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'THE GREAT GATSBY' — A NEW WAY OF USING THE GREAT CONRADIAN VITALITY?

by J. ZAAL

As Fitzgerald's short masterpiece recedes into the past, its place in the Modernist movement of fiction becomes evident. Its literary genesis, as the American critics James E. Miller and Henry D. Piper reconstructed it some seventeen years ago,[1] was a process of abandoning the school of Wells and Compton Mackenzie for that of Henry James, of learning by the pursuit of selection and the limited point of view to attain intensity of effect. That Conrad plays a special rôle in the process in the years immediately preceding the writing of the novel is evident in Fitzgerald's exclamation in a letter to Edmund Wilson in August 1922, 'see here . . . I want some new way of using the great Conradian vitality'.[2]

When Miller, Piper and more recent critics note the characteristic freshness of vision, the unity of tone and mood, the concise manner and the lucid construction of *The Great Gatsby*, they attribute these qualities in large measure to the use of a narrator, and they link Fitzgerald's use of this crucial device to the practice of the school of James, especially to the precept and example of Willa Cather and Joseph Conrad.[3] In particular, Conrad's use of Marlow — the Marlow of *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* — is rightly shown to lie behind the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*. The Nick Carraway who witnesses the success and fall of a figure whose morally equivocal fame represents at many points the corrupt dream of an era, who attends the fallen hero's lonely burial and who has a delicacy about telling the sordid truth about him, clearly derives a great deal from the Marlow of *Heart of Darkness* and something also from the Marlow who cannot make up his mind about the dream-deluded hero of *Lord Jim*. Yet while a tracing of the provenance of Nick Carraway confirms the modernist antecedents of *The Great Gatsby*, it adds little to our understanding of the novel. There are other aspects of its structure equally influenced by Conrad which have not been adequately noted, and whose exploration in the light of this influence would be more illuminating.

The narrative details a closely-woven series of events — the story of two extra-marital liaisons — spanning the summer of 1922. A series of flashbacks are woven into this narrative belonging to a period beginning almost five years earlier, including Gatsby's courting of Daisy in October 1917, Daisy's marriage to Tom Buchanan in June 1919, and the birth of the Buchanans' child in April 1920. This procedure of relating two time sequences in such a way that the longer and earlier is woven by means of allusive flashbacks into the shorter and later makes for great concentration and intensity. The procedure achieves also a special effect. The longer earlier sequence coincides chronologically with the closing phase and aftermath of the Great War, and by bringing this event within the purview of the main sequence, it is implied obliquely that the disordered lives of the main sequence are a reflection of that international upheaval. The war is indeed keyed into the narrative in a significant way. Gatsby's departure on military service occurs just when his affair with Daisy has unexpectedly turned serious, and his return home after the peace is delayed in the general confusion of the time until after Daisy, weary of waiting, has married Tom Buchanan. The novelist's creative dislocation of chronology here, his procedure of weaving the earlier events by means of short allusive flashbacks into the brief sequence of the summer of 1922, is reminiscent of Conrad's sophisticated narrative method. It is however in the non-narrative elements of the novel, in the imagery and the other devices which contribute an oblique commentary to the narrative, that the link with Conrad is most evident.

It would be useful at this point to look briefly at the way Conrad uses these devices. *Heart of Darkness* will again provide a concise illustration. A prominent feature of this tale is its use of a central, over-arching image, the image of the wilderness, to the heart of which Marlow travels: an image into whose fabric are variously woven the connotations of a place of magic and enchantment which has 'a strangely narcotic effect on (Marlow's) half-awake senses'; of a place of subdued light or darkness; of a place of stillness; of a place of moral depravity; of a place of death and an underworld; of a primeval place of great antiquity. Apart from this image whose profusion of forms gives the tale its phantasmagoric density, there are symbols: the ivory, the two knitting women, the painting of a woman representing justice, the river, and Kurtz himself. There are also narrative digressions and collocations in which chronology is suspended, like the time shift whereby Marlow's longing to meet the Kurtz who will enlighten him is briefly placed side by side with Marlow's dismay at the real man. The author has skilfully maintained a precise balance between the suspenseful chronological narrative and the oblique elements, so that the narrative excitement of the tale is not brought to a halt, and may even be reinforced by a secondary element like Marlow's anxiety to meet and learn from Kurtz. As in Conrad's other major works, the oblique elements play a structural, not a peripheral rôle. Kurtz's state of mind and situation are as much described by what the imagery reveals of the wilderness as by what the narrative shows him saying or doing.

When we turn to *The Great Gatsby*,[4] the lineaments of these oblique elements are apparent. The fact that its narrative extends over a single summer has been mentioned. It is in fact permeated by an awareness of the physical world in which weather plays an important part, so that weather and season become for the reader a sounding board of the unfolding drama in a manner which, while not unusual in the history of the novel, is again reminiscent of Conrad. The warmth and colour of the summer are made to convey something that lies at the thematic heart of the novel, the fragile wonder and promise of life:

> with the sunshine and the great bursts of leaves growing on the trees, just as things grow in fast movies, I had that familiar conviction that life was beginning over again with the summer.[5]

It is drawn into descriptions of Daisy:

> For a moment the last sunshine fell with romantic affection upon her glowing face; . . . then the glow faded, each light deserting her with lingering regret . . .[6]

Many novelists before Conrad have used setting or imagery to mediate a theme obliquely; what seems Conradian here is the calculated deliberation with which it is done. Conradian, for instance, is the use of imagery to introduce a sudden ominous overtone:

> I love New York on summer afternoons when everyone's away. There's something very sensuous about it — overripe, as if all sorts of funny fruits were going to fall into your hands.[7]

The theme of summer is reflected also on the more purely verbal level of figurative language:

> Daisy (surprised) me by opening up again in a flower-like way.[8]
>
> At his lips' touch she blossomed for him like a flower[9]
>
> as the moon rose higher . . . I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes[10]

Almost as frequent as the imagery of bright summer days is that of summer nights, usually moonlight nights. And while high summer predominates in the imagery, Fitzgerald makes use, again as

Conrad might have done, of the contrary state of unpleasant weather on a few crucial occasions. New York's notoriously intense summer heat provides an insistent background to the tensions of the scene in which Tom Buchanan and Gatsby confront each other over Daisy at the Plaza Hotel. Gatsby's dismal funeral, to which 'nobody' came, occurs in thick drizzle, with the hearse 'horribly black and wet'.

The most notable example of imagery used to make an oblique statement occurs in the central scene of Gatsby's meeting with Daisy in Nick's house. The scene begins with Gatsby's strained embarrassment, works through his 'unreasoning joy' at Daisy's warm response to him, then through his faltering uncertainty whether she can adequately embody his dream, and ends with the lovers' euphoric 'rush of emotion'. While the narrator balances in his tone a sensitive involvement with the characters with hints of comedy at their expense, a stronger comment on them is mediated by the vicissitudes of the weather. While the warmth and colour of summer are prominent in the novel, this scene occurs on a day of rain. After persistent rain in the morning, the rain becomes lighter in the afternoon, and at the moment when Gatsby and Daisy reaffirm their love, they discover with delight that the sun is shining. Gatsby proudly shows Daisy the front aspect of his mansion glowing in the sun, but then their tour of the grounds is cut short by a return of the rain. Presently a partial opening of the sky showing 'a pink and golden billow of foaming clouds above the sea' provides a moment of vision and promise for the lovers, which Daisy marks with the triteness of her imagination:

> 'Look at that,' she whispered, and then after a moment:
> 'I'd like to just get one of those pink clouds and put you in it and push you around.'[11]

For a while the weather seems again to move in response to the lovers' hopes, but then the rain returns, thwarting the promise of the weather report to which Gatsby had clung that the rain would stop at about four. The lovers' consequent confinement indoors provides a striking image of their isolation at the close of the scene:

> They had forgotten me . . . I looked once more at them and they looked back at me, remotely, possessed by intense life. Then I went out of the room and down the marble steps into the rain, leaving them there together.[12]

The impression is not simply of the privacy of the lovers but of an isolation which carries an ironic comment and a pointer to Gatsby's fate. Fitzgerald's competence in assimilating the accidentals of weather to the narrative, not simply to control mood but to make an oblique statement about the characters' destiny, belongs to the higher reaches of the craft and suggests a Conradian parallel.

A prominent oblique element of the novel is the two symbols of the valley of ashes and the advertisement of Dr Eckleburg's gigantic eyes. These symbols should be read as providing together an alternative landscape to the landscape of wealth — to that of the prospering city and the Long Island suburbs where the main characters live. This alternative landscape, the ashland through which the wealthy commuters have to pass, where they must pause at a drawbridge while the ash-barges go by, and where they pass Wilson's garage and the scene of Myrtle's frightful accident — this landscape implies a retribution which an age of ruthless exploitation has incurred, and which will claim Gatsby as its victim. Wilson, lacking the privileges of wealth and repeatedly spurned by Tom Buchanan, and desperate to hunt down the driver of the car in which Myrtle had tried to escape, becomes — an 'ashen, fantastic figure' — the personification of this landscape and of its retribution. Though it is referred to only a few times, its admirable consistency with the other parts of the novel allows it to permeate the novel as a whole. In thus working in conjunction with the total structure, it functions in a way similar to the jungle landscape of *Heart of Darkness*, to the landscape blanketed with snow which symbolizes Russia in *Under Western Eyes*, or to the dark obscurity of the Placid Gulf in *Nostromo*. It is a pity that Fitzgerald weakened the symbol of Dr Eckleburg by trying to embroider it. The middle-aged man with 'enormous owl-eyed spectacles' who makes three appearances in the novel is evidently to be linked with the figure of Dr Eckleburg and to act as an observing presence at certain points. He exclaims with amazement at Gatsby's lavishly stocked library; he emerges incredulous from the car which loses a wheel on driving from a party; he attends Gatsby's funeral. The thread of his appearances is too slender to establish him as a commentator on Gatsby, let alone as an observer of the whole action of the novel.[13]

Also symbolic but restricted to particular characters is the striking imagery used when the Buchanans are introduced. Nick first sees Daisy and Jordan Baker lying on a sofa in the Buchanans' wind-filled lounge as if buoyed up by the fluttering drapery, and then seemingly deposited when Tom shuts some windows:

> The only completely stationary object in the room was an enormous couch on which two young women were buoyed up as though upon an anchored balloon. They were both in

> white, and their dresses were rippling and fluttering as if they had just been blown back in after a short flight around the house. I must have stood for a few moments listening to the whip and snap of the curtains and the groan of a picture on the wall. Then there was a boom as Tom Buchanan shut the rear windows and the caught wind died out about the room, and the curtains and the rugs and the two young women ballooned slowly to the floor.[14]

The image prefigures the character of the persons Nick is meeting, subtly connoting the rootlessness and insubstantiality of Daisy and Jordan, and Tom's readiness to bring them down to earth.

The other oblique elements of the novel are the use of motifs, of iterative or interlinked images, and of repeated situations. There is the motif of restlessness and, linked to it, the motif of mechanical gesture and meaningless bodily movement. Nick mentions that he returned from the war feeling restless.[15] Lingering one evening in the garden, Nick is aware of the 'unquiet darkness'.[16] He speaks of the satisfaction which 'the constant flicker of men and women and machines' that is New York gives to 'the restless eye.'[17] Tom and Daisy after their marriage 'drifted here and there unrestfully wherever people played polo and were rich together.'[18] When Tom converses, his eyes flash about restlessly.[19] Jordan Baker has a need for frequent bodily movement. For instance, 'Her body asserted itself with a restless movement of her knee, and she stood up.'[20] Early in the novel a description of personality is half-ironically suggested which provides a kind of frame for the images of gesture and movement in which the novel abounds:

> If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous in him (Gatsby)[21]

Most of the gestures and motions observed in the novel are in fact unsuccessful; they seem incomplete, mechanical, meaningless. When Nick first sees Jordan Baker, she is lying prone on a couch with her chin raised a little 'as if she were balancing something on it which was quite likely to fall'.[22] Presently

> she yawned and with a series of rapid, deft movements stood up into the room.
>
> 'I'm stiff,' she explained . . .[23]

Nick notes also that 'there was a jauntiness about her movements',[24] and that she had a way of 'throwing her body backwards at the shoulders like a young cadet.'[25] The emphasis on her postures and restless movements, coupled with her prevailing mood of discontent suggests an unconscious search for equilibrium which is equally marked in Tom Buchanan. He begins a remark by 'shifting heavily in his chair',[26] and elsewhere, bored with his company, he 'yawned audibly and got to his feet.'[27] Daisy refers to him as 'a brute of a man, a great, big, hulking specimen . . .'[28] More charming but equally meaningless is the vignette of the seated film star and her director bending over her at a party, who maintain their combined posture all evening as in a *tableau vivant*.[29]

Our first glimpse of Gatsby is also of a gesture: Nick sees him stretching his arms in a gesture of yearning, in the privacy of his garden, towards the green light across the Sound.[30] His appearance in public is invariably marked by a punctilious correctness of word and gesture, as when he stands on his porch at the end of one party, 'his hand up in a formal gesture of farewell'.[31] Yet the impression he gives in his public appearances of 'successful' gesture and of an inner harmony is belied by his restlessness on some private occasions. When he calls on Nick one morning, Nick observes,

> He was balancing himself on the dashboard of his car with that resourcefulness of movement that is so peculiarly American . . . This quality was continually breaking through his punctilious manner in the shape of restlessness. He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand.[32]

Apart from restless and fragmentary gestures, the characters' lives are marked by fequent moves to different parts of the country: there is much travelling and commuting. Their communications are often disjointed and inconsequent. Conversations end in mid-air and questions are left unanswered — several times because a telephone call has to be answered or made. Inconsequence seems also to be the keynote of Gatsby's parties. There is the singer whose song alternates with drunken weeping,[33] and the girl who breaks sporadically into uncontrollable laughter.[34] Inconsequence is reflected in the drunken amazement of the party-goers whose way home is obstructed by the car that has lost a wheel; the car itself is of course a conspicuous image of disjunction.

There is nothing derivative in Fitzgerald's handling of these linked motifs of restlessness, meaningless gesture and disjointed behaviour, yet the reader who is familiar with Conrad may well be reminded of the use in *The Secret Agent* of certain linked motifs which throw light on character and theme. Among the characters of that novel, which is also a social satire, there is a tendency to obesity or largeness or heaviness of body, to physical indolence linked with mental dullness and even imbecility — traits which, as in *The Great Gatsby*, cut across individual differences to point certain themes.

The repetition of images and situations contributes directly to the themes of the novel. The image already referred to of Daisy and Jordan Baker lying on a couch as if buoyed up in a wind-filled room is allusively repeated in the prelude to the confrontation scene:

> The room, shadowed well with awnings, was dark and cool. Daisy and Jordan lay upon an enormous couch, like silver idols weighing down their own white dresses against the singing breeze of the fans.[35]

The same notion of buoyancy as synonymous with delusory dream and insubstantiality is conveyed in an earlier image:

> We passed a barrier of dark trees, and then the facade of Fifty-ninth Street . . . Unlike Gatsby and Tom Buchanan, I had no girl whose disembodied face floated along the dark cornices and blinding signs, and so I drew up the girl beside me . . .[36]

A notable image that is Conradian in its strikingly sensuous embodiment of a complex idea is the scene already alluded to of the guests at a party of Gatsby's obstructed on their way home by a car stripped of a wheel after it has had an accidental encounter with a jutting wall. With its strange lighting provided by cars' headlights, its eerie, discordant horn-sounding, and its confused, inconsequent behaviour of the party-goers, particularly that of the erring driver who cannot be persuaded that he has not run out of gas — the whole composite image has the bizarre quality of a drunken hallucination.[37] It shares with the buoyancy images mentioned earlier a striking connotation of charmed unreality and trivial inconsequence, as it does with other images like that already referred to of the film star, the 'gorgeous, scarcely human orchid of a woman' and her director.[38] The effect of these images is to extend through the novel a web of allusion linking drunken delusion, dream and adultery[39] into a structure which enriches and complements the narrative, and which finds its thematic focus in Gatsby's dream. One further item needs to be added to this fabric: the element of violence.

