with the challenges of fire and flood—

> 'I simply imagined a group of people and subjected them to the simple universal catastrophes, which are Flood and Fire . . .'[10]

—the Bundrens respond as best they can to the pressures put on them, pressures which are metaphors for the travails of life itself. Out of this test comes a range of insights into human nature, as each character responds in his or her own way and according to his or her own needs and psychological make-up to the pressures placed upon that character by the difficulties of the journey.

Clearly, one of the methods used to confront the difficulties of life is some form of religious response. Generally speaking, religion has always been used by man to help him make sense of life, and to aid him in his struggle to live through difficult or problematic experience. If we focus only on the issue of religion, ignoring other issues, then it can be said that Faulkner presents in *As I Lay Dying* a range of responses to explore man's religious nature and his use of religion—in the broadest sense of the word—to help him make sense of his experience, to give meaning to the 'clotting' that is man, and to help him through the 'trials and floutings' of life. The range of religious response is fairly complete. There is no orthodox Messiah or prophet figure, and no hermit-like contemplative, for the book is concerned with ordinary experience, and with active life as it must be lived from day to day by ordinary people in 'normal' society. But within these limitations the range is more or less complete. What should be noted, however, is that orthodox and conventional attitudes to religion, and characters that express them, are often treated ironically.

In orthodox terms, the response of Dewey Dell and Jewel is highly superficial. Dewey Dell can see no further into life than her

own obsessive need for an abortion, and as a result cannot even properly acknowledge her mother's death. She 'believes' in God insofar as He appears to her to be able to help her in a practical way to attain her purpose. So, when the family does not turn off to New Hope, to the Bundrens' burial place, but goes on to Jefferson where Addie's family are buried and where the chances of an abortion are far greater, Dewey Dell repeats over and over again, 'I believe in God, God. God, I believe in God' (p. 94). Jewel, with his own obsession to fulfil his mother's last request and bury her in Jefferson, also seems to see God in functional terms. His savage '... if there is a God what the hell is He for?' is in no way a metaphysical speculation, but simply an expression of his desire to protect his mother from what he considers to be the hordes of useless sympathisers that crowd around her in her last hours (p. 15). Both these characters, however, have a far more innately 'religious' response to life than would appear on first impression, in that both have an instinctively natural involvement with or union with something that Faulkner sees as an essential part of life. Jewel's intense feeling for his mother—which he can express only by transferring it to the horse—and Dewey Dell's pregnancy both serve this function.

Dewey Dell is seen as a classic fertility symbol.[11] In her, life continues in its blind, primal sense, even if as an individual she wants to end her pregnancy. In this way she can be said to represent something that can be termed religious in its most basic sense: she is the bearer of the life force, and represents in her person an eternal measure against which existence is assessed and affirmed. Her legs, for example, are seen as calipers by which life itself can be measured (p. 81). Jewel's energetic, savage commitment to his mother implies a similar commitment to life, a commitment of great intensity, even if it has its problematic aspects. The commitment itself has what could be called a transcendent quality, taking him out of himself, giving him a driving sense of purpose and uniting him in some way with the life force (the horse is a traditional symbol of vital energy). His commitment is exclusively to Addie, however (and to the horse which is a substitute for Addie), and this is what makes it problematic. However, within that limited context, Addie points the way to the value of this commitment when she speaks of Jewel in Christ-like terms: 'He is my cross and he will be my salvation. He will save me from the water and from the fire. Even though I have laid down my life, he will save me' (p. 133). To Cora this is blasphemy, but her response largely points to her own hyper-orthodoxy which is treated ironically. What Addie's statement suggests are qualities in Jewel's commitment to her which, if not literally Messiah-like on a superficial level, do imply a strong

redemptive quality which must be seen in relation to Addie's own particular struggle to make sense of life.

Ironically, in contrast to Jewel and Dewey Dell, whose religious response *seems* so superficial, the characters who talk most in orthodox religious terms—Cora Tull, Anse, and Whitfield the preacher—are in fact examples of a genuinely superficial religiosity, not simply because they are the greatest religious talkers, but because their words and their deeds are so completely unconnected. Tull's comment of Whitfield that 'His voice is bigger than him' (p. 73) could sum up Cora as well, as it could also Anse who is a great mouther of religious platitudes when it suits him. Anse does not claim to be a religious person (unlike Cora, who lets everyone know continually how pure she is) but a key comment of his does sum up the quality which each of these characters possesses: 'I am not religious, I reckon. But peace is in my heart: I know it is' (p. 33). Their 'peace' comes from self-satisfaction—Cora in her complacent assurance of her 'reward' for all her good works and piety, Whitfield in the superficial piety of his rôle as preacher, and Anse in his ability to manipulate others to do everything for him, even while he mouths platitudes of noble self-sufficiency and self-denial. But because this peace is based on false premises, it is a peace that is inimical to the peace 'that passeth all understanding' which the religious person is meant to experience. Their peace is all too comprehensible, all too much of this world.

Addie Bundren's attempt to come to terms with life seems to be more honest and more realistic, even if it could be said to have some questionable qualities. She is intensely aware of the emptiness of the words spoken by the Anses, Coras, and Whitfields of the world, and this is the cause of her bitterness and her dissatisfaction with her life. Her effort is to confront life in reality, rather than to gloss over it (however terrible it may be)[12] with conventional words or phrases that impose an artificial and essentially false pattern on it. This is what she seems to mean when she says that 'the reason for living is getting ready to stay dead' (p. 139): she can lay down her life in peace only if she has lived life in a satisfactory manner; and she will have a sense of this only if she has lived it out in terms of deeds, not empty words. That her attempt to do this is essentially religious (however much it may outrage the highly orthodox sensibilities of Cora) is seen by the terms in which she frequently talks, wanting to make terms like sin and salvation real in deed, rather than mouthing them constantly while having no concept of the reality of either (p. 140). Living to her is always seen in terms of deeds lived out on the earth: '. . . words go straight up in a thin line, quick and harmless, and . . . doing goes along the earth, clinging to it, so that after a while the two lines are too far apart for the same person to straddle

from one to the other' (pp. 137–8). Deeds connect a person to life, and life is lived out on the earth. Man is only alive so long as he is in contact with the earth. In the light of this, it is significant that Faulkner describes the death of the mules in the river in terms of their losing touch with the earth:

> Between the two hills I see the mules once more. They roll up out of the water in succession, turning completely over, their legs stiffly extended as when they had lost contact with the earth. (p. 118)

