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BOLT

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Introductory Note

Since **Voorslag** (which has the reputation and suffers the fate of being a classic) Durban has not had an 'open' literary journal. While accepting the impossibility of emulating that famous racy and now long defunct publication, it is felt there is a need for a quarterly in which the best in contemporary South African reviews, criticism and creative writing can appear.

Literary quarterlies are notoriously short-lived. Despite present exigencies of finance and limitations of space, **Bolt** is hereby launched — perhaps as an act of faith.

We aim to print the best available. Our contributors will be paid. **Bolt** will be apolitical, otherwise no limitations will be imposed. Our banner is simply literary excellence.

The present (historical?) first number carries poetry and literary criticism only. In the future, we will be printing short stories and articles on the theatre, music, art and films as well. We hope that this will increase the range and interest of **Bolt**.

All that remains is for **Bolt** to be bought and read, thought about and contributed to.

The Editor

Why Read

Bosman?

"I have known people who sit like you do and dream about the veld, and talk strange things, and start believing in what they call the soul of the veld, until in the end the veld means a different thing to them from what it does to me. I only know that the veld can be used for growing mealies on, and it isn't very good for that either. Also, it means very hard work for me, growing mealies. There is the ploughing, for instance. I used to get aches in my back and shoulders from sitting on a stone all day long on the edge of the lands, watching the kafirs and the oxen and the plough go up and down, making furrows."

The story goes on about a man who saw the soul of the veld, and also a beautiful, spectral woman, who came naked to him, her arms held out in longing towards him; 'I saw her again, Oom Schalk', he said, 'I saw her last night. In surpassing loveliness. Just at midnight. She came softly across the veld towards my tent. The night was warm and lovely, and the stars were mad and singing. And there was low music where her white feet touched the grass. And sometimes her mouth seemed to be laughing, and sometimes it was sad. And her lips were red, Oom Schalk. And when I reached out with my arms she went away. She disappeared in the maroelas, like the whispering of the wind. And there was a ringing in my ears. And in my heart there was green fragrance, and I thought of the pale asphodel that grows in the fields of paradise.'

'I don't know about paradise,' I said, 'but if a thing like that grew in my mealie lands I would get the kafirs to pull it up.'"

One night the veld maiden didn't disappear from him, and the next day he went down the road to catch the lorry for Johannesburg; "As for Frans Welman, (my neighbour), it was

quite a long time before he gave up searching the Marico for his young wife, Sannie”.

It isn't easy to write an ordinary sort of critical article on Bosman. If you read him you'll see why. When you have pointed out the obvious, there is nothing left to say, except 'Read Bosman'. The obvious is, first, that you **hear** his voice. His prose is thick, nurtured on Afrikaans (like Uys Krige's, whose voice you can also hear in his English pros). Then, his stories are short – four, six pages – but have enough material for a whole novel, and work by **not** saying things but by leaving the reader to realise the full implications of what is here and there sketched, only just pointed to. Then, and this is what makes him so difficult to criticise objectively and impersonally, he is more than anyone else I have come across, South African – in his themes, scenery, people and names, place-names. There is the sardonic, Afrikaans sense of humour, stories of deep passion and violence, told through an ironic, sardonic detachment.

Some extracts from a short story called **The Clay Pit** will indicate what you find.

“You will also be told that what actually hanged Diederik Uys was a strand of Johanna Greyling's hair, that was of a wanton colour, yellow, not unlike the colour of a hangman's rope if you were to tease out the ends.

“Whereas the truth is that her hair was not always light.

“Anyway, you can see from this that the incidents linking the fortunes of the young bywoner, Diederik Uys, and of the girl, Johanna Greyling, and of the ageing Bertus Pienaar made a good story, that was told over and over again. Otherwise each person who tells the story would not be able to bring in that touch about the hangman's rope so confidently. A high-school girl, home for the holidays, would otherwise not be able to talk of the strings in a hangman's noose as familiarly as though it were crochet thread.” Bertus Pienaar was Johanna Greyling's step-father, who corrected her with a sjambok. “Several Marico farmers, driving past the dam on their way to Ramoutsa, had actually seen Bertus Pienaar administering instruction to his daughter in this fashion. It was only on account of the esteem, of a long-standing nature, in which Bertus Pienaar was held by the Dwarsberge community that some farmer did not pull up his mule-team and, having tied the reins to the off-wheel, go over to the dam and lay the doubled thongs of the sjambok across Bertus Pienaar's shoulder blades, instead. Part of this esteem was