The climactic event of the novel links adultery with the violence of a fatal car accident. The link is anticipated in an incident which occurrred in the first year of the Buchanans' marriage. It happened, as Jordan Baker relates it to Nick, at a time when Tom and Daisy were touchingly attached to each other:

> Tom ran into a wagon on the Ventura road one night, and ripped a front wheel off his car. The girl who was with him got into the papers, too, because her arm was broken — she was one of the chambermaids in the Santa Barbara Hotel.[40]

The link gains further thematic resonance in the incident discussed above of the guest's car shorn of a wheel at the end of a party. The element of violence becomes fatal violence, of course, in the car accident which kills Myrtle and the murder of Gatsby. The violence of the dénouement, all the more ominous because on a purely human level both events depend on human error, is subtly anticipated in Nick's thoughts when he travels into New York with Gatsby and is struck by the view of the city. New York is for him 'the city seen for the first time, in its first wild promise of all the mystery and the beauty in the world'.[41] While a funeral procession and a few smart vehicles pass them, Nick comments, 'Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge . . anything at all . . .'[42] The emphasis carries an ironic implication (Fitzgerald's, not the narrator's) that the enchantment of New York and of Gatsby's dream is coupled not with some ineffable consummation, but with death.

These symbols, images, motifs, allusions and repeated situations play a rôle complementary to that of the narrative, lending by their continuous fabric a kind of Conradian vitality to the theme which the narrative projects: the theme of a world of delusive enchantment and self-regarding vanity destroyed by a violently irrupting reality. The link with Conrad which the brilliant technique of the novel leads one to recognize is not a matter of its having this or that particular device in common with Conrad's fiction, but of the presence in both writers of a sophisticated fabric of oblique elements.

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Umlazi.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND NOTES

Three useful general studies of the novel may be mentioned. Arthur Mizener's essay *'The Great Gatsby'*, printed in *The American Novel* ed.W. Stegner, New York, 1965, is particularly perceptive about the attitude to wealth out of which the novel was written. John S. Whitley, *F. Scott Fitzgerald, The Great Gatsby*, Studies in English Literature Series, London,.1976, shows the influence of Keats on Fitzgerald as well as that of Conrad; it also makes brief mention of some of the motifs discussed in the present essay. Brian Way, *F. Scott Fitzgerald and the Art of Social Fiction*, London, 1980, gives a balanced view of the main works while stressing Fitzgerald's importance as an historian of American manners.

1. James E. Miller, *F. Scott Fitzgerald, His Art and His Technique*, New York, 1964, and Henry D. Piper, *F. Scott Fitzgerald, A Critical Portrait*, London, 1965.
2. Quoted in Miller, p. 92
3. Both Miller and Piper believe that the influence of James must have reached Fitzgerald mainly through the works of Willa Cather and Conrad. It is very unlikely, says Piper, that Fitzgerald had read any works by James by the time he wrote *The Great Gatsby* (op. cit. pp. 127–8). Both critics agree that Fitzgerald is likely to have read and profited by Willa Cather's novel *A Lost Girl*, 1923, in which a severely selective protrait of a single character is presented as seen through the eyes of a sympathetic narrator; Miller notes that the development of the main character is significantly linked to a change of attitude in the observer from admiration to disillusion (Miller, p. 90). Fitzgerald's correspondence, Miller notes, shows that of Conrad's works he had read by this time at least *Youth, Heart of Darkness*, and *Lord Jim*, as well as the preface to *The Nigger of the Narcissus*. Miller stresses the resemblance between the use of Marlow and the use of Nick Carraway to achieve not only selection but authenticity (Miller, pp. 106–111); Piper stresses the importance particularly of *Victory*, in which Marlow conducts a sustained examination into the character of a protagonist who is an *alter ego* (Piper, pp. 131–2). Some of the points made by Miller and Piper were anticipated by R.W. Stallman who perceived the importance of Conrad's Marlow for *The Great Gatsby* in *The Houses that James Built*, East Lansing, 1961. Several of the essays in E.H. Lockridge, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Great Gatsby*, Englewood Cliffs NJ, 1968, have a bearing on the technique of the novel under discussion inasmuch as they discuss the device of the narrator with a fuller perception than Miller and Piper do. In particular, Thomas A. Hanzo's essay, 'The Theme and the Narrator of *The Great Gatsby*' makes it clear how far the characteristic virtues of the novel — the vital freshness of its complex vision, its authenticity, its unity of tone and mood, its conciseness — all depend on the skilful use of the narrator.
4. References to *The Great Gatsby* are to the Penguin edition, Harmondsworth, 1950.
5. Ibid. p. 10
6. Ibid. p. 20
7. Ibid. p. 131
8. Ibid. p. 26
9. Ibid. p. 118
10. Ibid. p. 187
11. Ibid. p. 101
12. Ibid. p. 103
13. Symbolic in a Conradian manner, too, is Gatsby's near mishap with the clock on the mantelpiece against which he leans when he meets Daisy in Nick's house (Ibid. p. 93). This incident together with a number of clock and time references in the novel are given a heightened significance by Gatsby's naive faith in his ability to transcend the bounds of time: 'Can't repeat the past?' he cried incredulously. 'Why of course you can!' (Ibid. p. 117)
14. Ibid. p. 14
15. Ibid. p. 9
16. Ibid. p. 28
17. Ibid. p. 63
18. Ibid. p. 12
19. Ibid. pp. 13 and 185
20. Ibid. p. 25
21. Ibid. p. 8
22. Ibid. p. 14; cf p. 141
23. Ibid. p. 17
24. Ibid. p. 57
25. Ibid. p. 17
26. Ibid. p. 20

27. Ibid. p. 38
28. Ibid. p. 18
29. Ibid. pp. 112 and 114
30. Ibid. pp. 27–28
31. Ibid. p. 62
32. Ibid. p. 70
33. Ibid. p. 57
34. Ibid. p. 53
35. Ibid. p. 121
36. Ibid. p. 86
37. Ibid. pp. 60–62
38. Ibid. pp. 112 and 114
39. There is strictly speaking a distinction in the novel between the active adultery of Tom Buchanan (all but accepted as a norm by Daisy), and the marital infidelity of Gatsby.
40. Ibid. p. 83
41. Ibid. p. 74
42. Ibid. p. 75

TOWARDS A COMMON CORE CULTURE IN SOUTH AFRICA*

by KEN DOVEY

The origins of my interest in this topic go back twelve years to a rugby tour of Europe. Our arrival in Britain sparked off a radical re-evaluation of my personal identity. I arrived there with the expectation of being regarded as a long-lost brother finally returning home and was shocked to discover that, to the British, I was just another foreigner. Their reaction started a process of soul-searching within me — why had I expected them to relate with familial warmth toward me? I began to realize that it had something to do with my schooling; that in spite of being a South African of many generations and of having descended mostly from Afrikaner stock, my schooling had somehow led me to believe that I was a 'European', that I belonged elsewhere than Africa. The realization that the British people and I had, apart from language, little in common brought home with impact the fact that my experience had, until then, been totally African.

This realization was reinforced a few years later when I went to study in America. After a short period of mutual suspicion, other African students and I were drawn into a close friendship by our understanding of each other. It seemed as if there were huge areas of our experience, in different parts of Africa, which overlapped; and within a short time my wife and I were accepted into the African student body and referred to as 'brother' and 'sister'. The students from Kenya, Nigeria, Ghana and elsewhere, however, recognized an even closer similarity in 'culture' amongst my wife and myself and the Black South Africans within our group. Our shared South African experience, in some ways, set us apart from the other African students. The deceits underlying my socialization as a 'White' South African began to become more and more transparent. Here, in the United States, our shared African experience was becoming explicit by the ease with which we developed relationships with other African, and particularly South African, students. I began to realize that I had been subjected throughout my life to propaganda which focussed upon the 'differences' between 'White' and 'Black' South Africans, and that the social structures of Apartheid had denied me the opportunity of testing the validity of that propaganda. It was only on foreign soil that we were getting to know each other and discovering the vast 'similarities' of our identity and culture.

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*This article is based upon a paper delivered by the author at the 'Art in Education' Conference, held at the Frank Joubert Art Centre in Cape Town, 28–30 July 1981.

* * *

John Dewey stated that 'the career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way' (Dewey, 1934, p. 13). He refers to works of art as 'refined and intensified forms of experience' and claims that these are intimately connected to the 'everyday events, doings, and sufferings that are universally recognized to constitute experience'. In a different context, R.D. Laing indirectly refers to art as 'the articulated vision of experience'. Ken Baynes, in his discussion of so-called popular art also emphasizes the complex dialectic between art and experience and between individual artist and general community, when he says that 'Art is as often articulating and symbolizing the truth of already shared experiences, as it is presenting genuine novelty . . . It is as if one of the things that art does is to hold up pictures of other peoples' experiences, other peoples' morals, other peoples' emotions, in the hope that, if they are enough like our own, they will reassure us that our own are real and have a place in the world' (Baynes, 1975, p. 201).

If this dialectic between art and experience is broken, if we forget our human authorship of art, alienation occurs and works of art are reified; they are assigned an ontological status of their own, independent of human experience and volition. It is my contention that such a state of alienation generally exists in art in South Africa, and I want to suggest three processes which, in my opinion, have contributed significantly to this general state of alienation in South African art.

The Colonized Consciousness:
Alienation from our African Experience:

This point may, paradoxically, be most forcibly made by examining the North American experience one hundred years or more ago. Walt Whitman, in his letter to Emerson of 1855, argues passionately that Americans would only begin to produce great art when they stopped trying to emulate Europeans, and started to draw from their own American experience in their art. Speaking of America's inheritance of the English language, Whitman says,

> That huge English flow, so sweet, so undeniable, has done incalculable good here, and is to be spoken of for its own sake with generous praise and gratitude. Yet the price the States have had to lie under for the same has not been a small price. Payment prevails; a nation can never take the issues and needs of other nations for noth-

> ing. America, grandest of lands in the theory of its politics, in popular reading, in hospitality, breadth, animal beauty, cities, ships, machines, money, credit, collapses quick as lightning at the repeated, admonishing, stern words, where are any mental expressions from you, beyond what you have copied or stolen? Where the born throngs of poets, literats, orators, you promised? Will you but tag after other nations? They struggled long for their literature, painfully working their way, some with deficient languages, some with priest-craft, some in the endeavour just to live . . . As justice has been strictly done to you, from this hour do strict justice to yourself. Strangle the singers who will not sing you loud and strong. Open the doors of the West. Call for new great masters to comprehend new arts, new perfections, new wants. Submit to the most robust bard till he remedy your barrenness. Then you will not need to adopt the heirs of others; you will have true heirs begotten of yourself, blooded with your own blood. . . Old forms, old poems, majestic and proper in their own lands here in this land are exiles; the air here is very strong. Much that stands well and has a little enough place provided for it in the small scales of European kingdoms, empires, and the like, here stands haggard, dwarfed, ludicrous, or has no place little enough provided for it. Authorities, poems, models, laws, names, imported into America are useful to America today to destroy them, and so move disencumbered to great works, great days . . . To poets and literats — to every woman and man, today or any day, the conditions of the present, needs, dangers, prejudices, and the like, are the perfect conditions on which we are here, and the conditions for wording the future with undissuadable words. These States receivers of the stamina of the past ages and lands, initiate the outlines of repayment a thousand fold. They fetch the American great masters, waited for by old worlds and new, who accept evil as well as good, ignorance as well as erudition, black as soon as white, foreign born materials as well as home-born, reject none, force discrepancies into range, surround the whole, concentrate them on present periods and places, show the application to each and any one's body and soul, and show the true use of precedents. Always America will be agitated and turbulent. This day it is taking shape, not to be less so, but to be more so, stormily, capriciously, on native principles, with such vast proportions of parts! As for me, I love screaming, wrestling, boiling-hot days.
>
> (Whitman, 1965, pp. 732–738)

Most South Africans have been subjected to this experience of negation in the proces of growing up: our education, our media, our families have taught us to perceive the source of our experience to be outside of ourselves and our social context. The imperative has been that other nations' and other peoples' experience is to be reflected and admired. Our own African experience is to be regarded as insignificant, inferior. The assumption has been that our confidence can only be established by leaning on our European heritage. I think that the art curriculum in our schools exemplifies this alienation *par excellence!* For example the Cape Education Department's *Syllabus for Art* makes a token gesture, in the Standard Ten year, to South African Art whereby in one small section, pupils may select two South African painters from a list of seven — all of whom are White painters. Similarly, the *Syllabus for Science of Art* (sic), has a very limited section, at the Standard Six level, on Bushman Art and a small section in Standard Ten is allocated to South African Art — 'two painters, two sculptors, and Cape Dutch Architecture'. The rest of the syllabus draws almost exclusively on European Art. The *Syllabus for Painting* advocates as the major themes for Standards 8, 9 and 10, 'the animal in painting'; 'the landscape in painting'; and 'representation of depth and space in painting'. Such a neutralised, or 'de-humanized', syllabus effectively de-politicizes art: it removes the human and social reality as a subject from art, and emphasizes form as opposed to a meaningful analysis of content. The *Syllabus for Music* similarly emphasizes form and technique, and nowhere in this syllabus is there any mention of South African music.

The Nationalized Consciousness: State Control of Human Experience:

Since 1948 our experience of our fellow South Africans has been drastically curtailed through legislated segregation of residential areas, schools, public facilities, transport, and hosts of other domains. Such segregation applies not only between White and Black South Africans but also, in the area of schooling, to English- and Afrikaans-speaking White persons. Generations of South Africans grow up almost entirely isolated from each others' lived experience. In such a context it is not surprising that the various cultural realities are becoming reified — in the White case they have virtually become *deified,* as the following quotation demonstrates: 'Ultimately the education of each child in the RSA should be such that he will acknowledge the authority of God who has placed us here' (HSRC, 1972, p. 122).

Such reification will have severe consequences for art in this country. Fundamental Pedagogics, the ideology undergirding CNE, has made a pathology of 'difference' — conformity of its White children to the cultural conventions of an enlaagered group is perceived as critical to the survival of its 'cultural identity': 'the different or unusual form of behaviour *whatever it may be,* implies a way of behaviour different from the proper, and draws the attention of other children or of adults' (Swanepoel, 1975, p. 3 my italics). Swanepoel's colleagues in the TED tell us how to recognise the 'different' child: 'you can observe or expect the symptoms in children who are obviously different, if you know what an ordinary pupil looks like and how he reacts, and what a pupil who is not an ordinary child, looks like and how he reacts.' (Moreland & Vermeulen, 1975, p.4). Such an official restriction upon 'differentness' must lead to cultural stagnation. Black groups, too, from their insulated pockets of experience appear to have internalised this concept of cultural exclusivity with its reification of their own 'identities'.

We must, in my opinion, make the effort to jump the artificial barriers created by Apartheid if we are to tap the wealth of our past communal experience and our South African heritage. The Faculty of Education at UCT currently makes it possible for its students to do their teaching practice in the non-racial schools of Bophuthatswana. One of our students described the experience as follows:

> In all honesty, I didn't expect to be at ease with the Blacks . . . there was just this idea of a 'Black' threat to me (the 'Black', I suppose, being the unknown), and no vision of 'them as people', people who bleed, cry, feel and breathe . . . I was so scared of being 'shown up' as *not* so liberal, not so accepting or able to accept. I was to be tested. I had always thought that I was all of these, but had never been forced to live up to my words or opinions . . . The atmosphere was unbelievably accepting, warm, sharing and caring, but still allowing each one his space to move, to do, not to do, or just to be . . . we talked deep into the night and early hours of the morning on serious issues. We discussed ourselves and grew closer by revealing our deepest fears and needs. We came to a new awareness of ourselves through these discussions, a new awareness and understanding . . . We were able to see a new perspective on many levels and issues . . . We *grew* from experiencing one another . . . It was only in the going home that I mainly realized how tension-free Bophuthatswana is. An extremely happy me left for Cape Town, filled with a genuine love for these people, an understanding beyond what I'd thought possible. Most of all, I didn't want to leave . . . As we reached the Hex River Valley and saw the breath-taking beauty, the greenness, the Boland Mountains that I so loved, I knew that I couldn't simply go back to where I was before. I had changed.
> (Quoted from a paper by Mike Lawrence, entitled 'Through the Past Darkly: Educational Projects and the Homelands', publication forthcoming.)

Not all of our attempts to re-connect our experience with that of our fellow Black South Africans will be as easy and joyous. We will require much courage, tolerance and, above all, honesty to make this journey of re-discovery. R.D. Laing's words, written in a very different context, are appropriate:

> In this journey there are many occasions to lose one's way, for confusion, partial failure, even final shipwreck: many terrors, spirits, demons to be encountered that may or may not be overcome.
> (Laing, 1967, p. 104)

This exploration of our communal experience is, in my opinion, the most urgently required project of our time. We are so out of touch with our common human experience that we have begun to doubt that we have any experience in common.