This can be linked with Anse's spiritual death in Addie's eyes, because his indulgence in empty words has cut him off from contact with any meaningful experience in life. That is why Addie can say of her and Anse's children: 'My children were of me alone, of the wild blood boiling along the earth, of me and of all that lived; of none and of all' (p. 139). She experiences them as part of a greater and more substantial reality, of the greater process of nature exemplified by the earth and its patterns of cyclical re-creation with which she is frequently identified, for example in the opening paragraph of her monologue, particularly the last five lines of that paragraph:

> In the afternoon when school was out and the last one had left with his little dirty snuffling nose, instead of going home I would go down the hill to the spring where I could be quiet and hate them. It would be quiet there then, with the water bubbling up and away and the sun slanting quiet in the trees and the quiet smelling of damp and rotting leaves and new earth; especially in the early spring, for it was worst then. (p. 134)

Equally, the value of her sinning *in reality* with Whitfield is that it makes sin — and therefore its concomitant salvation — a reality in deed, rather than just in word. Her actions, therefore, while certainly not in any way orthodoxly religious, are a more intense attempt to come to terms with life and with the concepts with which religion deals, than those of many other characters in the book, particularly those who overtly are 'religious' in the extreme.

Addie's mistrust of empty words and her desire to live life in deeds brings us naturally to Cash, whose economy in the use of words is a marked phenomenon of the book, particularly in its early stages, and whose commitment to deeds rather than words as the dominant mode of his experience is so obvious that it has prompted one critic to define him as 'action in search of a word'.[13] What I would like to focus on for the rest of this article is the particular way in which Cash acts, a way which implies a moral value that has a wider and deeper significance, not just within the rather vague framework implied by the statement that he is a good workman who

does a careful and thorough job at all times, but within a specifically religious context, religious not in a narrowly denominational sense, but as a type of practice or discipline or mode of behaviour aimed at bringing man closer to an awareness of and union with God, however He happens to be named or envisaged.

Cash's attitude to work can be seen in a number of key passages. Tull, for example, describes the way in which Cash plugs up the holes bored by Vardaman in the coffin lid:

> I go round to the back. Cash is filling up the holes he bored in the top of it. He is trimming out plugs for them, one at a time, the wood wet and hard to work. He could cut up a tin can and hide the holes and nobody couldn't know the difference. Wouldn't mind, anyway. I have seen him spend a hour trimming out a wedge like it was glass he was working, when he could have reached around and picked up a dozen sticks and drove them into the joint and made it do. (p. 69)

His careful attention to every detail of his work, however unimportant a particular task may seem to the onlooker, is equally apparent in the incident when Jewel, riding past on his horse, splashes a spot of mud on to the coffin as it lies on the wagon:

> A gout of mud, back-flung, plops on to the box. Cash leans forward and takes a tool from his box and removes it carefully. When the road crosses Whiteleaf, the willows leaning near enough, he breaks off a branch and scours at the stain with the wet leaves. (p. 84)

His decision to bevel each joint of the coffin as he builds it, simply because it will then be better made, even though the rain is threatening, the night is closing in, and the whole process will take that much more time, reflects the same attitude. What makes this care in the building of the coffin that much more remarkable is that a coffin is simply a box used to contain a dead body, which will soon be laid in the ground, covered over with earth, and allowed to rot. It is not for living man's use; it is not even to be long in the sight of man; yet Cash works on it with all the infinite care that he has, as if it were intended for a king's palace, rather than the earth. Cash himself sums up his attitude to work towards the end of the book:

> But it's a shame, in a way. Folks seem to get away from the olden right teaching that says to drive the nails down and trim the edges well always like it was for your own use and comfort you were making it. It's like some folks has the smooth, pretty boards to build a court-house with and others don't have no more than rough lumber fitten to build a chicken coop. But it's better to build a tight chicken coop than a shoddy court-house, and when they both build shoddy or build well, neither because it's one or tother is going to make a man feel the better nor the worse. (p. 185)

Undoubtedly this is an accepted attitude to good workmanship — it is, for example, the sort of attitude frequently mourned in the late twentieth century, the century of mass-production which does away with good craftmanship, to the general detriment of the quality of life. But why should it be seen as particularly religious? In a specifically Christian text, its religious value is defined in St Paul's Epistle to the Colossians, 3:23–24:

> And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ.

In the broad context of Western tradition the same idea of the sacramental nature of work is summed up in the Medieval aphorism 'laborare est orare'.[14] This attitude is essentially the same as that expressed in the passage below, taken from a modernised version of the *Vedanta*, the ancient Hindu philosophy founded on the *Upanishads*:

> Do the work at hand to the best of your abilities . . . That work which is assigned or which becomes your share, do it excellently, do it supremely well, not for honour or praise or notice, but because it is your offering to the Lord.[15]

I would suggest that the concept of work as something worthwhile and valuable, let alone sacramental, is hardly likely to go down well nowadays. The problem is not so much that the value of work is no longer appreciated or praised: take the following statement by Alan Sillitoe, a reasonably well-known modern novelist:

> Early factory training instilled into me the inability to be idle, and the fact that one always had to justify the air one breathed. The work was never boring to me.
>
> In humane and modern conditions there is no such thing as soul-destroying work. What won't destroy the body will not damage the soul. It was a common observation in the factory that whoever found work boring was a bore to others, and was very soon classified as bone-idle. He lacked the intelligent flexibility to get the best out of it.
>
> It is futile (and *really* soul-destroying) to regard work as of no importance, or as something to be avoided at any cost. One soon learns that it is a major part of life, in one form or another, for better or worse, until — as far as I'm concerned — death do us part.

There is nothing objectionable about this — until we come to the source of the quotation. I found it in the *Reader's Digest* (June, 1979) which gave as *its* source the *Sunday Telegraph Magazine*. A more right-wing, reactionary combination one cannot imagine. And such statements have become associated with reactionary

values, with the bad old world, with outmoded Victorian values (Victorian sages tended to hold forth at length on the value of work, self-help and self-reliance, all keystones of Victorian prosperity), and from there with capitalism and all its many ills or crimes (depending on your political stance). Max Weber in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904–5) effectively linked the puritan work ethic and the success of capitalism, in an argument that is difficult to refute. Work, then, has been given a very bad press over the last few years, reaching its nadir when the Nazis placed slogans glorifying work over the entrance to Auschwitz concentration camp.