due to Bertus' piety and deep love of religion. The other part of it arose from the fact that, although past middle life, he was still agile on his feet. And in teaching a kafir not to let the cattle stray into the lucerne lands, Bertus would always first draw back two paces and then charge forward with the whole weight of his body behind his fist". (His comment on piety is echoed in the **Makapan Caves** where a father sends his sons off to a kafir war with 'Pray the Lord help you and when you shoot, always aim for the stomach'.) That strange, very Afrikaans type of humour, grim and hard-faced, is here. "Bertus had had a clay pit dug for bricks for his new house. And he made Johanna Greyling help tread clay. The kafirs poured buckets of water into the hole. Bertus Pienaar stood on the side of the pit with a long whip, driving half a dozen head of oxen round and round the wet earth. And along with the cattle, the skirts of her print dress raised high, Johanna Greyling tramped in the red clay of the Transvaal.

"The murder, a few days later, of Bertus Pienaar, caused less stir in the Marico than the fact of his having made his adopted daughter tread clay.

"It was daybreak that the kafirs, coming to work with their buckets and spades, found their boss lying by the edge of the pit, with his face pressed deep into the hardening mud. Veld-cornet Apie Nel, of the landdrost's office, was on the scene soon afterwards.

"'They must have fought a long time in the night,' Apie Nel said, surveying the area of grass that had been flattened by heavy boots. 'They should rather have fought inside the clay-pit. They would have kneaded up quite a lot of clay.'"

Johanna Greyling had run away from Pienaar to Diederik Uys, then on to Kimberley. Then there is Bosman's view of how justice works. "The Veld-cornet was in a difficult position. As things stood, there was so much public sympathy with Diederik Uys on account of Bertus Pienaar's unnatural usage of the girl, Johanna Greyling, that no Zeerust jury would bring in a verdict more stern than homicide — quite soon he would reach the age when he would have to retire. He would not be able to look back on his career with a proper kind of satisfaction if, at the end of it, he would have to admit that he had never succeeded in getting a white man hanged.

"Johanna Greyling was subpoenaed. In court she said little. But when the coach that brought her back from Kimberley stopped in front of the Transvaal Hotel, half the population

of Zeerust saw her alight on the pavement. The fate of Diederik Uys was sealed.

"A woman like that, people said. And if in court Johanna Greyling spoke few words, the Zeerust public had a good deal to say outside the courthouse — and inside too, in whispers." The story ends: "One cannot pass by Johanna Greyling just lightly, somehow. Johanna Greyling, walking about the night-streets of Kimberley, blond headed and with her high heels clicking on the pavement. Lifting her steps high as she had done in former days in the clay-pit of her adopted father."

He is full of compassion, but also observant, hard, ironic. What comes out of these stories, firstly, are the various characters — hard people, friendly people, shy, compassionate, bigoted, mean, generous, passionate, fantastical or shrewd or dreamy or ignorant or sly. But all are clearly, finely etched, with a few characteristic strokes. Then, always in the background, is the veld; hard, harsh, unyielding, begrudging every livelihood it supports, but spare, beautiful, lonely. There is also the Boer War, how it affected the people, made them bitter and despairing, how it showed up characteristics of bravery or cowardice or ironic mocking gaiety. There are also some beautiful done sketches of black tribesmen, at once similar and diametrically opposite to the Afrikaners they come into contact with, and which never allow one prejudice, liberal's or bigot's, within a stone's throw.

There are stories not located in the Marico bushveld, stories set in Cape Town, or in jail, where he went for murdering his step-brother. "And every time, at night, when the steel door was banged shut on me by the warder, and I heard the key grate in the lock, then my head would start spinning, and I would crawl round and round, with great difficulty, on my hands and knees, because of the narrowness of the walls of my cage — 'You bastards get too much time off,' the warder said. 'The authorities must be mad to give you time off like that.' He had said that the authorities were mad. That gave me more confidence than ever. I didn't feel so lonely and cut off from the rest of mankind, in my insanity. Here were the authorities, also mad. I had the warder's word for it. I had a sudden, vivid picture of the authorities also crawling round and round on the floors of their bedrooms."