The Mystification of Experience:
The Cult of 'Genius':

R.G. Collingwood comments that we have inherited a long tradition, beginning in the late eighteenth century with the cult of 'genius' and lasting all through the nineteenth, which is inimical to the dynamic collaboration between artist and community in artistic creation. This tradition views the artist as if 'the artist were a kind of transcendent genius whose meaning is always too profound for his audience of humbler mortals to grasp in more than fragmentary way' (Collingwood, 1975, p. 311). Thus art is reified; human authorship is forgotten and 'supernatural' definitions of art prevail, ranging from divine inspiration to the cult of 'genius'. From this perspective art becomes part of another realm which we can view with adulation but which we as mortals are powerless to impact and toward which we are impotent to contribute. Collingwood shatters this myth and brings art back to earth by pointing out the collaborative relationhip between the artist and his/her community:

> But a man, in his art as in everything else, is a finite being. Everything that he does is done in relation to others like himself. As artist, he is a speaker; but a man speaks as he has been taught; he speaks the tongue in which he was born. The musician did not invent his scale or his instruments; even if he invents a new scale or a new instrument he is only modifying what he has learnt from others. The painter did not invent the idea of painting pictures or the pigments and brushes with which he paints them. Even the most precocious poet hears and reads poetry before he writes it. Moreover, just as every artist stands in relation to other artists from whom he has acquired his art, so he stands in relation to some audience to whom he addresses it. The child learning his mother tongue, as we have seen, learns simultaneously to be a speaker and to be a listener; he listens to others speaking, and speaks to others listening. It is the same with artists. They become poets or painters or musicians not by some process of development from within, as they grow beards; but by living in a society where these languages are current. Like other speakers, they speak to those who understand . . . In other words, he undertakes his artistic labour not as a personal effort on his own private behalf, but as a public labour on behalf of the community to which he belongs. Whatever statement of emotion he utters is prefaced by the implicit rubric, not 'I feel', but 'we feel'. And it is not strictly even a labour undertaken by himself on behalf of the community. It is a labour in which he invites the community to participate; for their function as audience is not passively to accept his work, but do it

> over again for themselves. If he invites them to do this, it is because he has reason to think they will accept his invitation, that is, because he thinks he is inviting them to do what they already want to do.
>
> In so far as the artist feels all this (and an artist who did not feel it would not feel the craving to publish his work, or take seriously the public's opinion of it), he feels it not only after his work is completed, but from its inception and throughout its composition. The audience is perpetually present to him as a factor in his artistic labour; not as an anti-aesthetic factor, corrupting the sincerity of his work by considerations of reputation and reward, but as an aesthetic factor, defining what the problem is which as an artist he is trying to solve —what emotions he is to express — and what constitutes a solution of it. The audience which the artist thus feels as collaborating with himself may be a large one or a small one, but it is never absent.
>
> (Collingwood, 1975, pp. 315–317)

The emergence of artists like David Kramer and *Jaluka* in South African music is a healthy sign that we are beginning to recognize the fundamental link between the work of art and the 'everyday events, doings, and sufferings' of ordinary human beings.

* * *

Henri Bergson's contribution to our understanding of the concept of 'time' is valuable here. He introduced the term *duration,* that is 'time-as-experience', and argued that under the influence of positivism 'time' had come to be understood almost exclusively as a quantitative concept. As H.S. Hughes comments, 'in Bergson's hands time became a positive concept. It ceased to be the mere source of 'change and decay' (Hughes, 1974, p. 117). Bergson reintroduced the qualitative dimension of time, particularly as applied to our deep-seated conscious states, and argued that only through a concentration on our consciousness could we arrive at a realization of our unique historical experience in its fullness and actuality. This could be done on two levels. He anticipated Freud in his idea of a total conservation of the individual's experience, even though subsequent experience may have led to the repression of the past from consciousness. The memory of the individual has a remarkable capacity to record every facet, nuance, smell, flavour of past experience, although its recall may take special conditions. On another level, Bergson anticipated Jung, in his contention that the collective experience of a group is similarly recorded and transmitted in the taken-for-granted rituals of the primary socialization of the individual. Such experiences constituting the primary reality of the individual are more deeply entrenched in the consciousness than experiences, such as schooling, which constitute 'secondary socialization' (see Berger and Luckmann, 1967). From this it becomes clear that no ideology can easily wipe out three hundred years of collective experience in South Africa: that experience 'flashes back' whenever the institutionalized mystification veils are lifted: whether it be South Africans of different colours seeking each other out in foreign countries, or through the 'consciousness exploration' of our more authentic artists. André Brink's *Rumours of Rain* is, in my opinion, a masterpiece of such exploration of his personal, and our collective, experience:

> Often, in the two years I spent in England, I would be struck by exactly the same phenomenon: the two people more or less predestined to drift together in the course of such a party, isolating themselves in a corner and excluding the rest of the world, would be an Afrikaner and an African. Strange . . . We refilled our glasses and returned to our secluded spot, talking non-stop. All the *d'you remembers* of compatriots in a foreign land. The pepper trees and the horse-carts, the silence of Sundays, the din of stock fairs, the smell of woodsmoke in winter, the taste of green apricots and loquats, sweet *hanepoot* grapes and watermelons. Boys swimming naked in muddy pools. Bird-nesting, crawling along slack willow branches and dropping into the water. Cooking a tortoise in its shell. Fighting with clay sticks. Pumpkins on flat iron roofs. The scare of the *tokoloshe.* Sweet-potatoes baked in their skins. Mud between your toes. Frost on the brittle white grass of winter. How irrational, the things one discovered one missed most. I told him about my earliest memory: how Ma would hand me over to the care of old Aia, our Black nanny, whenever I'd been unmanageable; to be tied with a blanket to her back, my earliest and deepest experience of security. And how, as we'd grown up, Theo and I would join the servants for breakfast squatting on our haunches round the three-legged iron pot, helping ourselves to tough *putu* porridge in our cupped hands.
>
> (Brink, 1979, pp. 327–328)

Set in the Eastern Cape, the main character moves freely between the lives of Afrikaners, Xhosas, and English-speakers. He compares the constructive experience of the *Abakhweta* ritual of Black boys into manhood with the psychologically shattering initiation ritual his son was forced to undergo through the 1975 military invasion of Angola. The mystical experience in the forest with the old Black 'wizard' seeking the *Momlambo* is a distinctly 'Black' phenomenon but it is experienced with equal emotional impact by a White Afrikaner. Such 'Black' phenomena pop up all over in 'White' art where the artist allows it to: David Kramer, who grew up in the Boland, also refers on his album, *Bakgat,* to *'die tokoloshe van my kinderdae'*, and relates that, in the hills outside Worcester, he'd 'listen to Radio Bantu, on the crackling shortwave band, because I love that *kwela* music, but the words

I'll never understand.' He may have been barred from understanding the 'words' but something in him responds to the African rhythm of the music. Watching Jonathan Clegg, of *Jaluka*, being joyously affirmed by his Black audience at a concert in Bophuthatswana this year, was a clear manifestation for me of the authenticity of this 'White' man's 'Africanness'. Similarly 'Black' art is loaded with 'White' phenomena from Christianity to the very media through which it is communicated. Above all, our more recent joint experience of Apartheid and Modernization dominates the current art of South Africa, whether it be artificially labelled as 'White' or 'Black'.

McAllister (1980) shows how many 'White' phenomena have been incorporated into Xhosa rituals which ironically are attempting to preserve 'traditional' meaning structures. Many of the rituals connected to the *rites de passage* of migrant labourers have close associations to traditional 'White' habits — for example, the Afrikaner ritual of preparing 'padkos' for a member of the family to partake of during a journey is almost directly incorporated into the Xhosa language as 'umphako':

> The most important aspect of women's role in the rites of departure, however, involved the provision of food *(umphako)* for the migrant to carry with him on his journey to work. *Umphako,* 'food for a journey', is prepared by the migrant's wife or mother and usually consists of bread baked in the homestead.
>
> (McAllister, 1980, p. 217)

Many of the other rituals associated with migrant labour that McAllister refers to, such as the moral obligation to visit distant lineage members and other kin within the first weeks of returning, have clear equivalents in 'White' traditions. The degree of inter-cultural borrowing in South Africa thus reflects that in our past, there have been many years of close experiental contact.

McAllister comments that:

> Much of what is seen as traditional today is, in fact, of relatively recent origin — the plough, the use of oxen for ploughing, the role of men in agriculture, the mud-brick hut, etc. Even labour migration is viewed as traditional, since it was done by man's forefathers. Conservative Gcaleka accept that new circumstances require adaptation and say that the shades allow for a degree of change.
>
> (*ibid,* p. 248)

My contention, here, is that we have to explore this rich historical and personal experience in an open and courageous manner, which means that we will not be able to separate politics from our art or from our lives. Pablo Neruda, the great South American poet, talking of his experience of growing up in Chile states that from late adolescence onwards, 'politics became part of my poetry and my life. In my poems I could not shut the door to the street, just as I could not shut the door to love, life, joy, or sadness in my young poet's heart'. (Neruda, 1978, p. 53).

A particular responsibility rests upon the teachers of art in our schools because for most pupils they are probably the most significant 'audience'. What is required, in my opinion, is that the teachers initiate their pupils into the artistic ceremony of re-discovering their fellow South Africans and their collective South African heritage. But the teachers can only do this once they, themselves, have undergone such an initiation ceremony. The onus is on them to initiate themselves into this 'journey' so that they may assist themselves and their pupils, in Laing's words, to 'be more able to see clearly the extent to which we all confront common problems and share common dilemmas' (Laing, 1973, p. 108). Speaking through one of his characters, Brink has the following to say:

> Only later, when in my twelfth year I was sent away to boarding school in town, did I begin to react consciously to the difference between White and Black. Back on the farm during holidays my relationship with my erstwhile companions seemed to change automatically to that between master and subordinate . . . After obtaining my law degree I went to Holland for postgraduate research at the University of Leiden. There, for the first time in my life, I met Blacks on a basis of social equality . . . In fact, in the cultural and emotional sense, I believe it was the greatest shock I'd had to accomodate up to that point.
>
> It forced me to spend many hours in thought trying to account for my strange revulsion. I remember how easy it had been to communicate with my boyhood friends. I'd never felt this embarrassment or resentment in their company. What became abundantly clear was that it was I and not the Black man who had changed; that I had developed an antagonism for which I could find no rational basis whatsoever . . . But the outcome of my reflections in Europe was the beginning of a process which I had to see through to its logical conclusion — philosophically, morally and, in the final analysis, in practice.
>
> (Brink, 1979, pp. 91–92)

This challenge is relevant not only to teachers of art, but to all South Africans. It constitutes the most important human project of our time and place, and promises a transformation of our reified social reality into a dynamic context where the dialectic between art, or theory, and experience is re-established.

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THE 'TRANSFORMATION' OF THOMAS BECKET

'. . . *poteris de nostra manu pontificalis officii curam recipere.*'

by M.G. SPENCER

Historiographically speaking, Thomas Becket has had a somewhat chequered career at the hands of British scholars. Lauded to the point of adulation, by most medieval writers, he was brought down to earth with a bump in the 16th century, in the anti-Catholic (more strictly anti-papal) atmosphere consequent upon the Henrician Reformation. Shakespeare, who happily plundered out of time and space for his material, left the Becket affair (with all its potential for high drama) severely alone. The 17th and 18th centuries saw little change. A burgeoning interest in constitutional and 'administrative' history, quickened by the 'Glorious Revolution' and its aftermath, relegated him to the minor placings as a one-dimensional and somewhat mischievous figure. Resurgent rationalism pays little heed to archbishops and saints. A notable revival of interest in medieval studies in the 19th century brought renewed attention, not all of it judicious. More modern scholarship, with its worthy emphasis on meticulous research and scrupulous impartiality, has rcognized him as a figure of historical significance, as a man of strong character and unusual abilities, whose fortunes in life -and whose fortunes after death-merit attention and analysis. Underscoring these developments on the academic level proper is the emergence of Becket as a literary figure at the hands of master playwrights who have seen in him an apt vehicle for effective dramatisation of the human predicament.

Despite these attentions, if not because of them, Becket still generates much historical controversy. He is generally seen as an important figure in a seminal century, yet interpretations as to the man and his motives differ notably. Did he suffer a 'sea-change' on his election to the archbishopric, or was he rather a superb actor rejoicing in another challenging role? Was it fear that prompted him to flee into exile, or was it a desire to steal a march on his enemies? Did he deliberately court martyrdom as a supreme act of egoism, or did he die a tragic victim of royal displeasure? Trained historians do not offer judgements lightly. Why is there this striking diversity of views?

In part, the answer is straightforward. There is the '*tot homines quot sententiae*' syndrome which afflicts all areas of healthy academic activity where men apply themselves individually to knotty problems of scholarship. Then again, no scholar however scrupulous can divorce himself completely from built-in values, attitudes and prejudices. There is a further problem in this case relating to the contemporary sources themselves, the product of men who were seldom impartial in their writings. Monks, bishops, kings, royal servants, papal officials as well as the chief actors themselves, all had their axes to grind; and grind them they did with the result that historians have to pick their way through a minefield of propaganda, partiality and prejudice.

But there are other, less obvious, reasons for the conflicting interpretations that bedevil attempts to come to grips with the Becket Saga. The foremost of these is a strong tendency among modern British historians to judge in terms of the monarchy. This is not to imply an assumption on their part that the monarchy can do no wrong, but that individuals and events are seen essentially in terms of how they affected the growth of monarchical power and prestige, or the development of governmental institutions. The monarchy, its waxing and waning, is the focal point and treatment of other historical material tends to be subordinated to this end. This is most obvious in the case of that great medieval phenomenon labelled Feudalism which is generally reckoned to be a Bad Thing because the decentralizing tendencies that accompanied it slowed down, at times wrecked, the growth of royal government, militated against an easy march towards a streamlined, centralized state. Strong, centralized government, in the medieval context, has become a Good Thing. Any monarch (or series of monarchs) who contributed to this end has become a Good Thing also. King John, damned as knave or fool for centuries, is now coming into his own because he succeeded in making a grasping English exchequer even more grasping. The more efficient the institutions of central government, perhaps, the greater abundance of historical records, and who set England more firmly on this road than Becket's king and John's father, Henry II? Choleric, greedy, rash, obstinate -yes, but as the father of English Common Law he is a king worthy of the name. Becket and his actions tend to be seen in relation to this thoughtpattern and he tends to suffer in consequence. There is something of a built-in lopsidedness in much modern historical treatment of the Becket episode.

It manifests itself most clearly in the great emphasis placed on the early phase of the struggle between the archbishop and Henry II, the first two years or so when Becket was in England; when he was in direct contact with the king. The subsequent six years -his period in exile- is treated consistently more summarily by historians of the British school. It is highly probable that this is precisely because his personal connection with Henry was more tenuous and his activities therefore become of less moment. One can justify this attitude historiographically, up to a point. The early phase merits deep treatment, it can be argued, because here are to be found the crucial origins of the quarrel, and a close analysis of these origins is necessary for a full understanding of the issues involved. But scholars have been tempted to go further, to find the key to Becket's character and motivation in the events of these two years alone. This is not possible and to try to do so must give way to uncertainty of judgement, to conflicts in interpretation. A sound appreciation of the man and his motives can result only from a rounded analysis of the whole episode, exile included.

To take one major example, was there a transformation in Becket when he assumed the office of archbishop, a transformation from which all else flowed? There were modifications certainly -in mode of life, in companions, one can go so far as to say in his world-view, in that his first loyalty went now to the Church and not to the king. But much, in fact, stayed the same. Thomas manifested the same character traits in his early days as archbishop as he had as chancellor -arrogance, impetuosity, flamboyance, efficiency, single-mindedness, to name a few. Humility, caution, balance were as foreign to him at this stage as they had ever been. There is no convincing evidence of a sudden, total metamorphosis of the inner man; no convincing evidence, indeed, of real spiritual growth. Then there are his sudden bouts of irresolute, almost quixotic, behaviour in times of crisis. At Westminster in October 1163 he defied Henry over the question of criminous clerks; at Oxford a few weeks later he gave in. At Clarendon in January 1164 he reverted to his original stand, then surrendered again (to the consternation of his suffragans who had backed him solidly), only to change his mind yet again and repent of his weakness.