Equally, the problem with fully appreciating Cash's role in *As I Lay Dying* lies in the attitude of Western man to religious experience. Increasingly since the Middle Ages, religion has been hived off from the main stream of life and has been placed in a separate compartment of experience all of its own:

> Religion, ceasing to be the master-interest of mankind, dwindles into a department of life with boundaries which it is extravagant to overstep.[16]

With the intense arguments over the finer points of creed and doctrine that originated in the Reformation, religious experience for Western man has become highly prescriptive — certain ideas or areas of experience have become defined as 'religious', others have not. And, because of these self-same arguments, we have increasingly come to see religion in intellectual terms: it is something that must be carefully defined by the mind, something to be written about and precisely delineated in learned books. Religion has become separated from the great stream of life.

But the basis for a sacramental view of work lies essentially in a belief in a holistic creation, *every* aspect of which participates in the divine:

> Every individual being, from the atom up to the most highly organized of living bodies and the most exalted of finite minds, may be thought of . . . as a point where a ray of the primordial Godhead meets one of the differentiated, creaturely emanations of that same Godhead's creative energy. The creature, as creature, may be very far from God, in the sense that it lacks the intelligence to discover the nature of the divine Ground of its being. But the creature in its eternal essence — as the meeting place of creatureliness and primordial Godhead — is one of the infinite number of points where divine Reality is wholly and eternally present.[17]

If God is present in all things, then he may be worshipped in an infinite number of ways; in other words, the religious experience, in

its very broadest and richest sense, is not simply restricted to certain conventional conceptions of its manifestation, as people like Cora Tull or Whitfield might imagine. It is a question of attitude to that which one is doing — *whatever* one is doing — so that the deeds of a saint, which outwardly may seem rather fine, could, if done with the wrong attitude of mind, be sacrilegious, while the sweeper of the streets — or in Cash's case the carpenter — may be relfecting a more genuinely religious attitude to life by going about his duties, however humble and mundane they may be, in the right way. I would like to work through various aspects of this basic attitude to work that Cash reflects, supporting each point with relevant writings on the subject, to show how rich Faulkner's portrait of Cash is where this particular attitude to life is concerned. Each facet of this attitude is differentiated out for the purposes of the study, but often they overlap, so such distinctions remain artificial and should not be seen as absolute.

Firstly there is the sense of doing whatever work one has to for its own sake, without any desire for reward or praise. This comes out clearly in St Paul's dictum and in the passage from *Vedanta* (both quoted above). *Vedanta* continues a little later:

> Throw overboard your hopes of praise and your fear of blame and work with the sole idea of expressing, through your actions, the perfection which is within you. (p. 91)

Attachment to reward means attachment to externals, to ego, and to self, and 'the more there is of self, the less there is of God' (Huxley, p. 113). Cash's lack of desire for praise for his work is indicated by the care which he takes over a coffin, soon to be placed in the earth out of the sight of man. Notice also the terms in which Faulkner describes Addie's response to Cash's work on her coffin:

> He drops the saw and lifts the board for her to see, watching the window in which the face has not moved . . . For a while still she looks down at him from the composite picture, neither with censure nor approbation. Then the face disappears. (pp. 40–41)

She receives the offering 'neither with censure nor approbation', her response reflecting the attitude in which the work is carried out, hoping for no reward and expecting no blame. Compare also Cash's comment on p. 185, quoted earlier. The last sentence, puzzling though it initially may be, points to the same response — an attitude to work which, whether good or bad, has no emotional effect on the individual carrying it out.

Cash's attitude to work and care for detail, then, can be said to reflect not just a "work ethic", but an inner state which has a spiritual significance:

> If you are not accurate, neat, and pure in your ordinary daily activities, you cannot be so in your inner life. It is possible to judge a man's spirituality simply by watching how he sweeps a room. (*Vedanta* p. 90.)

In Cash's case it is possible to judge his spirituality by watching the way he does his work as a carpenter. It is not a declared, overt spirituality—in fact, Cash himself would not probably see it in spiritual terms at all—but it reflects an attitude to life that implies a spiritual state which, whether the individual concerned is conscious of it or not, is quintessentially religious in that it is humble, non-egoistic, and expresses in its selfless concern for perfection in one area, a potential selfless concern for perfection in all other areas. Equally, it is contrasted with those characters whose 'spirituality' is declared and overt; and it gains strength and substance by comparison with their spiritual emptiness.

Closely linked with this process is the necessity of discipline, which works precisely in the same way: '. . . if one is careless and negligent in one department he is careless and negligent in all departments. If one does not train himself to concentrate on each minute detail, he cannot attain perfection in anything.' (*Vedanta*, p. 90.) Discipline is vital for spiritual fulfilment (for a fuller discussion of the subject, see Huxley, chapter 26). Discipline in one area reflects discipline in another. Without discipline the mind wanders away from its spiritual path, to be distracted by the myriad fascinations of the world, the flesh and the devil. Cash's discipline is obvious, and scarcely needs further comment. The orderliness of his mind, suggesting a discipline in his thought-processes, is apparent when he systematically enumerates the reasons why he built the coffin on the bevel:

> I made it on the bevel.
>
> 1. There is more surface for the nails to grip.
> 2. There is twice the gripping-surface to each seam.
> 3. The water will have to seep into it on a slant. Water moves easiest up and down or straight across.
> 4. In a house people are upright two-thirds of the time. So the seams and joints are made up-and-down. Because the stress is up-and-down.
> 5. In a bed where people lie down all the time, the joints and seams are made sideways, because the stress is sideways.
> 6. Except.
> 7. A body is not square like a cross-tie.
> 8. Animal magnetism.
> 9. The animal magnetism of a dead body makes the stress come slanting, so the seams and joints of a coffin are made on the bevel.
> 10. You can see by an old grave that the earth sinks down on the bevel.

11. While in a natural hole it sinks by the centre, the stress being up-and-down.
12. So I made it on the bevel.
13. It makes a neater job. (p. 66)

Slatoff, who is highly dismissive of Faulkner's view of life in general, sees this as reflecting a 'rigidity and absurdity' in Cash's thought.[18] But it is worth noting that Cash's insight in this passage broadens out from a simple carpenter's explanation of the way he works, to an expression of insight into one of the basic structures of life itself (points 7–11). This seems to be far more constructive than Slatoff is prepared to allow, and suggests that Cash's careful attention to detail makes him aware of the basic patterns of life itself, and in effect integrates him better into life, which seems to be the major purpose of a religious attitude to life.

The significance of giving careful attention to whatever work one is doing, then, becomes obvious as well. By concentrating on the work in hand, one is focusing the mind in the present, concentrating one's whole being in the here and now which alone is the time and place where life can be lived—and where the divine can be experienced. Attention is a part of discipline: it focuses the mind on whatever task is in hand, it excludes all thoughts of success or praise, it makes for the job to be thoroughly done. The attention is also outside the self—it is an anti-ego technique, used to focus the mind and make it aware not of itself, but of something outside itself. It is also the means to a better understanding of life itself, for in a holistic universe, perfect attention to the part means perfect attention to the whole:

> Somewhere in the heart of experience there is an order and a coherence which we might surprise if we were attentive enough . . .[19]

Notice, then, how Faulkner's description of Cash's sawing, upon which his whole attention is concentrated, is given in terms of illumination or light, an image traditionally associated with insight into truth and its attainment. This image is particularly strong when Cash is working on the coffin in the gathering dusk (and darkness, it should be remembered, is traditionally associated with ignorance); he is described as

> stooping steadily at the board in the failing light, labouring on towards darkness and into it as though the stroke of the saw illumined its own motion . . . (p. 40).

Later, the image is repeated:

> The saw has not faltered, the running gleam of its pistoning edge unbroken.

A gleam of light seems to come from the point where the saw meets the wood, the point at that moment in time when man's attention mates his consciousness with reality.

That close attention to the work in hand brings one firmly into the present, can be fruitfully extended further. It is in the present that life is to be lived; we can live it nowhere else. The problem is that we try to, dwelling on past events or on future hopes, and thereby giving up all hope of worthwhile experience since we are in those moments no longer in the present, where alone worthwhile experience may occur. Worthwhile experience here must obviously include religious experience. Cash's attention excludes past and future; it therefore excludes the many distractions which draw man away from the possibility of contemplation of the divine. Concentration on such an action as sawing may not in itself directly relate to the divine (although points have been made above which may suggest otherwise) but it serves the same function as the concept of discipline or non-attachment even in humbler areas, in that it points to an attitude to life which can easily be directed towards the divine. In the light of this, it is interesting to note that throughout his fiction Faulkner is obsessed with time, and that the most helpless and destructive of his characters are frequently those who dwell completely in the past—Quentin the suicide in *The Sound and the Fury* for example, or Hightower in the early stages of *Light in August*. By bringing one's attention into the present, one is taking the first step towards confronting oneself in relation to the universe; in that light it is the first step towards confronting the divine essence to be found both in oneself and in the universe, for it is in the present that time and eternity meet (cf. the opening lines of T.S. Eliot's *Four Quartets* for a poetic expression of the same idea).

Giving attention to the task in hand and doing the job well, have a positive effect on the person acting in this way. Cash has a noticeable quality about him of calm composure and substantiality. The gesture of wiping his hands against his raincoated thigh is described as being 'deliberate, final, composed' (p. 64). The adjectives describe a man of substance and authority. What has to be done has been done well, and the doer is quietly confident of the value of his achievement. We get a sense of a man at one with himself and with the universe about him, in which he has played an active and worthy part by the completion—the proper completion—of the task he has put his mind and body to. Cash's care and attention to the task is equally directed towards the equipment he uses, all part of a general sense of reverence for any aspect of work. Darl describes how Cash

> gathers up his tools and wipes them on a cloth carefully and puts them into the box with its leather sling to go over the shoulder' (p. 65)

reflecting the instruction in *Vedanta*:

> Proper consideration should be given to the necessary implements and instruments for the work undertaken. (p. 92)

The respect Cash has for his tools has an effect on the whole family, as they spend a good deal of time and effort after the accident at the ford recovering Cash's tools that have fallen into the water. A long section of the novel is devoted to this process, indicating its importance.[20] The tools are the means with which Cash does his work; they are therefore the means by which he manifests the meaning of work as it has been described above. His care for them is natural within the context and in itself adds another dimension to that.

Finally there is Cash's taciturnity which abates only later when, with a broken leg and therefore unable to work and so act out what he is, he resorts more to words to express himself. *Vedanta* makes the point about the futility of endless talk in a way that has clear links with the experience of *As I Lay Dying*:

> Why engage in idle talk, speculation, and pointless discussion? It is fruitless and leads to waste. Everyone talks but no one does anything . . . Labour hard and you will know everything in time. Exertion brings its own reward. (p. 85)

It has already been noted that as far as the religious experience in the book is concerned, those who talk the most about it, those who mouth the words and phrases of religiosity, are the most irreligious in a pure sense:

> Ironically, most of this biblical language is spoken by the three most superficial and hypocritical characters in the book: Cora Tull, Whitfield, and Anse.[21]

Words become an impediment to any sense of genuine experience; as Addie has discovered about Anse, words are simply substitutes for deeds, an acknowledgement of a failure to act, 'just a space to fill a lack' (p. 136). This is another way of putting the same thing:

> Words create confusion. Words are not the word . . . The fact is that words say nothing . . . There are no words for the deepest experience. The more I try to explain myself, the less I understand myself. Of course, not everything is unsayable in words, only the living truth.[22]

Ionesco here is presenting exactly the same problem that Addie (and the book as a whole) presents: that we are lost in a plethora of words that are no longer an expression of the 'living truth'—of what is right, and good, and essential to life. Cash's ability to act in the way he does, becomes a living solution to Addie's problem—of

undergoing some sort of genuine religious experience in a world that seems to try its hardest to deny any possibility of such experience.

In the light of this, it is worth noting that the Founder of the Christian Faith preferred to teach not through theory, but through images of faith in action. The widow who gave her mite, the good Samaritan, the centurion whose faith was so exemplary, did not talk about their faith (unlike the scribes and the Pharisees, the ostentatiously 'religious' types who openly prayed at street corners, and whose endless verbiage about their faith so reminds one of Cora Tull), but rather acted it out. The parables are a very rich yet very basic and down-to-earth illustration of faith in *action*, as it is manifested in the real world and lived out in men's lives, so becoming a reality for them too. Like Cash's actions, there is nothing overtly 'religious' about what they do. The words or actions associated traditionally with religion are not about them; yet their actions are such that they show the religious way. Cash's actions, equally humble, serve the same function.

However, once Cash has been injured and incapacitated, it is interesting to note that he does not only speak with a moral authority which has been noted,[23] but on occasion he actually speaks as if interpreting God's plan, in a way very different from Cora Tull's similar tendency:

> But I thought more than once before we crossed the river and after, how it would be God's blessing if He did take her outen out hands and get shut of her in some clean way, and it seemed to me that when Jewel worked so to get her outen the river, he was going against God in a way . . .