November 1st 1164 found Thomas at his arrogant best, breathing fire, brimstone and clerical immunity at king and barons alike. November 2nd saw him scurrying into exile disguised as a clerk. Infirmity of purpose seemed the hallmark, and it is extremely difficult to make sense of these actions unless they are followed through. If the early stages of his quarrel with Henry require thorough analysis, then so do the early stages of his exile, for they illuminate his earlier behaviour notably. They merit far more than the cursory glance usually afforded them. Contemporary writers are agreed that Becket made straight for the pope, then in exile himself at Sens. Let Alan of Tewkesbury take up the tale:

> 'My fathers and lords' (Thomas said to the pope and cardinals) 'I freely confess with sighs and groans that these afflictions have befallen the English Church through my wretched fault. I clambered into the sheepfold of Christ, not through

> Him who is the door, as one summoned by canonical election, but was forcibly intruded by the secular force (*terror publicae potestatis intrusit*). And though I accepted this burden unwillingly, nevertheless it was human and not divine will which induced me to do so . . . But now, recognizing that my appointment was far from canonical, dreading lest the consequences should prove the worse for me . . . I resign into your hands, father, the archbishopric of Canterbury.'[1]

A most dramatic moment. Thomas was gambling everything on Pope Alexander's understanding and compassion. The pope, hounded into exile by the Barbarossa, desperate to retain Angevin support, must have been sorely tempted to accept Becket's resignation -such, indeed, was the advice of a group of his counsellors. But he did not. Before a large group of witnesses, Thomas was confirmed as archbishop:

> 'Now receive anew at our hands the burden of episcopal office' (*Iam secure de novo poteris de nostra manu pontificalis officii curam recipere*).[2]

This marked the beginnings of a transformation in Thomas Becket, insofar as there was a transformation per se. The pope himself confirmed him as the rightful occupant of Canterbury. No-one could now gainsay him. Recognize the full significance of this interview between Thomas and Alexander -painted in too strong colours, perhaps, by Alan, but confirmed in its essentials by William Fitz Stephen[3] and William of Canterbury[4] as well as by Becket's inseparable companion Herbert of Bosham[5] — and all that has gone before falls more easily into place. Becket so provoked his king, virtually from the moment he became archbishop, to show the world (particularly the English hierarchy most of whose members disapproved of his elevation) that he was not Henry's creature, despite the circumstances of his election. The vacillations, the strange volte-face earlier described, should be seen as manifestations of his deep uncertainty as to the righteousness of his election.

The sudden flight from England was undertaken to seek the support of Christ's Vicar in view of the plan concocted between Henry and the English bishops to have him deposed. All Becker's controversial public actions, from his election to his final showdown with Henry at Northampton and his consequent flight, can be viewed in terms of Thomas' agonizing doubts over the validity of his election, coupled with that intemperate determination to prove his worthiness which tore the English Church apart and brought on the implacable enmity of the king.

And certainly he was right to agonize. His election was both suspect canonically and outrageously untraditional. Neither in learning nor in piety was he an outstanding candidate. Half a dozen of the bishops outshone him in both fields, none more clearly than Gilbert Foliot, soon to be his implacable enemy. In the first place, Thomas was not a bishop at the moment of his election; though as Archdeacon of Canterbury he did hold eminent office in the Church. More startling, he was not an ordained priest, a situation not unknown at the time if the wider European context is taken into account; though given the deep reforming instincts of the English Church in the late 12th century and the primatial status of Canterbury, this lack bordered on the scandalous. Thirdly, he was not a monk, as had been his predecessors since the Conquest. Little wonder the electoral chapter, the monks of Christ Church, were reluctant and that the bishops were resentful. Henry had to exert strong pressure to whip them into line. One suffragan bishop at least refused to profess obedience to his new metropolitan. Thomas was aware of these deficiencies and bent his energies towards vindication.

Further reference to the period he spent in exile allows us to evaluate the extent of the transformation Thomas experienced now that, in his eyes, God -through His Vicar- had blessed his endeavours. He retired to the Cistercian abbey at Pontigny, donned the monk's habit and (according to William FitzStephen) spent his time:

> 'in cultivating his penitence, cleaning his conscience, striving for a holy life, the celebration of Mass and divine contemplation, giving attention to the study of literature, especially the scriptures.'[6]

In other words: from pomp to simplicity, from ostentation to austerity, from spiritual arrogance to spiritual humility. But it proved to be an imperfect transformation. There were still to be examples of his kicking against the goad, of the Old Becket peeping through. He used every opportunity at his command to hit at his enemies among the English bishops and royal officials, to the point of vendetta[7]. Resignation he was never to achieve, nor could he bring himself to forgive his enemies. In his meetings with Henry at Montmirail and Montmartre he exasperated even his friends with his pigheadedness[8]. Yet for Becket this was not mere stubbornness but part of his duty, as rightful archbishop and primate, to defend the powers and prerogatives of his office. He owed it to himself and to God to do so.

His eventual return to England may be seen in the same light, for Henry had now attacked one of Canterbury's most precious prerogatives -the right to crown English monarchs- by allowing the Archbishop of York to crown his son. All other considerations counted for nothing in Becket's mind, and a reconciliation between himself and Henry was swiftly effected. This did not prevent him, though, from pursuing those who impugned the integrity of his office. His return to England early in December 1170 was accompanied by a fresh flurry of excommunications. The danger of provoking Henry afresh by these actions did not occur to him; or, if it did , was of less moment than the desire to defend his archiepiscopal rights.

There are several eye-witness accounts of Becket's martyrdom, each of which convey the same general impression, that of a man calm and courageous in the face of death, neither encouraging nor discouraging the violence of his attackers, sure in his convictions. He refused to run away; a true archibishop does not desert his cathedral or his flock. According to Edward Grim, and William FitzStephen, Thomas had this to say when confronted by the four knights:

> 'I commit myself and my cause to the judge of all men. Your swords are less ready to strike than is my spirit for martyrdom. Find someone else to fly from you. You will find me fighting foot against foot for the Lord's sake. I once fled my post; I returned at the pope's counsel and command. If I am allowed to carry on my duties, well and good. If not, let God's will be done'.[9]

* * *

The motivation behind this brief paper has been to underline some inadequacies in modern historical treatment of the Becket episode, inadequacies which manifest themselves most clearly in a notably secular approach which views the whole affair essentially in legalistic, governmental and monarchical terms. This has resulted in a tendency towards imbalance, in particular in a heavy emphasis on the pre-exile period where drama and pyrotechnics abounded, but wherein the key to Thomas's inner workings was but partially revealed.

Those contemporary writers who form the most important historical source for the details of the episode were not so deficient. Consider a breakdown, highly simplistic but a pointer nonetheless, of the space afforded by five such writers to the last three chapters of Becket's life. The figures in the columns refer to the number of pages devoted by each writer to each 'chapter':[10]

	1162–64	*1164–70*	*1170*
William FitzStephen	33	50	23
Herbert of Bosham	140	151	32
Edward Grim	33	27	11
William of Canterbury	34	55	38
Alan of Tewkesbury[11]	29	17	—

Historians in their treatment of Becket should more nearly approach this proportion; with the following provisos. One cannot expect 20th century historians to write with the detailed devotion of 12th century authors. And in almost every case the modern scholars concerned[12] have a far wider row to hoe. However, it is not the length of treatment or even (when it comes to general texts) the depth, that is at issue here. It is the balance. Analysis of character and motive must be based on an equitable review of the whole material.

To return to the title of this essay: Did Thomas undergo a profound transformation after he had assumed the office of archbishop? The answer would have to be qualified; but what change there was did not take place with his elevation, but was a gradual process, stretching over the last eight years of his life. His interview with Alexander III was a high-point of this and one that merits much more attention from future writers. It was the conditions he experienced in his exile, rather than in the immediate pre-exile period, that allowed for some spiritual and intellectual development; so that, whereas in 1164 he fled from his enemies, in 1170 he stood firm. The central impulse, according to this thesis, was not self-conceit, nor obduracy, nor even defence of the Church and her liberties (though these were there, to a varying degree) but his vision of the office he held-with the special responsibilities and the special graces that, to his mind, flowed from it.

Over the previous seventy years, two of his predecessors had suffered royal displeasure and consequent exile in their efforts to be true to their principles and their office[13]. In a sense, therefore, Thomas was picking up a well-used banner, not fashioning a new one, and of this he was most aware[14]. What gave his struggle its unique, reverberating quality was not the sentiments mouthed by the leading participants nor the attitudes they struck; but the manner of his death. He died for the honour of Canterbury.

The only recent biography of Becket is that written by the late Professor Knowles[15]. It is written with sensitivity and behind it stands a wealth of learning, but in itself it is rather slight. There is yet room for a serious re-assessment of one who, for all his faults, helped to give the century in which he lived an element of the heroic.

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NOTES

1. *Materials for the History of Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury,* edited by J.C. Robertson. Rolls series, London: 1875 ff. Vol. II, pp. 342–43.
2. Ibid., p. 344
3. *Materials,* vol. III, p. 74
4. *Materials*, vol. I, p. 46.
5. *Materials*, vol. III, pp. 340–42.
6. Ibid., p. 77.
7. *Materials*, vol. V, pp. 512–20.
8. *Materials*, vol. III, p. 437.
9. *Materials*, vol. II, p. 433; vol. III, p. 135.
10. The first 'chapter' stretches from Becket's installation as archbishop through to his flight, i.e. May 1162 to early November 1164. The second 'chapter' refers to his time in exile, November 1164 to November 1170; the third to his return to England and his subsequent death, 1st December 1170 to 29th December 1170.
11. Alan of Tewkesbury is something of a special case as his account stops abruptly during the latter stages of the exile.
12. A sampling of British medievalists should begin with H.W.C. Davis: *England under the Normans and Angevins* (Methuen, 1905); a most influential work, running through twelve editions. In the prestigious Oxford History of England series there is A.L. Poole's *From Domesday Book to Magna Carta* (Oxford, 1951) which has been reprinted at regular intervals up to the present. Other works worthy of mention here are: G.O. Sayles' *The Medieval Foundations of England* (Methuen, 1948); F. Barlow's *The Feudal Kingdom of England* (Longmans, 1955 and now in a paperback edition); C. Brooke's *From Alfred to Henry III* (Thomas Nelson 1961 and now in a paperback edition); W.L. Warren's *Henry II* (Eyre Methuen, 1973 and now in paperback). This latter is a work of outstanding merit. Professor Warren's treatment of Becket shows some real appreciation of the importance of the exile period.
13. Archbishop Anselm (1093–1109) and Archbishop Theobald (1139–1161).
14. For example, Thomas' reference to previous archbishops being 'unjustly exiled', cf. his letter to All the Clergy of England, *Materials*, vol. V, p. 490 ff.
15. Knowles, D: *Thomas Becket* (London, 1970). One can note here too a slightly earlier biography: R. Winston's *Thomas Becket* (Constable, 1967). The major virtue of this work is the emphasis placed on the primary source materials.

THE MIRROR OF THE MIND: A STUDY OF 'TROILUS AND CRISEYDE'

by MARGARET LENTA

The fact that the poem *Troilus and Criseyde* contains many different elements, obviously designed to elicit different kinds of responses from the reader or hearer, has made it a difficult poem to understand as a unity. We know that medieval people were happy to accept the appearance of purely medieval ideas such as courtly love in a story which they thought to be a classical legend; but there are other difficulties in *Troilus and Criseyde* the most important of which is the different kinds of treatment given to characters who nevertheless interact in the poem as though they had been conceived of in the same way. Troilus himself, for example, is not much more than the figure of the courtly lover, whereas Pandarus is a real medieval man with a vigorous and colloquial turn of phrase: his motives and actions are highly individual as well as credible. Criseyde has not the same degree of individuality, but she is a real woman rather than an idea of womanhood. The question must arise as to whether Troilus is a failed character in the story: was Chaucer unable to create a credible male lover? Yet the tragic elements in the poem — tragic in the medieval sense of demonstrating that men's fortunes are necessarily mutable and that great happiness must necessarily be followed by misery — harmonise better with the Troilus figure than with Pandarus's rather prosaic language and ignoble actions. The differences in character presentation and in the tone of the speeches made by the three main characters, as well as in the kind of interests they display, have led some critics to see the poem as belonging to the romance genre in part only and possessing some of the qualities of the realistic novel. Muscatine, realising the difficulties inherent in this point of view comments, 'Though it has traits common to both, it cannot even be called both. Viewed in the light of the broadest philosophical assumptions on which these genres are based, it has gone beyond the romance's entertainment of a univalent idealism; it is still far from the confident, univalent realism of the modern novel, which, like realistic philosophy, had to await the climate of much later centuries for its full flowering.'[1] He sees the poem as 'a genre unto itself', and quotes S.L. Bethell's term, 'multiconsciousness', that is 'the simultaneous awareness of opposite planes of reality.' This view, that *Troilus and Criseyde* combines different responses to, or ways of portraying reality which can be distinguished most clearly in the different ways in which the three characters are presented, is one which I shall explore further in this study, and I shall argue that the different elements are combined in terms of an intention comparable with that of *The Knight's Tale,* though differently executed.

There are two obvious unifying factors in the poem, the first of which is the plot, which holds together all the characters and incidents. The second is the narrator who, though unnamed, has recognisable attitudes which always inform his narrative and commentary. He is humble, almost deferential to Troilus, and as far as possible admiring or at least indulgent towards Criseyde. He tells us that he is a man 'that God of Love's servants serve' and it is important to the poem that he should feel this exaggerated respect for love and lovers because one of the points that will be made is that love completes the noble character: Troilus, always admirable, becomes braver, more energetic, more developed in sympathetic understanding of others when he becomes a lover. The narrator possesses other qualities: he is always tender-hearted towards Criseyde, always ready to pity her fears and where possible to excuse her failings. The famous phrase which he uses for her in Book V, 'tendre-herted, slyding of corage' (V, 118) illustrates how sensitive he is to what is, in different situations, good and bad in her. She is naturally fearful, insecure as regards her social position and her physical safety, always in need of the security which she thinks a strong man can give her. This characteristic, which the narrator so well understands, is the mainspring of the plot: in Books II and III we see it impel her towards union with Troilus, and in Book V, because we have sympathised with her in the earlier books, we understand and to an extent agree with the narrator in pitying her when she begins her liaison with Diomede because of the same kind of insecurity.

The narrator identifies himself as being more indulgent than the average person as far as concerns Criseyde: of the affair with Diomede he remarks, for example, 'Men seyn, I not, that she gave him her herte' (V, 150). This is a vital point. If, as the story in its traditional form showed, Criseyde's feelings for Diomede were the same as or similar to those which she felt for Troilus, then she really would be a light woman who, perhaps unconsciously, has used the beliefs and vocabulary concerning love current in her society to deceive herself and Troilus about the nature of her feelings. The narrator, however, regards her second affair as weakness, not as a second love.

I should like to suggest that there is a third, perhaps less apparent but more important, unifying element which is the way in which the poem as a whole constitutes a dramatised debate about courtly love.Chaucer has in fact used a story well-known to his hearers to investigate a particular concept of love and to ask himself and his hearers whether this concept bears any resemblance to actual human feelings. He was to re-use the debate concept later and differently in the Knight's Tale, where the overall structure of the *Canterbury Tales,* in which a diverse group of people travel together, presents the Knight with a visible audience to whom he can present his topics for debate as they emerge from the story. The debate of *Troilus and Criseyde* is intended to occur mainly in the minds of the hearers or readers of the poem who are presented with problems or incongruities which emerge from the story as they do from the Knight's Tale, though they are not articulated at once by the narrator. There are interventions by the narrator, the most obvious of which occurs at the end of Book V: the three stanzas 263, 264 and 265, which will be discussed in detail later, constitute his (and Chaucer's) sense of the truths which emerge from the action. A lesser intervention, on the same side of the debate, is the laughter of the dead Troilus at the folly of those still involved in life.

It would be irrelevant here to embark on discussion of the origins or history of courtly love, though it must be accepted that Troilus's feeling for Criseyde and his behaviour towards her would be recognisable to Chaucer's medieval audience as closely resembling courtly love. W.G. Dodd's article 'The System of Courtly Love' explains how the love affair conforms to the conditions listed by Andreas Capellanus, and how Troilus's behaviour, in particular his dependence on Pandarus and his exaggerated respect, amounting almost to fear, of Criseyde derives from patterns which had become familiar to Chaucer's audience in literature like the *Romance of the Rose* and lesser French poems of the period.[2] What is important for the poem is the way in which Chaucer understands love and portrays it in the behaviour and speech of Troilus. For him, love is immediate and irresistible: he falls in love on seeing Criseyde and can think of nothing but her. It lasts as long as life, even if the beloved's feelings alter: when Troilus finds that Criseyde is unfaithful to him, he says,

> '. . . I see that clean out of your minde
> Ye have me cast; and I ne can nor may
> For all this world, within myn herte finde
> T' unloven you a quarter of a day.'[2]
>
> (V,243)

These are the irrational characteristics of love, acceptable as noble because they attach to an energy (the term 'emotion' isn't active enough) which is vital in the world. Troilus's song, after the consummation of his love for Criseyde at the end of the Book III, celebrates these 'vital' aspects of love:

> 'Love, that of earth and sea hath governaunce';
> Love, that his heste hath in heaven highe;
> Love, that with an wholesome alliaunce
> Halt peoples joined as him list them gye;
> Love that knitteth law of companye
> And couples doth in virtue for the dwelle
> Bind this accord that I have told and telle.'
>
> (III, 250)

He defines love here as the proper, mutually beneficial relationship between persons or things, a broad and beautiful definition which he goes on to expand by claiming that the love between the land and sea,

> '. . . that greedy is to flowen
> Constreyneth to a certeyn ende so
> His floodes, that so fiercely they ne growen
> To drench earth and all for evermo;
> And if love aught let his bridle go
> All that now loveth asunder sholde leape
> And lost were all that Love halt now to heape'.
>
> (III, 252)

In this amity between land and sea, love is the feeling that the integrity of the other is precious and must not be violated by the way in which they coexist. The sea does not overwhelm the earth: it exists beside it in intimacy but denies even its own inclination, its greed to flow, in order that the land may not lose by their association.