The situation is the reverse of the usual 'Man proposes, God disposes', and Cash feels that it is wrong. Perhaps here Jewel becomes something like a representative of twentieth-century, technological man, imposing his will on creation against the dictates of a greater, and possibly in the long run, a wiser order. If so, his constant fury, his intense anger that seems to cut him off from much of what Cash exemplifies, suggests that he is paying a terrible, internal price for the power that he exerts over life. Cash, more close to nature, more prepared to accept life as it comes rather than attempting to dominate it (when they ask him what he is going to do when it rains, while he is building the coffin, he simply answers 'get wet'), is more composed, more at one with himself and the world he lives in. He is a man at peace with the universe, not struggling violently against it. Without wishing to judge either experience as 'better' or 'worse', experientially the quality of Cash's life—both outer and inner—seems to be altogether more satisfying, more bearable for himself as the person who has to live it, than Jewel's.

Perhaps this is why he is presented as a man who likes music. His desire for a record-player so that he can listen to and enjoy music becomes increasingly apparent as the book progresses. Music has always been a symbol of harmony within the universe and the little world of man. Cash's love for music seems to reflect the inner harmony of his nature, a nature contentedly at one with itself, and all about it. In that way, if in no other, his experience is essentially religious.

Rand Afrikaans University,
Johannesburg.

NOTES

1. *The Sound and the Fury*, for example, is divided up into four sections, each section being dated on a particular day of the Easter period in its respective year.
2. R.P. Adams, *Faulkner: Myth and Motion*, Princeton: Princeton U.P., 1968, p. 9.
3. In J. Robert Barth (ed.), *Religious Perspectives in Faulkner's Fiction*, Notre Dame and London: University of Notre Dame Press, 1972, pp. 107–116.
4. H.H. Waggoner, *From Jefferson to the World*, Lexington: Kentucky U.P., 1966, chap. 4. See in particular pp. 66–70 and 74.
5. Adams, p. 78.
6. Waggoner, p. 72.
7. Ibid., p. 84.
8. William Faulkner, *As I Lay Dying*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972, p. 130. All references to the text of the novel are to this edition.
9. He is given 19 sections out of 59 in the book, far more than anyone else.
10. 'William Faulkner: An Interview', by J. Stein, in *William Faulkner; Three Decades of Criticism*, ed. F.J. Hoffman and O.W. Vickery, Michigan State U.P., 1960, p. 73.
11. See Adams, pp. 72–3, for example.
12. 'I knew that living was terrible', *As I Lay Dying*, p. 136. The experiences of the journey bear this assessment out.
13. O.W. Vickery, 'The Dimensions of Consciousness: *As I Lay Dying*', in Hoffman and Vickery, p. 239.
14. H.P. Jones (ed.), *Dictionary of Foreign Phrases and Classical Terms*, Edinburgh: John Grant, 1963, translates this as 'He preaches best who lives best', which is highly relevant to the point I am trying to make here and later.
15. *Vedanta for Modern Man*, ed. C. Isherwood, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1952, p. 85. This is the main source I have used for relevant commentary from other than Western sources. I have used it because, although it is a concise expression of Vedantic wisdom, it is couched in a form highly accessible to Western man. I have used Huxley (see note 17, below) for the same reason. The title is abbreviated to *Vedanta* in the references that follow.
16. R.N. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, London: Murray, 1926, p. 5.
17. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy*, London: Chatto and Windus, 1969, pp. 71–2.
18. W.J. Slatoff, *Quest for Failure: A Study of William Faulkner*, Ithaca: Cornell U.P., 1964, p. 171.
19. Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, quoted in Barth, p. 141.
20. Pages 124–130.
21. P.C. Rule, in Barth, p. 113.
22. Ionesco, in George Steiner, *Language and Silence*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1969, p. 74.
23. See Waggoner, p. 83.

CARLYLE AND THE CONDITION-OF-ENGLAND: MYTH VERSUS MECHANISM

by LAURENCE STUART WRIGHT

For the generation which came to maturity in the 1830s and 40s, Carlyle's influence was immense. As John Morley later wrote: 'Here was the friendly fire-bearer who first conveyed the Promethean spark, here the prophet who first smote the rock.'[1] Carlyle's prophetic tones provided marvellous relief for young consciences caught between orthodox utilitarianism or radicalism (the 'Reform' ethos) on the one hand, and the dogmatic rigidity of Tractarianism on the other. Tom Brown's reaction to *Past and Present* (1843) was intended to be a representative response:

> He had scarcely ever in his life been so moved by a book before. He laughed over it, and cried over it, and began half a dozen letters to the author to thank him . . . . There was no narrowing of the ground here — no appeal to men as members of any exclusive body whatever to separate themselves and come out of the devil's world; but to men as men . . . telling them that the world is God's world, that every one of them has a work in it, and bidding them find their work and set about it.[2]

Evidence that some found the book as uniquely satisfying in real life as Tom Brown found it in fiction is not hard to come by. On August 5th, 1843, Lady Caroline Fox noted in her diary: 'Finished that wondrous "Past and Present", and felt a hearty blessing on the gifted Author spring up in my soul.'[3] Accompanying John Ruskin's copy of *Past and Present* is a letter to Alfred Magee in which Ruskin writes, referring to the book: 'It has become a part of myself — and my old marks in it are now useless because in my heart I mark it all.'[4] Even allowing for the characteristic ardour of expression, such reactions show that Carlyle met a deep-seated need in the climate of the time.

Despite this popular acclaim, the formal critical reaction was generally lukewarm, often one of exasperated incomprehension.[5] Carlyle's early reviewers were quick to point out a major paradox which they felt partially vitiated the force of his appeal. Why could not the chief prophet of the Victorian gospel of work tell his disciples in concrete terms what to *do*? Aside from determined gestures towards planned emigration and popular education — quite usual proposals which in any case had only a peripheral bearing on the main tendency of Carlyle's argument — *Chartism* and *Past and Present* put forward nothing in the way of solid practical steps to ameliorate the Condition-of-England.

The omission spurred Lady Sydney Morgan, the popular

sentimental novelist, to complain: 'It is to little purpose that Mr Carlyle revolves in an atmosphere of generalities if he will not strive, by individualising and analysing, to arrive at particular and practicable results . . .'.[6] Comparing *Past and Present* with *Chartism* she observes: 'There is a like repudiation of statistics, political economy, of all investigations tending to appreciate and define; a like substitution of picture writing for analysis; . . .'[7]

William Henry Smith finds even less of practical import in *Past and Present*, and is brought to the realisation that:

> In fine, turn which way you will, to philosophy, to politics, to religion, you find Mr. Carlyle objecting, denouncing, scoffing, rending all to pieces in his bold, reckless, ironical manner — but *teaching* nothing.[8]

Given the rapturous reception afforded Carlyle by so many young intelligences of the day, we are left wondering what he was offering that more orthodox treatments of social and political issues failed to provide.

The 'message' of *Chartism* and *Past and Present* has autobiographical roots which Carlyle first fictionalised in the unfinished novel fragment *Wotton Reinfred* (1827) and then went on to explore in some detail in *Sartor Resartus* (1833–4). But the intellectual rudiments are already apparent in the early review essays. Carlyle's wide-ranging forays in the criticism and translation of German literature are peppered with small tussles over the solipsistic implications of subjectivism. He earnestly desires to save his readers from the dangers of critical Podsnappery in their approach to the great German writers. For instance, in characterising 'the vulgar reader' at one point he comments: '. . . to a reader of this sort few things can be more alarming than to find that his own little Parish, where he lived so snug and absolute, is, after all, *not* the whole universe . . .'.[9] Again, in the essay on 'Goethe's "Helena" ' of 1828, we find him urging:

> We have not *read* an author till we have seen his object, whatever it may be, as *he* saw it . . . . We should understand the circumstances which, to his mind, made it seem true, or persuaded him to write it . . . .[10]

From such passages, and there are many others, it is plain that Carlyle is to some extent bothered by the notion that, in Thackeray's words, '. . . a distinct universe walks about under your hat and mine . . .'.[11] This tentative worry becomes a coherent concern in Carlyle's first sustained piece of social criticism, the influential essay 'Signs of the Times', which appeared in 1829. The symbolic mills of Coketown, Arnold's definition of Philistinism as 'Faith in machinery', and Ruskin's condemnation of mechanised

labour as a type of slavery in 'The Nature of Gothic', share a common origin in this phase of Carlyle's thought.

In company with most of the major nineteenth-century critics of industrialism, Carlyle is no simple Luddite. While readily conceding the benefits conferred by improved technology, in 'Signs of the Times' his alarm is roused by the degree to which mechanism is invading man's inner being: 'Not the external and physical alone is now managed by machinery, but the internal and spiritual also.'[12] Should this process continue unchecked, it may finally issue in the utter demise of the dynamical faculty. With this possibility, we approach Carlyle's deepest anxiety:

> ... we might fancy either that man's Dynamical nature was, to all spiritual intents, extinct, or else so perfected that nothing more was to be made of it by the old means; and henceforth only in his mechanical contrivances did any hope exist for him.[13]

Carlyle fears that man may one day look out on a world which is rapidly assuming the aspect of a 'dead, immeasurable Steam-engine',[14] and see there nothing but a reflex image of himself—a mechanical solipsism.

This worry was no mere chimera. It is precisely the vision of man which T.H. Huxley set forth with great equanimity later in the century, in his essay on 'A Liberal Education' of 1868:

> That man, I think, has had a liberal education who has been so trained in his youth that his body is the ready servant of his will, and does with ease and pleasure all the work that, as a mechanism, it is capable of; whose intellect is a clear, cold, logic engine, with all its parts of equal strength, and in smooth working order; ready, like a steam engine, to be turned to any kind of work ....[15]

'Signs of the Times' argues for a balanced development of 'mechanical' and 'dynamical' thinking in the individual, and subsequently in society. However, this convenient notion of balance is substantially undermined by a contrary strain of language indicating that man's devotion to mechanism is far from an overt strategy. The surrender to mechanism is depicted in terms which suggest mass hypnosis:

> Today we may say, with the Philosopher, 'the deep meaning of the Laws of Mechanism lies heavy on us'; and in the closet, in the market-place, in the temple, by the social hearth, encumbers the whole movements of our mind, and over our noblest faculties is spreading a nightmare sleep.[16]

Man's attention is so completely absorbed by mechanical consciousness that he is ineluctably losing his awareness of the very

existence of dynamical potentialities. The remedy proposed in 'Characteristics' (1831) and elaborated in *Past and Present* is a return to a state of organic unconsciousness, a state where:

> Society was what we call *whole*, in both senses of the word. The individual man was in himself a whole, or complete union; and could combine with his fellows as the living member of a greater whole .... Opinion and Action had not yet become disunited; but the former could still produce the latter, or attempt to produce it; as the stamp does its impression while the wax is not hardened. Thought and the voice of thought were also a unison; thus, instead of Speculation, we had Poetry; Literature, in its rude utterance, was as yet a heroic Song, perhaps too a devotional anthem.[17]

In such passages Carlyle was by no means recommending flight from contemporary realities towards some mystical or antiquarian ideal (though the medievalism of *Past and Present* was often to be misunderstood in this way). His claim was that current political and economic troubles were ultimately attributable to man's increasing reliance upon 'mechanical' thinking. Restoration of integrity and wholeness in the individual sensibility must, in some measure, be reflected in a whole and united society. At the very least, greater sensitivity to the encroachments of 'mechanical' thinking would lead to increased dominion over technology and political 'machinery'.

Carlyle's meaning here depends to a large extent on how one understands the contrast between 'mechanical' and 'dynamical' thinking.[18] Although he employs a different terminology, Ernst Cassirer has formulated a very similar distinction, richly documented in his major work, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*.[19] Mechanical thinking he calls 'theoretical' or 'discursive' thinking, while dynamical thinking becomes 'mythic' thinking. This particular passage is taken from *Language and Myth*:

> In discursive thought, the particular phenomenon is related to the whole pattern of being and of process; with ever-tightening, ever more elaborate bonds it is held to that totality. In mythic conception, however, things are not taken for what they mean indirectly, but for their immediate appearance; they are taken as pure presentations, and embodied in the imagination. It is easy to see that this sort of hypostatization must lead to an entirely different attitude toward the spoken word, toward its power and content, than the standpoint of discursive thinking would produce.[20]

He continues by observing that in theoretical thinking:

> The word stands so to speak, *between* actual particular impressions, as a phenomenon of a different order, a new intellectual dimension; and