It is when Troilus defines love in this way that we understand what was valuable and beautiful in courtly love — the idea of intimacy between a man and a woman in which each would be, not merely willing but anxious to respect the other; power, whether physical, social or political (all these kinds of power are on Troilus's side in his association with Criseyde) will never be used to dominate one's partner. The important notion of service which is constantly seen as a part of the male lover's relationship to his lady, is related to this idea of love: the man, who is naturally the stronger physically and to whom medieval society often gave the advantage in other ways, will use his greater power, not to dominate, but to convey pleasure or use to his beloved.

The last and perhaps most attractive effect of his love on Troilus is his growth in feeling for others. In Book I he is already a brave knight; now his wish to please Criseyde has made him even braver —

And this increase of hardiness and might
Came him of love, his lady's thanks to winne,

(III, 254)

but more engaging, because less directly related to his hope to win Criseyde's admiration, is his sympathetic feeling for others:

And doubtelees no need was him beseeche
To honouren them that hadde worthinesse
And easen them that weren in distresse.
And glad was he if any wight well ferde
That lover was, when he it wist or hearde.

(III, 256)

There seems little doubt that Chaucer intends us to believe that the kind of love that Trolius experiences produces beneficial growth. There is however a great problem which is to be fatal in Troilus's case: the fact that his love is unalterable brings him into great danger unless his beloved feels exactly as he does and is able to be equally constant. Yet the fact that he fell in love on first sight implies that his love is only in the most superficial sense a response to the excellence of the beloved. Criseyde's appearance is beautiful and suggestive of nobility —

. . . men might in her guesse
Honour, estate and womanly noblesse.

(I, 41)

and Troilus feels himself irrevocably committed to her without ever having spoken to her or even having heard by report of her character. The narrator significantly explains that after their momentary exchange of glances in the temple, Troilus returns alone to his chamber and as it were, recreates an ideal Criseyde whom it will be appropriate to love and serve in the courtly fashion.

Thus gan he make a mirror of his minde,
In which he saw all wholly her figure;
And that he well could in his herte finde
It was to him right good aventure
To love such a one, and if he did his cure
To serven her, yet might he fall in grace
Or elles for one of her servants pace.

(I, 53)

We must remember here that the medieval mirror was of polished metal and reflected an image altered by the characteristics of the metal's surface: what Troilus sees in his mind has certainly been produced by the experience of seeing Criseyde but it owes something too to his own mind.

Since love is a bond between two people, then question of whether Criseyde will be adequate for her part in this very demanding relationship has to arise. I have already claimed that the narrator is very indulgent towards Criseyde: he frequently emphasises the ways in which she is typical for women — 'womanly' is his favourite adjective for her. She is typical not only in her appearance and behaviour but in much that happens to her. Another critic has pointed out that she is, in almost all that happens to her, the passive victim of others.[4] Deserted by her traitor father, she is left alone and afraid in Troy: worked on by her uncle, she is pushed and persuaded into an affair with Troilus. An exchange of prisoners is arranged between Greeks and Trojans, in terms of which she is separated from Troilus and sent to her father in the Greek camp. Her father's indifference and her own loneliness as a stranger in the Greek camp make her ready to listen to Diomede's rapid and calculating wooing. All this manipulation does not of course, make her especially pitiable amongst women: to have her life settled for her at every turn by men was the fate of a medieval noblewoman, and Chaucer, seeing her as such, presents her inability to resist other people's interventions in her life in order to question some of the beliefs which surrounded courtly love. R.K. Root has commented that Criseyde 'has from the beginning of the story a fatal weakness — the inability to make a deliberate choice',[5] but he does not register that deliberate choice is rarely possible for Criseyde or for any other medieval woman of rank. How can a woman give herself freely in love when she is not her own to give? How can she promise eternal fidelity when she cannot even determine her place of abode? Before she commits herself to the love affair with Troilus, Criseyde tries to assert her autonomy:

> 'I am my owne woman, well at ease
> I thank it God, as after myn estate:
> Right yong, and stonde untied in lusty lese,
> Withouten jealousy or such debate.
> Shall noon housbonde seyn to me, "checkmate!" '
>
> (II, 108)

Time fills her words with irony: although her husband is certainly dead, she is not and can never be her own woman. Her father schemes to have her sent after him like a piece of property: the Trojans agree to send her without considering whether or not she wants to go. The anxiety characteristic of her — she is described as 'the fearfullest wight/That might be — is one of her responses to her awareness that she is always helpless in the hands of others.

The other response is a kind of indirectness, a willingness to manoeuvre herself into whatever position seems best, and a reluctance to confront, to accept, or to refuse outright. When Pandarus comes to tell Criseyde that Troilus loves her and to persuade her at least to accept his love, he begins his persuasions by protesting his goodwill to her in extravagant terms. They have earlier been teasing each other very familiarly but she accepts the change in tone and responds with formal protestations of her gratitude, though with a slight embarrassment on both sides which shows their consciousness that his real purposes are hidden:

> With that she gan her eyen down to caste
> And Pandarus to coughe gan a lyte;
>
> (II, 37)

She cannot afford to commit herself to a definite attitude until she has discovered what will be to her advantage. When Pandarus praises Troilus and begs her to make him 'bettre chere' she encourages him to run on, saying to herself, 'I shall feel what he meaneth, ywis;' (II, 56); rather than question directly, she prefers the passive course of allowing him to expose his purpose.

Her first love affair involves her with an ideal lover, as far as one can be conceived of as a human being, and she is happy and fortunate. It is strongly suggested in the narrative that though she remains passive throughout the courtship stage of their affair — notions of female modesty demanded this of the courtly lady — she does really consent to what occurs, and is excited, almost eager for the union with Troilus. When Pandarus's visit to her house is over, she sees from her window Troilus returning from battle amidst the cheers of the people, and is much moved both by his prowess and by the modesty he shows. Later, her niece's song in praise of love helps reassure her that she will not be endangering herself by entering on a love affair. Above all, her answer to Troilus when they are finally brought together in Pandarus's house implies, not free consent, but willingness at least:

> 'Ne had I ere now, my sweete herte deare,
> Ben yolden, y-wis I were now not here.'
>
> (III, 173)

She is admitting that she has all along been aware of, perhaps grateful for the stratagems which have brought her to this point. Indeed, it is the crown of her life, and for the period of their love, of which we see in detail only this early period, she is able to respond with apparently equal love.

In the period when both lovers know that she is to be sent to the Greek camp in exchange for Antenor, her nobility and above all her complete commitment to Troilus begin to appear strained. The circumstances are changing, and no doubt unconsciously, she too begins to change in order to accommodate herself to new conditions as a woman must. Troilus suggests the one course of action which would allow them to remain together, an elopement, but she cannot consider any course which demands action or initiative. She alleges vaguely that the reason why she will not elope with Troilus is that both will regret such an imprudent act, which in any case would violate the secrecy which must surround their liaison, but there seems no reason why they should be discovered together during or after their flight: it is just as likely that their relationship will become known if she tries to persuade her father to return, or escapes from the Grecian camp to Troy. Even the narrator is embarrassed by her evasions and her multiplicity of vague plans — 'all this thing was seyd of good entente' (III, 203) he says apologetically, and increases his hearer's doubts by insisting that Criseyde was genuinely unhappy when she left Troy, 'And was *in purpose* ever to be trewe' (III, 203).

A woman, we realise at this stage of the poem, can allow herself the luxury of feelings which appear to be those of *fine amour* but she has never sufficient power over herself to make the complete commitment which the term implies. Soon we are to see Criseyde in the Greek camp, feeling desperately in need of a protector and therefore responding to Diomede's overtures with more frankness than she ever did to Troilus's (or rather to Pandarus's overtures on Troilus's behalf), and thereby, perhaps, making a point for Chaucer about the tendency of extra-marital love affairs to be degrading.

The major point which emerges from the presentation of Criseyde in the poem, is that admirable though courtly love is as a concept, it is totally unrelated to the conditions under which medieval women lived. There are two scenes, of very minor importance of the plot, which show us the lives of women in ways significant for our understanding of Criseyde.The first occurs when Pandarus first comes to speak to her of Troilus and finds her sitting with two other ladies in a 'paved parlour' (II, 12) listening to the story of the siege of Thebes. We see that the life which she leads as an unattached woman is spent with other women, out of the mainstream of life, reduced to meditating on the fictionalised deeds of others in order to fill her days and we realise that once she has begun to live more fully through her love for Troilus she will not readily return to such an emotional backwater. The second scene occurs when three women friends come to visit her just before she leaves Troy.

> Quod first that one: "I am glad, trewely
> Because of you that shall your father see."
> Another answered: "Ywis, so am not I,
> For all too little hath she with us be."
> Quod then the third: "I hope, ywis, that she
> Shall bringen us the peace on every syde,
> That, when she go'th, Almighty God her gyde."
>
> (IV, 99)

In this incident, where the voices seem as fresh as if they were speaking today, we hear the typical kind of comfort which women offer each other. The first and third speakers are trying to help Criseyde to understand her enforced departure as for the best, and the second is assuring her of their real and continuing regard for her. These are the voices of kind women who know Criseyde's and their own inability to resist the will of the male world: happiness for them and for her lies in accepting and adapting themselves as soon as possible.

Pandarus shares with his niece a preference for indirect dealings, though he is not passive but startlingly active in his friends' love affair. The degree of interest he shows in the affair and the energy he expends on bringing them together would seem improper interference were it not that both Troilus and Criseyde accept his constant presence. Although the psychological realism with which he is presented tends to make us forget this, Pandarus is in part a traditional figure, the lover's confidant, familiar to medieval people from that text book of courtly love, the *Romance of the Rose*. Some of his character traits, like this avid interest in the affairs of others and his willingness to intervene energetically in their business are also functionally related to this traditional rôle: Troilus must be able, without violating the obligation of secrecy, to tell his love to someone; high-minded as he is, his friend must be a shrewd contriver if Criseyde, without compromising her reputation or her modesty, is to be manoeuvred into the love affair. Troilus's song which has been quoted earlier, compares love to the relationship between land and sea, but the way in which Pandarus is necessary to the lovers seems to represent Chaucer's own disagreement with this comparison, at least as regards the physical love between humans. If the love of Troilus and Criseyde were 'natural' in this sense, there need be no intervention by a third party to bring about their union.

The obligation of secrecy in love which makes a trusted confidant necessary to the lover is of course closely related to the fact that courtly love was non-marital, that is to say that it was presumed to exist independently of marriage, although it might exist between marital partners, as for example in *The Franklin's Tale*. In *Troilus and Criseyde* the love affair is not adulterous since neither party is at the time married, but the question of its resulting in marriage is not considered. Diomede's question as to

> '. . . why her father tarieth so longe
> To wedden her unto some worthy wight,'
>
> (V, 124)

partly explains why this was so: women were disposed of in marriage by their families, though courtly love required, somewhat unrealistically as we have seen, that they dispose of themselves in love.

Every reader or hearer of the poem is struck by the eagerness of Pandarus's longing for his friends' union, and by the way in which he is prepared to expend immense energy to bring it about. Chaucer relates this longing to the fact that Pandarus is himself an unsuccessful lover who receives vicarious gratification from his friend's happiness, as well as enjoying the way in which his activities on their behalf fill his life. Clearly, if he is willing to spend so much of his energies for others he must have a need of this kind but this need, as we see when the lovers are in danger of being separated, is at variance with the principle of unalterable fidelity in love. When Troilus is grief-stricken at the thought of losing Criseyde, Pandarus offers a remedy which will allow him to retain his important rôle in Troilus's life.

> 'This town is full of ladies all aboute,
> And to my doom, fairer than suche twelve
> As e'er she was shall I find in some route.
> ....
> If she be lost, we shall recover another.'
>
> (IV, 58)

His earthy shrewdness, which appears in this suggestion for Troilus's comfort, is also necessary to his function. If the courtly lover is truly high-minded, 'ideal' in the sense of being totally possessed by a pure and intellectual passion, he will be obliged to depend on someone who has the down-to-earth qualities which he lacks but which are necessary if the affair is to progress.

In order to be a successful manipulator, Pandarus must understand and be prepared to exploit human weaknesses, and yet inevitably this kind of unscrupulousness prevents him from having any real understanding of the love which Troilus feels. In Book

IV he describes the relationship of Troilus and Criseyde as 'casual pleasaunce', showing that the fixed intensity of Troilus's feelings for Criseyde has always been a mystery to him. He seems to have been involved in love affairs before in the same rôle: in Book III we are told that he knew well 'The olde daunce and every point thereinne', (III, 100) and the phrase seems to catch his sense of love's pleasurable but essentially trivial nature.

Pandarus knows from the moment when he hears that Criseyde must leave Troy that she will never return: the attitudes of the two friends are strongly contrasted:

> Quod Troilus: "Now God me grace sende
> That I may finden at myn homecominge
> Criseyde comen!" and therewith gan he singe.
>
> "Yea, hazel-wode!" thought this Pandarus
> And to himself full sobrely he seyde:
> "God wot, refreyden may this hote fare
> Ere Calchas sende Troilus Criseyde!"
>
> (V, 72, 73)

What is significant is that although Pandarus's sentiments like his words are ignoble, he is absolutely right. Criseyde's father will certainly never return her voluntarily and love in her is not a strong enough force to overcome her timidity and a lifetime habit of passivity.

The narrator's apology at the end of Book V (V, 254–5) to women because he has chosen a faithless woman for his subject must not be taken as a refusal to claim that Criseyde's behaviour illustrates a general truth. He claims that he would be happy to celebrate the virtue of Penelope and Alcestis's goodness; both these two are wives outstanding for conjugal virtues and they could not find themselves in the paradoxical situation of Criseyde who has committed herself in one way to Troilus and in another remains committed to her father and to the rulers of Troy.[6]

Diomede does not seduce Criseyde in the sense of persuading her that he is in any way preferable to Troilus. She simply accepts that she dare not escape and that she needs a male protector. Failure to live up to the commitments she made in accepting Troilus's love is, as she recognises, a disgrace to her and she knows she must be infamous but says sadly, 'there is no better way.' (V, 153) The obligations of courtly love are too great for such a woman.

Trolius, the ideal lover, is never unfaithful to his lost Criseyde: he seeks to avenge himself on Diomede in battle and failing to kill him, rages in battle against the Greeks until he finds the death which he has earlier told Pandarus must be his only good if he loses Criseyde. The end of the poem reflects, not only on his experience but on Criseyde's and perhaps on Pandarus's final despair:

> O younge fresshe folkes, he or she,
> In which that love up-groweth with your age,
> Repaireth home from worldly vanitee,
> And of your herte up-casteth the visage
> To th'ilke God that after his image
> Yow made, and thinketh all nis but a faire,
> This world that passeth sone as flowers faire.
>
> And loveth Him, the which that right for love
> Upon a cross, our soules for to beye,
> First starf, and rose, and sit in heaven above;
> For He nil falsen no wight, dare I seye,
> That will his herte all wholly on Him leye.
> And sin He best to love is, and most meeke,
> What needeth feigned loves for to seeke?
>
> (V, 263, 264)

These stanzas, with their beautiful celebration of the love of God in terms belonging to the courtly love vocabulary, 'For he nil falsen no wight, dare I seye,' have puzzled readers who have tried to reconcile them with the way in which Troilus's love for Criseyde is obviously considered admirable within the poem. The point is that his feeling *is* admirable; in fact it is of so exalted a nature that it is only appropriate to direct it towards God. The necessary qualities of courtly love which are complete devotion (so that all other claims on one become unimportant) and eternal fidelity, are inappropriate to the necessarily weak and changeable nature of a human beloved. The comparison of worldly loves to 'flowers faire' reveals exactly the ephemeral nature of worldly loves as well as their attraction. And the comparison which Troilus makes at the end of Book III, when he sees love as being like the relationship of land and sea, is entirely appropriate to the love between man and God which is a natural result of the natures of both. If man loved God with the 'courtly love' kind of intensity, then he certainly would stand in the appropriate relationship to God.