> to this mediating position, this remoteness from the sphere of immediate data, it owes the freedom and ease with which it moves among specific objects and connects one with another.
>
> This free ideality, which is the core of its *logical* nature, is necessarily lacking in the realm of mythic conception. For in this realm nothing has any significance or being save what is given in tangible reality. Here is no "reference" and "meaning"; every content of consciousness is immediately translated into terms of actual presence and effectiveness. Here thought does not confront its data in an attitude of free contemplation, seeking to understand their structure and their systematic connections, and analyzing them according to their parts and functions, but is simply captivated by a total impression. Such thinking does not develop the given content of experience; it does not reach backward or forward from that vantage point to find "causes" and "effects", but rests content with taking in the sheer existent.[21]

Cassirer's description of the differences between discursive and mythic thought could be substantiated from the full range of Carlyle's work, but in the early period the correlation is particularly clear. The primary characteristic of mechanical thinking is a marked tendency to formal abstraction, or what Cassirer terms 'free ideality'; 'the core of its *logical* nature'. He notes that because of its 'remoteness from the sphere of immediate data' discursive thinking moves easily and freely among specific objects 'and connects one with another'. This is one of Carlyle's chief complaints against mechanical thinking. He claims that 'the power man has of knowing and believing, is now nearly synonymous with Logic, or the mere power of arranging and communicating'.[22] Again, Carlyle holds that in the mechanical philosophy of the nineteenth century, ' "Cause and effect" is almost the only category under which we look at, and work with, all Nature.'[23] He would clearly be much more at home with the capacities of mythic thought as Cassirer describes them, for mythic thought 'does not develop the given content of experience; it does not reach backward or forward from that vantage point to find "causes" and "effects", but rests content with taking in the sheer existent'. Carlyle is overwhelmingly concerned with 'the sheer existent': in Lady Morgan's words, he substitutes 'picture writing' for analysis.

The crucial point that emerges from Cassirer's formulation of the mechanical/dynamical contrast is that dynamical thinking is associated with 'an entirely different attitude toward the spoken word, toward its power and content, than the standpoint of discursive thinking would produce'. This insight suggests the possibility that the entire trend of Carlyle's thinking may be closely related to oral rather than literate modes of thought and expression.

Cassirer observes that with mythic thinking 'Thought and its verbal utterance are usually taken as one; for the mind that thinks

and the tongue that speaks belong essentially together.'[24] This closely parallels Carlyle's plea in 'Characteristics' for a state of unconscious 'wholeness' in society, for conditions where 'Thought and the voice of thought were also a unison; thus instead of Speculation, we had Poetry; Literature, in its rude utterance, was as yet a heroic Song, perhaps too a devotional anthem.'[25] Furthermore, this 'heroic Song' is far from an aesthetic or decorative social embellishment. Earlier in the same passage we find Carlyle claiming that before man succumbed to mechanical consciousness, there existed a state of affairs where 'Opinion and Action had not yet become disunited; but the former could still produce the latter . . . as the stamp does its impression while the wax is not hardened.'[26] Cassirer points out that in mythic thought 'every content of consciousness is immediately translated into terms of actual presence and effectiveness'. Carlyle's entire oeuvre is deeply imbued with this feeling for language as power, as a force capable of moving men to action.[27]

This hypothesis is confirmed if we look to *Sartor Resartus*. At the height of his misery under the 'Everlasting NO', Teufelsdröckh describes his predicament in the following terms:

> A feeble unit in the middle of a threatening Infinitude, I seemed to have nothing given me but eyes, whereby to discern my own wretchedness. Invisible yet impenetrable walls, as of Enchantment, divided me from all living: was there, in the wide world, any true bosom I could press trustfully to mine?[28]

Teufelsdröckh is conscious of himself only as an abstraction, set apart from his fellows in a world which has taken on the appearance of a vast hypothesis. It is a world consumed by abstract visuality: '. . . I seemed to have nothing given me but eyes . . .'. This is the epistemological nightmare of the Empiricists, a state of acute solipsistic anxiety which Hume assures us 'can never be radically cured' but may be made bearable through liberal doses of 'Carelessness and inattention'.[29] In contrast, having accepted the 'Everlasting YEA', Teufelsdröckh finds he can resolve to ' "work in well-doing", with the spirit and clear aims of a Man'.[30] Celebrating this discovery, he delivers this little encomium on the pen:

> Never since Aaron's Rod went out of practice . . . was there such a wonder-working Tool: greater than all recorded miracles have been performed by Pens. For strangely in this so solid-seeming World . . . it is appointed that Sound, to appearance the most fleeting, should be the most continuing of all things. The WORD is well said to be omnipotent in this world; man, thereby divine, can create as by a *Fiat*. Awake, arise! Speak forth what is in thee; . . .[31]

So Teufelsdröckh finds his vocation as sage and writer at the same time that he emerges into a mode of awareness where sound and the tones of the speaking voice are primary. The unqualified conflation of the spoken word with the power of the WORD is an important key to understanding Carlyle's writing and his response to the Condition-of-England question. Carlyle's notions of literature, art and religion, are deeply imbued with his conception of the Hero as an inspired orator, a 'rude, intuitive poet'.[32] A man who can give voice to the WORD by means of the word is 'thereby divine, can create as by a *Fiat*'. His authority brooks no dissent, for it stems from his oneness with the absolutes of Nature and Truth.

The conclusion must be that Carlyle was advocating, in a fairly conscious fashion, nothing less than a return to the mythic universe dominated by the spoken word. The proposed revolution in human sensibility is so radical that it is difficult to fathom its implications. Certainly the posture involves an egregious confusion typical of the Victorian response to the industrial revolution; for it is hardly feasible to retain the benefits of improved technology while at the same time demanding a radical curtailment of technological consciousness. Yet the impulse is thoroughly understandable. We all start out in the oral/aural universe and only by dint of much effort do we assimilate the modes of literate culture. Intense involvement with these 'new' modes of thought and expression may swamp the primitive mythic consciousness of childhood, though it is not always permanently extinguished.[33] The suicidal struggle presented in the central episode of *Sartor Resartus* shows how the mythic universe miraculously reasserted itself for Teufelsdröckh, and Carlyle's numerous attempts to deal with the Condition-of-England were essentially an extrapolation from this complex experience.

Many of Carlyle's contemporaries noted the similarity between his brilliant, oracular conversation and the style of his published writings.[34] One need look no further than the *Reminiscences* to find the sources of this primitive mythopoeic gift in the 'bold glowing style' of his father, 'flowing free from the untutored Soul':

> Nothing did I ever hear him undertake to render visible, which did not become almost ocularly so.[35]

Then of course the sabbath sermon in the 'New Light' Burgher Church in Ecclefechan was a prime venue for experiencing the full power of verbal utterance, for 'a Gospel was still preached there to the heart of a man, in the tones of a man'.[36]

No wonder then that Carlyle's reviewers were puzzled! When he first formally propounded the Condition-of-England question in the opening chapter of *Chartism*, Carlyle set it down in two parts.