John Frankis in his article, 'Paganism and Pagan Love in *Troilus and Criseyde,* argues that Chaucer's main purpose in the poem is to show Troilus as suffering 'from the limiting factor of his paganism.'[7] Frankis suggests that Troilus is induced to fall in love and to consummate his love for Criseyde by a kind of conspiracy of the gods, and that the 'arbitrary and irresponsible natures' of the gods later cause them to favour Diomede's suit to Criseyde. He finds it significant that Troilus, in his song at the end of Book III, sees his love for Criseyde as resembling divine love: the fact is that it does resemble the Christian understanding of God's love for the world, though not the pagan gods' feeling either for man or for the world. Frankis claims that this is the tragedy of Troilus's situation, 'that he can see so much further than his fellow pagans, but that his paganism still makes his vision faulty'.

It is certainly true that the gods are seen as important in bringing about the conditions which first unite and then separate the lovers and that Troilus comes to curse them for their fickleness, but it is less clear that Chaucer intends us to see the whole narrative as proving only the inferiority of paganism as compared to Christianity. A stanza which Frankis quotes certainly condemns paganism and the pagan gods, but it goes further:

> Lo here, of pagans' cursèd olde rytes;
> Lo here, what all their goddés may availle;
> Lo here, this wrecched worldes appetytes;
> Lo here, the fyn and guerdon of travaille
> Of love, Apollo, Mars, of such rascaille;
> Lo here, the form of olde clerkes' speche
> In poetry, if ye their bookes seche.
>
> (V, 265)

The repeated adjective 'old' shows Chaucer's sense that paganism was a danger in the past; and the splendid phrase 'such rascaille' seizes on the way in which the lovers of the poem were actually cheated by their gods whose strategies to unite them seemed to promise everlasting happiness. The deception of which Troilus and Criseyde were victims belongs, Chaucer feels, to the remote past, but his phrase, 'this wrecched worlde's appetites' makes it clear that he wishes to make a parallel between this deception and the self-deception to which people of his own day could succumb. Troilus, ignorant of Christian truth, was induced to waste his love on a mortal object; Chaucer in this stanza is explicitly inviting his hearers to recognise that this love closely resembled the *fine amour* of their own age and he warns them not to be tempted by the 'worldes appetytes' to pour out such devotion on a human.

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NOTES

1 Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition,* (University of California Press, 1957) p. 132.

2 *Chaucer Criticism Vol II: Troilus and Criseyde and the Minor Poems,* ed R.J. Schoeck and Jerome Taylor, (University of Notre Dame Press, London 1970) pp. 1–15.

3 All passages from *Troilus and Criseyde* come from John Warrington's edition, revised by Maldwyn Mills (Dent, London, 1974).

4 S.S. Hussey, 'Troilus and Criseyde', *Chaucer, an Introduction,* (Methuen, London, 1981) p. 75.

5 *The Book of Troilus and Criseyde,* ed. R.K. Root (Princeton, 1926) p. xxxii.

6 The prologue to *The Legend of Good Women* confirms this idea that Chaucer intended his hearers to see Criseyde as typical of medieval women: in it the God of Love claims that the poet has defamed women in general in *Troilus and Criseyde,* and sentences him to write another poem, taking up the hint referred to above that he would prefer to write of virtuous wives.

7 *Essays on Troilus and Criseyde,* ed. Mary Salu (Brewer, Cambridge, 1979) pp. 57–72.

HAMLET'S DYING WORDS

by A.M. POTTER

This article will attempt to put forward some suggestions as to an interpretation of Hamlet's enigmatic dying words, 'the rest is silence',[1] principally by using a key passage from T.S. Eliot's *The Family Reunion* as the means of elucidation.

In Eliot's play, the hero, Harry, arrives home for the family reunion in a state of considerable inner disturbance. His relations, whose concept of the nature and scope of life is a very limited one, insist on his explaining the reason for his emotional state:

> . . . you must try at once to make us understand,
> And we must try to understand you.[2]

To this Harry replies:

> But how can I explain, how can I explain to *you?*
> You will understand less after I have explained it.
> All that I could hope to make you understand
> Is only events: not what has happened.
> And people to whom nothing has ever happened
> Cannot understand the unimportance of events.[3]

Harry draws a significant distinction here. He divides the human race into two basic types: those who live wholly in the external world, who can only interpret experience according to what happens externally; and those who live in the inner world, the world of the spirit, to whom external events are largely irrelevant, mere incidents that have little significance in the world of inner experience. If we are to evaluate these two types — and Eliot invites us to do so — then the man of the spirit is infinitely superior to the man who lives in the external world only. Worldly people — the rest of the family in *The Family Reunion,* or the chorus of women in *Murder in the Cathedral,* for example — can at most only bear witness to the actions of the heroic figure within their midst: because of their own fears, which limit their vision to the 'real' and the tangible, they can never hope to enter into and share the significance of the heroic actions played out before them. When J. Alfred Prufrock, not even daring to eat a peach, let alone confront the mystery at the heart of life, says 'No! I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be:/Am an attendant lord, one that will do/To swell a progress, start a scene or two' ("The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," ll. 111–113) he is making the same distinction placing Hamlet in the ranks of the men of the spirit, and admitting his own relegation to the group of lesser men. This brings us to *Hamlet.*

What I would suggest is that Hamlet, in his dying speech, makes the same distinction — although not as specifically — as Harry does. Hearing the volley which announces the arrival of Fortinbras, fresh from his conquests in Poland, Hamlet gives the Norwegian prince his support as heir to the throne of Denmark, instructing Horatio to

> '. . . tell him, with th' ocurrents, more and less,
> Which have solicited' (V. ii. 349–50)

then adding that 'the rest is silence'. He may be simply referring to what follows for him — his passing into the silence of death. But his instruction to Horatio has a peculiar link with Harry's attitude to his own experience which suggests a more extended meaning. Hamlet tells Horatio to speak of 'th' ocurrents' — i.e. the events — great and small which brought about the tragedy, and these lines refer us to Harry's speech about people who live in the world of events. Horatio promises to do as he is asked, and when Fortinbras enters, delivers the following speech outlining what he plans to say in fulfilment of his commitment to Hamlet:

> '. . . let me speak to th' yet unknowing world
> How these things came about. So shall you hear
> Of carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts:
> Of accidental judgments, casual slaughters;
> Of deaths put on by cunning and forc'd cause
> And, in this upshot, purposes mistook
> Fall'n on th' inventors' heads — all this can I
> Truly deliver. (V. ii. 371–8)

Clearly, Horatio's speech is a summary of the external action — the *events* — of the play, but it is not in any way a reflection of the inner, spiritual process which the young prince has undergone. It is not a reflection of, in Harry's words 'what has happened', if we go by Harry's definition of what he means when he talks about 'what has happened.' Horatio can tell Hamlet's story; he can recount the plot of the play; but he cannot hope to communicate that quality which makes Hamlet's experieince the unique and impressive one that it is. That is to be found only within the inner development of the tragic hero, in Hamlet's attempts to confront the moral significance of the external events which Horatio describes. Or, to put it another way, Horatio's version of the play could be said to be a plot summary of any Elizabethan revenge play. But we value *Hamlet* for those qualities which make it transcend its superficial genre — for that indefinable 'something' which turns trite events into great tragedy.

I would suggest that it is to this indefinable 'something' that Hamlet refers in his final speech. The 'rest' — the remaining, significant part of the experience, left over after the 'occurrents' or 'events' have been described — can only be contemplated in silence, its significance ultimately indefinable in words, a perpetual mystery carrying within itself infinite possibilities for explanation and interpretation, none of which can wholly and satisfactorily explain the process that has been undergone.

It is an experience not new to literature, and it has been spoken of in other places in almost identical terms. Keats's image of 'stout Cortez' standing '*Silent*', upon a peak in Darien' (my italics) contemplating 'with eagle eyes'[4] all the possibilities opened up to him by his new discovery — and surrounded by fearful followers, looking to each other for support, unable to grasp the significance of the discovery which the man of vision can — presents almost the exact division of the human race which *The Family Reunion* does: the man of courage and vision, staring into the heart of the mystery of life, and the crowd that surrounds him, fear-filled, unable to cope with the awesome potential that is opening up before them. And again, the potential is contemplated in *silence* by the man of vision, because its significance necessarily goes beyond words.[5] Words define and fix, 'to define is to limit', and limitations and the infinite have no part in each other, just as the man who can contemplate the infinite and the crowd who cannot are as unlike as chalk and cheese.

Hamlet is organised to emphasise such a distinction between the Prince and those around him. Even the man closest to Hamlet, Horatio, is consistently seen to be incapable of measuring up to his friend's visionary capacity. It is to Hamlet that the ghost entrusts his information, not to Horatio, because it is only Hamlet who can adequately cope with its significance. Hamlet refers specifically to Horatio's limitations when he says of him, on being told by Horatio that he finds the events of the night strange, that 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'[6] Horatio is a stoic, passively enduring 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune'; it is not of such stuff that tragic heroes are made. His summing up of Hamlet's story confirms this. He leaves out the element that turns the play into tragedy, because he has no knowledge of it.

The man to whom the story is told, Fortinbras, has shown himself to be an even more limited human being. As one critic has put it, 'Fortinbras is not a man of the mind . . . No university for him, but lawless resolution, quarrels of honour, the doctrine of the sword.'[7] This is the 'delicate and tender prince' who will lead twenty thousand men to risk death for 'a little patch of ground / That hath in it no profit but the name'; who will lie to his uncle, the king of Norway, and plan a secret and dishonourable attack on Denmark. The most he will be able to comprehend is the sort of story Horatio offers to tell.

With Hamlet's passing, therefore, an important dimension has gone out of life. Fortinbras may bring to Denmark a superficial 'order' in the external world, but inwardly he has been shown to be as much a part of the decay and corruption of higher values as anyone else in the play — and just as incapable of understanding the significance of 'what has happened' to Hamlet. If we were to return to our original comparison between *Hamlet* and *The Family Reunion,* Fortinbras would be like Gerald, who thinks things have 'happened' to him because he has experienced action and adventure:

> Well, you can't say that nothing has happened to *me.*
> I started as a youngster on the North-West Frontier —
> Been in tight corners most of my life
> And some pretty nasty messes.[8]

But in terms of what Harry means by 'what happened' nothing has or will ever happen to Fortinbras. He is a blind participator in events, not the clear-eyed contemplator of their higher significance as Hamlet is. With a man such as this to be chief interpreter of Hamlet's story, and with a man such as Horatio the teller of it, it is little wonder that Hamlet consigns the most important part of his experience to 'silence'.

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NOTES

1. William Shakespeare, *Hamlet,* V. ii. 350, in *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare,* ed. P. Alexander (London and Glasgow: Collins, 1970). All references to the play are to this edition.
2. T.S. Eliot, *The Family Reunion,* in *T.S. Eliot: Collected Plays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1962), p. 65.
3. Ibid.
4. John Keats, 'On First Looking into Chapman's Homer', ll. 11–14.
5. The idea is in no way limited to literature, but is universal in concept. Pascal, for example, talking about man's position in the universe, says 'as his curiosity changes into admiration, he will be more disposed to contemplate them [the Infinite and Nothing] in silence than to examine them with presumption'. *Pascal's Pensées* (London: Dent, 1956), p. 17.
6. *Hamlet,* I. v. 166–7.
7. H. Howarth, *The Tiger's Heart* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1970), p. 75.
8. *Hamlet,* IV. iv. 18–19.
9. *The Family Reunion,* op. cit., p. 65.

THE *ALTER EGO:*
THE ARTIST AS AMERICAN IN 'THE JOLLY CORNER'

by J.U. JACOBS

Henry James's tale 'The Jolly Corner' (1908)[1] is a singularly suggestive and rewarding one for the insight it offers into the American artistic personality. With the wisdom of hindsight, James shows the consequences of a fundamental and early bifurcation in American aesthetic sensibility. 'The Jolly Corner' reflects, in its most general sense, the awareness reached by Keats in 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and Yeats in his 'Byzantium' poems: it is essentially a work of art about art itself, and, more particularly, about the teasingly ambivalent relationship between art and life.

Just as the notions of life and death are existential polarities, so the dichotomy between life and art is a fundamental one in the history of aesthetic thinking. It is usually in the works of their creative maturity that writers explore and articulate the implications of this paradoxical relationship. Art may be a representation of life, but it is emphatically not life itself. The difference is one of form. However, art can be seen as an intensified and finer kind of life in that its beauty of form transcends time and thus confers on life its own immortality. Art, then, can counter death with the life that is peculiar to art. On the other hand, art is simultaneously a denial and even a negation of life. By freezing the living moment into the formal timelessness of art, the artist frustrates the very purposes of life by leaving its processes unconsummated. In this sense, art can be seen as a form of death in life.

'The Jolly Corner' epitomises this paradox. The structure of the tale is a perfect vehicle for its theme of the double agency of both art and life. Rarely, even in the canon of James's works, have form and content been so inseparably fused. The facts of the narrative are no mere excuse for the demonstration of an aesthetic theory by Henry James — on the contrary, the tale dramatically embodies the aesthetic conclusions of a mature artist in a way that is compelling, accurately observed in social terms, and psychologically totally convincing. Furthermore, just as parables persuade us through the recognizable authenticity of the situations they describe, it would not be a contradiction of the above to interpret James's tale as a parable, not only of the artist as an international man of letters, but also as a parable of the artist as an unmistakable American.

Having chosen to leave his native country at the age of twenty-three in order to pursue what has turned out to be a successful artistic career in Europe for a third of a century, Spencer Brydon makes 'a strangely belated return to America' at the age of fifty-six to attend to his property in New York. The artist who left America in his first youth has spent the prime of his creative life in Europe and now returns to America toward the end of middle age, when all the projected achievements in his life have largely been realized and the energetic enthusiasm of youth is beginning to yield to the reflectiveness of old age.

Perspectives are contrasted in this tale from the outset: the European as opposed to the American, youth as opposed to maturity, and actual living as opposed to the contemplation of life. The returning expatriate is overwhelmed by 'the differences, the newnesses, the queernesses, above all the bignesses' that assault his vision wherever he looks (194). In America, he senses, proportions and values are upside-down. Whereas he has expected the ugliness he encounters everywhere, it is precisely 'the "swagger" things, the modern, the monstrous, the famous things' that are his sources of dismay. Aesthetically offended by so much in American life that he finds hideous, he is quick to motivate his return in a characteristically balanced sentence that reveals the central dichotomy in his personality and also points to the main theme of the tale:

> He had come (putting the thing pompously) to look at his 'property', which he had thus, for a third of a century, not been within four thousand miles of; or, expressing it less sordidly, he had yielded to the humor of seeing his house on the jolly corner, as he usually, and quite fondly, described it . . . (194)

Spencer Brydon's language betrays a consciousness that is divided between, on the one hand, a pragmatic recognition of the physical demands of the public world of property interests, and on the other, an almost fanciful belief in the more personal world of his highly developed aesthetic values. The first statement of his motive for returning to America may contain the more sordid truth, but the latter, he maintains, is the *finer* truth. Moreover, although the refined realm of his exquisite aesthetic sensibility may be dependent upon the mundane world of business, it is also clearly embarrassed by it: 'He could live in "Europe," as he had been in the habit of living, on the product of these flourishing New York leases' (195). The divorce between these two areas of experience is as obvious to the reader as it is uncomfortable to Spencer Brydon.

Brydon's return to New York is made more palatable by the presence of his old friend Alice Staverton, a person who, like himself, is in the afternoon of life, and whom he regards as exquisite 'like some pale pressed flower'. Alice Staverton shares Brydon's cultivation of the imagination, and the fact that on one occasion she has far 'too much tact to dot so monstrous an i' is sufficient evidence of the sublime subtlety of their communication. The delicately frugal possessor of a small house on Irving Place, Alice Staverton conducts her life with what Mrs Gaskell in *Cranford* calls an 'elegant economy'. The charm that her home holds for Brydon is of 'his having encountered and recognized in the vast wilderness of the wholesale, breaking through the mere gross generalization of wealth and fame and success, a small, still scene where items and shades, all delicate things, kept the sharpness of the notes of a high voice perfectly trained, and where economy hung about like the scent of a garden' (196). Miss Staverton's life is a modest celebration of domestic ceremony and is quietly dedicated to the maintenance of social forms. But if this old maid's life testifies, like the bachelor Brydon's, to the perfect achievement of art, it is also, in the fullest sense of the term, a still-life: like Brydon's, her youth and the possibility of satisfying the claims of life have been sacrificed to art. In this respect, their lives are equally frustrated: the actual physical details of Brydon's 'life' in Europe are as absent from this tale as is any mention of a fulfilled family context for Alice Staverton.

The impression that Brydon gives of his friend's existence in New York is revealing in an important way of the man himself. To Brydon, there is something heroic in the way Alice Staverton sallies forth from the genteel perfection of her home to do battle with the vast and monstrous forces of the confusing city. Either unable or unwilling to register the sober truth about a spinster whose mode of existence, admittedly more gracious, has been overtaken by the grosser energies of urban American life at the turn of the century, Brydon tends to idealize the shared values of their past and to sanctify them in a community of knowledge and experience with her. He romanticizes the ordinary everyday realities of her life by extending them imaginatively into some heroic mould. And it is precisely this heightened imaginative or aesthetic faculty which is capable of dramatizing and even mythologizing Miss Staverton that can also eventually conjure up a ghost in the house on the jolly corner.

It is necessary to pause here and consider the actual structure of the tale. Spencer Brydon's consciousness, it has already been suggested, is essentially a divided one. When he returns to New York to supervise the renovation of his properties, his exposure to this kind of experience is entirely novel to him:

> He had lived his life with his back so turned to such concerns and his face addressed to those of so different an order that

> he scarce knew what to make of this lively stir, in a compartment of his mind never yet penetrated, of a capacity for business and a sense for construction. (195)

Brydon's consciousness, so clearly compartmentalized into a world of fancy and a world of fact, is a particular instance of the general tendency of the schizoid personality to reduce all awareness to a sense of the 'self' as opposed to a sense of the 'other'. The compartment of the 'self' is what is familiar and valuable; the 'other' is alien, possibly even hostile. Whereas I would not go so far as to suggest that Brydon's condition is a psychotic one, his fundamentally split perspective tends to impose this polarized design on to all his experience and to reduce everything to this basic duality. And these dual perspectives are telescoped throughout this tale about perspectives.

To illustrate: in Brydon's experience there is a European perspective on life as opposed to an American perspective on life, and the events of this tale demonstrate the dialectic between them. (It is the income from his American properties, we know, that has made his European pursuits possible.) This fundamental distinction is narrowed down and transferred to his account of his two properties in New York. The family house on 'the jolly corner' is the 'good' one, 'having been, from far back, superlatively extended and consecrated'; the other house is 'not quite so good' (195). The former is located on the 'comparatively conservative Avenue', the latter farther back on one of the 'dishonoured and disfigured' streets (198). The initial dialectic between the European and the American is re-applied more pertinently: the conversion of the inferior dwelling into an apartment building will make it possible for Brydon to maintain the house on the jolly corner. Miss Staverton expresses this paradox in the relationship between the 'beastly rent-values' and the 'other values': 'In short you're to make so good a thing of your sky-scraper that, living in luxury on *those* ill-gotten gains, you can afford for a while to be sentimental here!' (200). The mild irony of her tone is matched exactly by the irony of the situation. Aesthetic values are supported by living realities; the house on the jolly corner to which Brydon is so sentimentally attached, is an empty shell whereas the other property is being readied for multiple human occupation and the business of living.

This reduction of Brydon's dual perspectives is taken one step further when the house is even contrasted as a sanctuary from the 'comparatively harsh actuality of the Avenue' outside in what he later calls the ugly world of hard-faced houses. His increased frequenting of the empty house can be seen as a kind of withdrawal from fact into fancy, from living reality into dead form. The house, he insists to Alice Staverton, is a symbol of *his* life: his relatives have lived and died in it. Ironically, it becomes just that: a symbol of a life led in art in observance of dead form, removed from the vital actuality of life itself.

Not content merely to oppose the house to the Avenue, Brydon splits it up still further into the front, more formal rooms of the residence, an area that has always been to him 'human, actual, social; this was the world he had lived in', and the service areas in the rear of the house 'where small rooms for servants had been multiplied' and which 'abounded in nooks and corners, in closets and passages' (211–12). The front is the familiar and known area, the rear the unknown; and it is precisely the unexplored life of the back that has made it possible to maintain the fine social forms in front.

Brydon's dual perspective eventually reduces the familiar and the alien areas of his experience to opposite sides of the door leading into the last of a series of interleading rooms. The spectre he is driven to confront lurks, he senses, on the other side of this door; and by this stage of the story, the architecture of the house can be seen most clearly as a metaphor for the structure of Brydon's mind with its series of diminishing perspectives into the self and its systematic narrowing down of the relationship between self and other.

The ultimate reduction of this dual perspective occurs when Spencer Brydon does, at last, come face to face with his *alter ego* in the hall with its pavement of large black and white marble squares. These black and white blocks were first responsible for 'the growth of an early conception of style' in him and are the most naturally integrated and fully realized symbols of Brydon's divided mind and its polarized perspectives in the tale (209). Brydon's earliest awareness of form and sense of design originated in response to this pavement, which remains as an ironic reminder of the liveliness of his youthful aesthetic sensibility as well as of its eventual rigid stultification.

Given his particular intellectual make-up that postulates a dark, unknown and possibly threatening 'other' from the illuminated security of its own 'self', it is inevitable that Spencer Brydon should conjure up a ghost in the house on the jolly corner, and that he should have to penetrate to the very core of his known world in order to confront the other self he has always denied. It is the actual organization and execution of the renovation of his property that first precipitates the 'lively stir, in a compartment of his mind never yet penetrated'. Brydon is both repelled and curiously attracted by all the activity surrounding the rebuilding — and it is in this that Henry James is psychologically so accurate in his observation. Brydon's ambivalent feelings hinge on his finding all this industry, money and energy vulgar and sordid on the one hand, and on the other, strangely exhilarating. 'I know at least what I am,' he can say to Alice Staverton, but it is the other side of the medal that is unclear to him. And when she suggests to him the analogy of the *alter ego,* he pounces on it with his characteristic imaginative quickness. Her suggestion that there might have been another side to his genius, another Spencer Brydon who, if he had but stayed in America, 'would have anticipated the inventor of the sky-scraper', finds fertile soil in his predilection for romantic embellishment and self-dramatization. He is thrilled and flushed with the notion, and he becomes haunted by the image of how he might have led his life and how he might have turned out had he remained in America and pursued his career as an American artist:

> 'I might have been, by staying here, something nearer to one of these types who have been hammered so hard and made so keen by their conditions. It isn't that I admire them so much — the question of any charm in them, or of any charm beyond that of the rank money-passion exerted by their conditions *for* them, has nothing to do with the matter; it's only a question of what fantastic, yet perfectly possible, development of my own nature I may not have missed. It comes over me that I had then a strange *alter ego* deep down somewhere within me, as the full-blown flower is in the small tight bud, and that I just took the course, I just transferred him to the climate, that blighted him at once and for ever.' (204)

And not content with a neutral curiosity, Brydon imaginatively enlarges this *alter ego* (just as he had enlarged upon Alice Staverton's situation) by projecting a vision of something 'quite splendid, quite large and monstrous' (205).

The artistic imagination shapes experience into form; so Spencer Brydon fashions his alternative possibility into an *alter ego* who, he is certain, walks and whom he is determined to waylay. The more he fleshes out his phantom self, the more he becomes convinced that '*He* isn't myself. He's the just so totally other person' (206). Although Alice Staverton enigmatically suggests that she has had a vision of the *alter ego* in a dream ('I saw him as I see you now'), she will not divulge the truth of what she has seen to Brydon.

Brydon's tracking down of his alter ego is presented with the most consummate fictional strategy by James. As he roams about his empty house at night, Brydon's imagination is more fantastically stimulated and more finely attuned than it has ever been in his life. The self that has always dwelt in the realm of fancy pursues the self that has spent its life in the world of fact, but the latter self is a figment of the former. Characteristically, Brydon's manoeuvres recall to him 'Pantaloon, at the Christmas farce, buffeted and tricked from behind by ubiquitous Harlequin' (213). This, however, is more than simply further evidence of Brydon's innate theatricality. Henry James is furnishing a further metaphor for the complexity of perspectives in the tale. James has already offered the reader a view of Spencer Brydon as Europeanized aesthete; and the reader has also been allowed to see Alice Staverton sympathetically through Brydon's eyes. There is also, we know, an undisclosed image of Brydon as seen through Alice Staverton's eyes, an image which may be either a dream vision or coldly observed reality. Brydon's pursuit of the vision of his *alter ego* becomes paradoxical: the spectre is also going to be confronted with a vision of Spencer Brydon. The truth, Oscar Wilde maintained, is rarely pure and never simple. Brydon stalks his prey in an elaborately patterned game of physical and intellectual dodging, retreating, and hiding. Just before the final confrontation, Brydon backs down, acknowledging that 'we both of us should have suffered' (219). In the name of discretion — but what may simply be cowardice — Brydon resolves to leave the house; but, in a superb fictional about-turn, James cannot allow him to return to the sober reality of the physical world outside from the now nightmarish recesses of his imagination without first coming face to face with the self that might have lived in that harsh world of American fact outside — a revelation which is simultaneously of the self that had forfeited the possibility of a fulfilled American existence by opting for Europe. James controls the suspense of this revelation with great skill:

> He saw, in its great grey glimmering margin, the central vagueness diminish and he felt it to be taking the very form toward which for so many days the passion of his curiosity had yearned. It gloomed, it loomed, it was something, it was somebody, the prodigy of a personal presence. (224)

When the physical details of the appearance of the *alter ego* finally crystallize out of Brydon's consciousness and take shape before his eyes, so Spencer Brydon himself is revealed to the reader:

> Rigid and conscious, spectral yet human, a man of his own substance and stature waited there to measure himself with his power to dismay. This only could it be — this only till he recognised, with his advance, that what made the face dim was the pair of raised hands that covered it and in which, so far from being offered in defiance, it was buried as for dark deprecation. So Brydon, before him, took him in; with every fact of him now, in the higher light, hard and acute — his

> planted stillness, his vivid truth, his grizzled bent head and white masking hands, his queer actuality of evening-dress, of dangling double eyeglass, of gleaming silk lappet and white linen, of pearl button and gold watchguard and polished shoe. No portrait by a great modern master could have presented him with more intensity, thrust him out of his frame with more art, as if there had been 'treatment,' of the consummate sort, in his every shade and salience. The revulsion, for our friend, had become, before he knew it, immense — this drop, in the act of apprehension, to the sense of his adversary's inscrutable manoeuvre. That meaning at last, while he gaped, it offered him; for he could but gape at his other self in this other anguish, gape as a proof that *he*, standing there for the achieved, the enjoyed, the triumphant life, couldn't be faced in his triumph. Wasn't the proof in the splendid covering hands, strong and completely spread? — so spread and so intentional that, in spite of a special verity that surpassed every other, the fact that one of these hands had lost two fingers, which were reduced to stumps, as if accidentally shot away, the face was effectually guarded and saved. (224–25)

The ambiguity of the situation is telling. The *alter ego*, looming so horribly and so physically out of life, is the most perfectly realized creation of Brydon's artistic imagination. It is, ultimately, his finest self-portrait. It is a portrait in which the master has unwittingly created a self-portrait in which he may not recognize himself but in which others can identify him all too readily. And with a life of its own, his creation seems to cower before Brydon. Is it Brydon who must summon up the courage to face his other self, or is it the *alter ego* who must steel himself for the full revelation? When the *alter ego* bravely bares his face, Brydon is appalled, 'for the bared identity was too hideous as *his* . . . Such an identity fitted his at *no* point, made its alternative monstrous' (226)

The *alter ego* both is and is not Brydon. It is both a positive and a negative reflection of his identity. The truth is, of course, that both alternatives are in a sense monstrous. The 'American' man of fact and the 'European' man of fancy, when seen in isolation, are equally hideous. Both are, after all, examples of the distortion of self that results from an inability to reconcile the imagination with reality in a fully integrated consciousness. The American *alter ego's* physical appearance betokens a sleek prosperity, but a want of true elegance. Moreover, the success suggested by his vulgar flashiness has been attained at a terrible cost: his hand is maimed and his eyesight ruined. As an artist, he embodies achievement at the expense of aesthetic crippling and distorted vision. The 'stranger, whoever he might be [and by now the reader knows who he is] evil, odious, blatant, vulgar' advances aggressively on Spencer Brydon who yields before 'the roused passion of a life larger than his own'. Nothing in Brydon's meticulously organized system of aesthetic values can adequately support this American world of brute fact which looms larger and overwhelms him with its physical immediacy. Brydon's Europeanized sensibilities cower and eventually crumple before so much life.

When Brydon regains consciousness, he is being comforted by Alice Staverton and lying on 'his old black and white slabs.' He feels that he has 'come back from further away than any man but himself had ever travelled', but realizes, too, that he has been brought back to a certain knowledge that is also 'the beauty of his state' (227). Brydon's apparent return from death is not quite as fanciful as it might at first appear. This is the point where Henry James steps back from the local American setting of his tale and sees it in more universal terms. Spencer Brydon has travelled to the realm where, in Yeats's 'Byzantium', 'floats an image, man or shade,/Shade more than man, more image than a shade'.[3] It is the realm of art in ambivalent relation to both life and death, opposing death with its own life and simultaneously deadening life. Brydon has been given a glimpse, too, into the essential truth of Keats's vision of beauty and has grasped the beauty of this truth.

Although Alice Staverton equivocally admits the validity of both identities, the European and the American, Spencer Brydon remains true to form at the end and sturdily contends that the *alter ego* is totally alien to him. The American self might well have been able to assess his value in terms of a million dollars a year, but Spencer Brydon clings to the 'other values' that have informed his existence. However, in this parable about contrasted perspectives, Henry James leaves one important image right to the end: the means by which defective vision is corrected. Spencer Brydon sports a 'charming monocle', but the *alter ego* needs a double eyeglass, a 'great convex pince-nez'. The European aesthetic perspective on life, Henry James implies, may be the more finely trained and acute one, but in the comparatively narrowed range of its vision, it is as surely ruined as the American perspective which has taken in more of life. The gain and also the loss to each perspective and also the irreparable divorce between them finally emerges from Alice Straverton's last words to Spencer Brydon: 'And he isn't — no, he isn't — you!' (232). The *alter ego* may not literally be Spencer Brydon, but he has been raised by Brydon in 'the jolly corner'. It is James's vision of the artist he might have been had he remained to develop his talents in America; and it is also James's awful vision of the figure of the American artist that was slowly evolving out of the literary consciousness at the end of the nineteenth century to stalk in the novels of William Dean Howells, Frank Norris and Theodore Dreiser.

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NOTES

1. Henry James, 'The Jolly Corner', in *The Complete Tales of Henry James*, 12 vols., ed. Leon Edel (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1964), 12:193–232. All page numbers given in brackets in the text will refer to this edition.
2. Amongst recent studies that have appeared, the following are particularly suggestive: Jason P. Rosenblatt, 'Bridegroom and Bride in "The Jolly Corner," ' *Studies in Short Fiction* 14 (1977): 282–84, for its view of the tale as a possible parable; H. Robert Huntley, 'James' *The Turn of the Screw:* Its "Fine Machinery," ' *American Imago* 34 (1977): 224–37, for its analysis of James's use of the characteristics of the Doppelgänger, or double figure; Adeline R. Tintner, 'Landmarks of "The Terrible Town": The New York Scene in Henry James' Last Stories', *Prospects* 2 (1976): 399–435; Rayburn S. Moore, 'The Strange Irregular Rhythm of Life: James's Late Tales and Constance Woolson', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 41 (4) (1976): 86–93; Ellen Tremper, 'Henry James's Altering Ego: An Examination of His Psychological Double in Three Tales', *Texas Quarterly* (19 (3) (1976): 59–75. Leon Edel argues that 'The Jolly Corner' is 'a profoundly autobiographical tale' in *Henry James, the Master: 1901–1916* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1972), p. 314: 'His nights of curiosity and meditation in "the jolly corner" become a quest, or hunt, for the alter ego — the self that might have been . . . The story is more than the revisiting of a personal past; it becomes a journey into the self, almost as if the house on "the jolly corner" were a mind, a brain, and Spencer Brydon were walking through its passages finding certain doors of resistance closed to truths hidden from himself'. Richard A. Hocks makes the valuable point in *Henry James and Pragmatistic Thought: A study in the Relationship between the Philosophy of William James and the Literary Art of Henry James* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1974), p. 201: 'James extends his conception of the quasi-supernatural to its most logical conclusion, the psychologically induced *alter ego* proper through obsession'. Daniel J. Schneider's analysis of 'The Divided Self' in *The Crystal Cage: Adventures of the Imagination in the Fiction of Henry James* (Lawrence: Regents Press of Kansas, 1978), pp. 38–69, is very useful: 'if the artist would reveal sharply the threat to the free spirit, what better strategy than to place this figure between two camps of hostile aggressors, such as "Europe" and "America", to present both aggressors as seeking to "get hold of" the free spirit, and to dramatize the struggle of that spirit to preserve its freedom? Clearly some such structural principle underlies James's art; and his typical plot, character alignments, and imagery may readily be explained in terms of it' (pp. 38–39).
3. W. B. Yeats, 'Byzantium', in *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* (London: Macmillan, 1967), p. 280, lines 9–16:

    Before me floats an image, man or shade,
    Shade more than man, more image than a shade,
    For Hades' bobbin bound in mummy-cloth
    May unwind the winding path;
    A mouth that has no moisture and no breath
    Breathless mouths may summon;
    I hail the superhuman;
    I call it death-in-life and life-in-death.