The first was this:

> Is the condition of the English working people wrong; so wrong that rational working men cannot, will not, and even should not rest quiet under it?[37]

Raymond Williams comments, quite rightly, that 'It is Cobbett's question, and in Cobbett's manner . . .'.[38] However, this sturdy formulation is followed almost immediately by a paralysing alternative, a qualification very far from Cobbett's mind, which throws Carlyle's Condition-of-England question into a radically different framework:

> Or is the discontent itself mad, like the shape it took? Not the condition of the working people that is wrong; but their disposition, their own thoughts, beliefs and feelings that are wrong? This too were a most grave case, little less alarming, little less complex than the former one.[39]

At base this is the same ambivalence that dogs the early review essays: can the English reader conform to the moral and intellectual requirements necessary to verify the vision of an inspired writer? Similarly, efforts at meeting the Condition-of-England question must be directed not only at the externals, but at the inner intellectual, moral and spiritual attitudes which both reflect and support these conditions. The contemporary passion for constitutional reform and extending the franchise, for periodical publications, statistical investigations, professional societies and scientific institutes — these are all merely symptoms of one malaise: 'Our true Deity is Mechanism.'[40] One can almost hear the tones of the preacher and the harsh Dumfries burr:

> Men are grown mechanical in head and heart, as well as in hand. They have lost faith in individual endeavour, and in natural force of any kind. Not for internal perfection, but for external combinations and arrangements, for institutions, constitutions — for Mechanism of one sort or another do they hope and struggle.[41]

In thus repudiating the most characteristic modes of thought and organisation of his day, Carlyle virtually guaranteed his own obsolescence as a social thinker. Nevertheless such cultural iconoclasm had its effect. His robust challenge to orthodoxy roused the social conscience of his generation. The status quo was not inevitable. Today, and as John Morley predicted,[42] Carlyle's work is regarded as mainly of historical importance. This could change if his writings came to be studied as chronicling a major episode in the long-persisting conflict between oral and literate ways of thought.

Rhodes University,
Grahamstown.

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2. Thomas Hughes, *Tom Brown at Oxford*, 1861 (3rd ed.; London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1910), 347–48.
3. Caroline Fox, *Memories of Old Friends: Being Extracts from the Journals and Letters of Caroline Fox*, ed. by Horace N. Pym, 11 (2 vols.; 3rd ed.; London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1882), 14.
4. Letter from John Ruskin to Alfred Magee, Brantwood Jan. 10, 1887. *British Library*, C.61.a.14.
5. A notable exception here is the review by Renouf, whose only reservation concerns Carlyle's underestimation of the Catholic Church—scarcely surprising in a man heavily influenced by Newman. Renouf preceded Newman into the Roman Communion. Cf. [Sir Peter le Page Renouf], review of *Past and Present*, by Thomas Carlyle, in the *Dublin Review*, XV (August, 1843).
6. [Lady Sydney Morgan], review of *Past and Present*, by Thomas Carlyle, in *Athenaeum*, May 13, 1843, 453.
7. Ibid.
8. William Henry Smith, review of *Past and Present*, by Thomas Carlyle, in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, LIV (July, 1843), 122.
9. Carlyle, 'Novalis', *Works*, XXVII, 6.
10. Ibid., XXVI, 150.
11. William Makepeace Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*, The Biographical Edition (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1899), 148.
12. Carlyle, *Works*, XXVII, 60.
13. Ibid., 73.
14. Ibid., *Sartor Resartus, Works*, 1, 133.
15. Thomas H. Huxley, 'A Liberal Education; and Where to Find It', in *Collected Essays*, 111 (London: Macmillan and Co., 1893), 86.
16. Carlyle, *Works*, XXVII, 79–80.
17. Ibid., XVIII, 15.
18. The terms evidently derive from Novalis (Friedrich Leopold Von Hardenberg), for they appear in an important passage translated by Carlyle from the *Novalis Schriften*, and published in his review of that work in 1829—the same year as "Signs of the Times", cf. Ibid., XXVII, 36.
19. Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, trans. by Ralph Mannheim with a Preface and introduction by Charles W. Hendel (3 vols.; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955). Carlyle's theory of the symbol as expounded in *Sartor Resartus* was influential in the development of Cassirer's philosophical outlook.
20. Ernst Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, trans. by Susanne K. Langer (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 1946), 56.
21. Ibid., 56–57.
22. Carlyle, *Works*, XXVII, 74.
23. Ibid.
24. Cassirer, *Language and Myth*, 46.
25. Carlyle, *Works*, XXVIII, 15.
26. Ibid.
27. Only later in his career did Carlyle become disillusioned with literature as an agency of reform. Among the bitter fulminations of the *Latter-Day Pamphlets* (1850), he wrote of literature as a futile evasion of reality: 'here do the windy aspirations, foiled activities, foolish ambitions, and frustrate human energies reduced to the vocable condition, fly as to the one refuge left . . .' (ibid., XX, 191).
28. Ibid., 1, 132.
29. David Hume, *A Treatise on Human Nature*, ed. by T.H. Greene and T.H. Grose, 1 (2 vols.; London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1874), 505.
30. Carlyle, *Works*, 1, 158.
31. Ibid.
32. Ibid., XXVII, 37.

33. In his autobiography, for instance, Darwin laments a loss of aesthetic sensitivity which he attributes to the nature and intensity of his scientific investigations; while J.S. Mill experienced just the opposite—a surge of sympathy for Wordsworth and the life of inward cultivation following his realisation that the habit of analysis tends to wear away the feelings. Cf. Charles Darwin, *The Autobiography of Charles Darwin 1809–1882*, ed. by Norah Barlow (London: Collins, 1958), 138–39; John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1873), 137–143.
34. Cf. [Elizabeth Lecky], *A Memoir of the Right Hon. William Edward Hartpole Lecky: By His Wife* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909), 93; Frederick Harrison, *Memories and Thoughts: Men—Books—Cities—Art* (London: Macmillan and Co. Limited, 1906), 99–100; Caroline Fox, *Memories of Old Friends*, 80–85.
35. Carlyle, *Reminiscences*, ed. by Charles Eliot Norton, with an introduction by Ian Campbell (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd, 1972), 3.
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40. Ibid., XXVII, 74.
41. Ibid., 63.
42. John Morley, *Literary Essays*, 93.