UNE ANALYSE DE TEXTE: ‘LE MOULIN’ D’EMILE VERHAEREN

par JACQUELINE MACHABÉÏS

LE MOULIN

Le moulin tourne au fond du soir, très lentement,
Sur un ciel de tristesse et de mélancolie,
Il tourne et tourne, et sa voile, couleur de lie,
Est triste et faible et lourde et lasse, infiniment.

Depuis l’aube, ses bras comme des bras de plainte
Se sont tendus et sont tombés; et les voici
Qui retombent encore, là-bas, dans l’air noirci
Et le silence entier de la nature éteinte.

Un jour souffrant d’hiver sur les hameaux s’endort,
Les nuages sont las de leurs voyages sombres,
Et le long des taillis qui ramassent leurs ombres
Les ornières s’en vont vers un horizon mort.

Sous un ourlet de sol, quelques huttes de hêtre
Très misérablement sont assises en rond;
Une lampe de cuivre est pendue au plafond
Et patine de feu le mur et la fenêtre.

Et dans la plaine immense et le vide dormeur
Elles fixent — les très souffreteuses bicoques!—
Avec les pauvres yeux de leurs carreaux en loques,
Le vieux moulin qui tourne et, las, qui tourne et meurt.

FOREWORD

The poem analysed in the following pages is perhaps one of the very best examples of Emile Verhaeren’s earlier works, in which the outer landscape of his native Flanders took on a hue of despair as the author went through a severe physical and emotional crisis. Here, between the first and last words of the poem — ‘The windmill . . . dies’ — is described a prolonged agony as at dusk, surrounded by cramped huts and fields smothered under a low-lying leaden sky, the wings of a windmill slowly grind to a halt amidst a growing silence and darkness.

In sharp contrast to this first despondence and helplessness, Verhaeren later sang the praises of the achievements and hopes of the Industrial Age. Ironically, he was to die in 1916, crushed under the wheels of a departing train in the station of the Northern French town of Rouen.

E.R. SIENAERT

Ce poème livre à la première lecture l'essentiel de ce que l'on doit y trouver: le paysage qu'il présente s'inscrit sans difficulté dans l'imagination du lecteur qui dispose d'un arsenal d'éléments descriptifs à la portée de tous. La syntaxe ne pose pas de problèmes et ce n'est manifestement pas par elle que l'auteur atteint le langage poétique. La structure régulière du poème en nombre impair de quatrains — dissymétrie séduisante — invite à une lecture coulée que facilitent l'ample mesure de l'alexandrin et la traditionnelle disposition embrassée des rimes. La lecture que je propose ici ne se basera pas sur une interprétation du texte — qui appartient à la subjectivité de chacun — mais sur une organisation de ses particularités lexicales et stylistiques autour de l'information fournie par le premier et le dernier vers: "Le moulin tourne", "le moulin meurt". Du point de vue du sens, cette information résume l'histoire du moulin; du point de vue stylistique, elle indique le passage d'un plan neutre à un plan imagé, l'image étant dans ce cas le support d'une personnification.

Si l'on s'en tient à l'étude du sens par laquelle procède l'analyse traditionnelle du texte, l'histoire du moulin se déroule ainsi: le premier quatrain présente le moulin *in situ*, silhouette détachée sur le ciel comme l'exige sa position nécessairement élevée, en mouvement comme le suppose sa fonction de capteur de vent. Son état de décrépitude actuelle est le résultat d'une longue existence de moulin laborieux que le deuxième quatrain décrit avec une intention symbolisante dans le passage de "l'aube" à "l'air noirci". Dans le quatrain suivant, la lueur du jour qui décline éclaire encore un paysage accordé à la mort qui s'y prépare, mais d'où le moulin est absent. Au quatrième quatrain, la lumière d'une lampe indique que la nuit est complètement tombée sur ce paysage dont on ne distingue plus ni le ciel, ni les nuages ni les ombres, mais seulement la terre qui confond — en son sein — les hameaux, les taillis et les ornières des vers précédents. L'affaiblissement progressif du moulin comparable à celui de la lumière du jour trouve son aboutissement logique dans le dernier quatrain qui est une synthèse des éléments pathétiques de cette histoire; le paysage décrit dans le troisième quatrain s'y retrouve comme cadre des maisons introduites au quatrième, investies ici de leur véritable fonction de témoin passif de l'événement: le moulin, absent pendant 11 vers, ne réapparaît que pour mourir.

L'approche lexicale et stylistique du texte a pour but maintenant de retrouver les composants de cette histoire, non pas selon la progression chronologique et signifiante de ses phases, mais selon la structure interne du texte telle que la révèlent l'étude détaillée de trois de ses aspects: la distribution des catégories lexicales, l'intention personnificatrice du discours, le rythme comme révélateur de l'action.

Le relevé systématique des mots employés dénombre 41 substantifs, 18 adjectifs et 18 verbes. Même si l'on considère que 6 de ces substantifs ont une valeur qualifiante (*tristesse, mélancolie, plainte, hêtre, cuivre, loques*), la prédominance de cette catégorie lexicale sur les deux autres est indéniable. Compte tenu du nombre moins élevé de verbes, ces noms ne sont pas tous sujets. Ceux qui le sont peuvent être classés en deux groupes: les sujets du verbe être (employé 6 fois) c'est-à-dire *voile, bras* (2 fois), *nuages, huttes, lampe* et les sujets des verbes d'action, autrement dit *moulin, bras, jour, taillis, ornières, lampe, bicoques* respectivement sujets de tourner (employé 5 fois), *mourir, retomber, s'endormir, ramasser, s'en aller, patiner, fixer*. En fait, chaque quatrain dispose de sujets-action et de sujets-état. Ainsi:

Premier quatrain	moulin/action voile/état
Deuxième quatrain	bras/état bras/action
Troisième quatrain	jour/action nuages/état taillis/action ornières/action
Quatrième quatrain	huttes/état lampe/état lampe/action
Cinquième quatrain	bicoques/action moulin/action

Cette énumération appelle une autre subdivision que celle imposée par la structure en quatrains; la voici:

moulin/action

voile/état
bras/état
bras/action

jour/action
nuages/état
taillis/action
ornières/action

huttes/état
lampe/état
lampe/action
bicoques/action

moulin/action

Ainsi se dégagent les trois seuls sujets de l'histoire. Nous les appellerons: MOULIN, PAYSAGE, TEMOIN. La place séparée du moulin-acteur à la fin de cette énumération — correspondant au rejet en fin de quatrain du complément d'objet du verbe *fixer* — signifie bien qu'il est le sujet principal de l'action, le héros du drane. Le deuxième sujet occupe principalement la troisième strophe, c'est-à-dire la strophe-charnière de ce poème en cinq quatrains. Lieu où les forces s'équilibrent, où les tensions s'apaisent, la nature est ici à la fois un cadre et un trait-d'union, cadre du drame paisible de la mort d'un moulin, trait-d'union entre les deux acteurs de ce drame.

Les substantifs non sujets détiennent une bonne part de la charge évocatrice de ce texte. Ce sont des compléments de temps (*depuis l'aube, jour d'hiver*) — dont le nombre peu élevé est compensé par les indications de luminosité — et surtout de lieu (*sur le ciel, dans l'air, vers l'horizon, sous un ourlet, dans la plaine . . .*). Ces derniers, régulièrement distribués dans le texte, trahissent l'importance de l'espace pour ce genre d'évocation. Le temps luimême s'y trouve assujetti: l'expression "au fond du soir" délimite plus un espace qu'elle ne marque un moment; "dans l'air noirci" suggèrre d'abord une matière étalée, une luminosité palpable qui évoque une notion temporelle par la couleur associée à un certain moment de la journée. Les sujets de l'histoire subissent tous les trois une personnification très poussée qui s'exprime par le choix des adjectifs. Ceux-ci ne sont pas abondants mais les registres psychologique (*triste, faible, lasse, las, pauvre*) et physique (*souffrant, souffreteuse, vieux, mort*) auxquels ils appartiennent produisent avec le contexte qualifié un choc émotionnel évident. *Noirci, éteinte, sombre, lourde*, en viendraient presque à drainer eux aussi les pouvoirs de la personnification. Certains substantifs (*tristesse, mélancolie, plainte, yeux, loques*) et certains verbes (*s'endormir, ramasser, s'en aller, être assis, fixer, mourir*) occupent également cette fonction qui monopolise toutes les ressources imagées du texte; on ne trouve en effet qu'une seule métaphore qui échappe à la tendance personnificatrice du langage imagé: "ourlet de sol".

Confrontons maintenant le plan imagé du texte (image étant synonyme ici de personnification) avec la répartition des substantifs-sujets:

Premier quatrain	non imagé	moulin/action
	imagé	voile/état
Deuxième quatrain	imagé	bras/état
	imagé	bras/action
Troisième quatrain	imagé	jour/action

	imagé	nuages/état
	imagé	taillis/action
	imagé	ornières/action
Quatrième quatrain	imagé	huttes/état
	non imagé	lampe/état
	non imagé	lampe/action
Cinquième quatrain	imagé	bicoques/action
	imagé	moulin/action

Les phases non imagées de l'action se situent uniquement au premier et au quatrième quatrains avec deux protagonistes: le moulin qui tourne et la lampe qui patine (la lampe présente deux phases non imagées mais celle où elle est sujet-état c'est-à-dire "pendue au plafond" ne fait pas intervenir l'élément'lumière qui est le seul décisif dans la personnification formulée au dernier quatrain). Or, il s'avère que c'est en subissant le passage du plan non imagé au plan imagé que ces deux sujets deviennent véritablement des personnes physiologiquement et psychologiquement au coeur de l'action: le moulin va être doté de "bras" donc d'un corps —à partir de là il peut mourir — et d'une âme qui affleure dans le *las* du dernier vers: la lampe va devenir des yeux par l'intermédiaire de la fenêtre et à partir de là les bicoques peuvent regarder, d'un regard fixe sur lequel se greffe le sentiment de pitié qu'inspire l'adjectif *pauvre*. Ainsi le cinquième quatrain regroupe-t-il, selon la logique interne du texte, les sujets-acteurs personnifiés; et il ne regroupe qu'eux: le paysage dans cette dernière strophe n'est plus personnifié, il n'est plus agissant (il n'y a pas de verbe au vers 17) comme si l'auteur, à la phase ultime de la lutte du moulin, rendait à la nature sa seule fonction de cadre de l'action.

Les sujets-acteurs, tels qu'ils viennent d'être mis en évidence, n'agissent pas tous les trois de la même manière. Il apparaît assez clairement que le moulin est, des trois, le plus apte à suggérer une action, sur le plan non imagé d'abord parce qu'il est en mouvement, sur le plan imagé ensuite parce qu'il est assimilé à un être vivant faisant un effort. La nature (ou paysage) n'est agissante que sur le plan imagé et le témoin est un acteur passif. L'étude du rythme de ce texte confirme, on va le voir, cette première impression. Les césures sont nombreuses dans ce poème mais réparties d'une manière irrégulière, comme ceci:

1. 8, / 4	moulin
2. 12,	nature-paysage
3. 4, ↖↗/ 4, / 4,	moulin (voile)
4. 8, ↖↗/ 4. prolongement du souffle (élision)	voile
5. 4, / 2 / 6	moulin (bras)

6.	8; / 4 + enjambement	bras
7.	6, / 2, / 4 + enjambement	bras / nature
8.	12.	nature-paysage
9.	12,	nature-paysage
10.	12	nature-paysage
11.	12	nature-paysage
12.	12.	nature-paysage
13.	6, / 6	témoin
14.	12;	témoin
15.	12 prolongement	témoin
16.	12.	témoin
17.	12	nature-paysage
18.	2– / 8! –	témoin
19.	12,	témoin
20.	7, / 1, / 4.	moulin

Regroupons maintenant les mêmes indications rythmiques selon les trois sujets-acteurs:

MOULIN	1.	8, / 4,
	3.	4 / 4 / 4
	4.	8, / 4.
	5.	4, / 2 / 6
	6–7.	8; / 4 / 6,
	20.	7; / 1, / 4,
NATURE PAYSAGE	2.	12,
	7–8.	18.
	9.	12,
	10.	12,
	11–12.	24.
TEMOIN	13–14.	6, / 18;
	15–16.	24.
	17–18.	14 – / 8! –
	19.	12.

La presque totalité des vers à césures se trouve bien concentrée dans la description du moulin, le rythme des séquences courtes suggérant l'action plus naturellement que ne le ferait un mouvement ample. Ce dernier au contraire convient bien à l'évocation de la nature qui s'exprime par des séquences dont la mesure est au minimum celle de l'alexandrin. L'exemple des vers 7–8 illustre à merveille la différence entre le rythme du moulin et celui de la nature: l' enjambement permet de passer de l'un à l'autre, du mouvement qui rend compte de l'effort des bras à celui qui épouse un paysage particulièrement immobile, figé dans sa saison hivernale et son heure crépusculaire. Les vers qui se rapportent au témoin ressemblent rythmiquement davantage à ceux qui évoquent la nature qu’à ceux qui décrivent le moulin. C’est que les bicoques font partie intégrante du paysage : le vers 13 introduit le témoin par une longue séquence qui ne peut être déliée, au niveau du sens, de l’hémistiche précédent qui concerne la nature; de même, dans les vers 17–18, les séquences appartenant à l’un et l’autre sujet ne sauraient être rythmiquement dissociées. Il se passe pourtant quelque chose qui perturbe le rythme coulé de la nature : le vers 18 comporte une très forte césure, d’autant plus marquée que la voix s’y repose après une séquence de 14 pieds. Or, elle intervient aprés l’un des deux mots importants de cette dernière strophe, le verbe *fixer* qui exprime à lui seul l’action du témoin et auquel répond l’autre mot important qui — lui — résume l’action du moulin: le verbe *mourir*.

Le mot, l’image, le rythme — outils essentiels qu’utilise tout poète —ont été mes seuls guides dans cette analyse. En invitant le lecteur à observer la distribution des mots dans ce texte, j’espère le convaincre du bien-fondé de cette approche. Là réside, à mon sens, la clé d’une compréhension qui n’a rien d’aléatoire parce qu’elle s’élabore sur une information vérifiable. L’emploi privilégié du substantif d’où a procédé ma démonstration ne découle pas d’une interprétation mais d’un constat. Bien qu’une telle démarche ne tienne compte ni de la connaissance de l’auteur ni de son arrière-plan culturel, c’est bien de l’auteur — responsable conscient ou inconscient des mots qu’il emploie — qu’elle se propose impérativement de partir. Et c’est aussi l’auteur dans sa totalité qu’elle restitue: la confrontation de constats objectifs m’a permis de démonter le mécanisme subtil par lequel Verhaeren transforme une vision, ou un souvenir, en drame. Pour ce dessein qui lui est propre et nous renseigne mieux sur sa sensibilité que la plus exhaustive biographie, il a besoin d’introduire dans son paysage intérieur ce qui caractérise le drame, c’est-à-dire une action. Il lui faut donc des acteurs, une histoire qui se déroule dans le temps et dans l’espace. C’est pourquoi il personnifie, il ’décrit’ une psychologie au lieu de peindre un spectacle, il inscrit doublement le signe du temps qui s’écoule : par la nuit qui enveloppe de ses ténèbres la mort silencieuse du moulin.

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