Our growth is, in one sense, stunted by so much European literature. It glorifies foreign places, and we neglect what is most immediate to us.

A European reference to a great literature that is set in places

that he knows. He is more likely to be able to have an instinctive knowledge of why the author set a particular scene in a particular place, and to develop that vital understanding of how a place has its own life, how a locality calls out the people of its own characteristics, and how certain people in one place imbue their environment with their own psychological features. An example of this is the setting of Rome used by George Eliot in *Middlemarch* and Henry James in *Portrait of a Lady*. We who do not know Rome, have to struggle with impressions at second hand from picture books and photographs, or even glean them from the books themselves.

Also, a European will get from literature, set in his own history, a sense of how that past moulded those people; the knowledge of the one will act on the knowledge of the other, and he will gain understanding at every re-reflection. An example of this would be, say, Lawrence's *Rainbow* with the miners' riots.

To the people who see the places of history, they are now associated with art; they are rounded and ripened by the artist's heat and light. With the artist's aid, through his eyes, people can see the beauty in the places and events that drew his attention.

"Then there was the bush. Thorn trees. Wit-haaks and Kameel-dorings. The kremetart-boom. Swarthaak and blinkblaar and wag-'n-bietjie. Moepels and maroelas. The sunbaked vlakke and the thorn tree and South Africa. Trees are more than vegetation and more than symbols and more than pallid sentimentality, of the order of 'Woodman spare that tree', or 'Poems are made by fools like me'. Nevertheless, what the oak and the ash and the cypress are to Europe, the thorn tree is to South Africa."

Bosman is conscious of the need for a distinctively South African writer, and conscious of his role as one — but most important, the country draws him irresistibly towards itself. It draws us. We have our best, most vital, alive thoughts, thoughts least eccentric and out of balance, thoughts most characteristic of our real knowledge, when our minds are able to work in the articulated environment of what we know best, in the environment that formed the structures that our thoughts work within.

Bosman gives us the apotheosis of our own deserts, towns, trees; he gives us the apotheosis of our own sins and glories.

John Vear

ADDRESS TO THE TOOTH OF A WHALE
AND TO AN UNBORN CHILD

*I knew your father; that is, I knew your flesh,
That is, one day I stood near Akraness
And watched the whales come in: reluctantly.
Lashed to a slender ship, slapping the sea,
Rolling their open bellies in the sun,
Spilling a gentle crimson through the green;
Their skin flashed grey and silver in the wet,
And as they turned, their entrails caught the light,
Purple, and green, and lapis lazuli,
Unwinding slowly in the milky sea.*

*All morning we had walked around the fjord,
Crunched broken lava; word by broken word,
Talking in German about cameras,
Whales, politics – the tall Hungarian,
His pregnant wife and I. Far out at sea,
Sjurtsey sent up its tongue of smoke; all day
We told our lives, and watched the water, till
We reached the factory: chimney, jetty, smell.*

*Cushioned in whales and setting the sea aside
The ship stepped home, and shrugged them off; the fjord
Grew choppy; winches dribbled; water leapt.
Then came the tearing: whale by whale was stripped
Peeled like an apple, sputtering drops of fat
Like bullets in the water round our feet.
Thick, grey and ragged in the greasy light
Long bandages of flesh swayed overhead:
Reduction of the sleek important whale
To what is needful: ambergris and oil.
Then the smell thickened till it drove us out,
Breaking the fragile lava underfoot,
Smiling, then running. Just the husband stayed,
Clicking his camera, but we three fled,*

*Took our two bodies up a hill; I watched
With a man's helplessness; she buckled, retched,
You tearing at her entrails, your disgust
Spattered on earth's dry vomit, crust on crust,
Three thousand miles from home, the choppy sea
Laughing, and Sjuritsey breathing.*

*You and me
Torn from that crush of oil and dripping flesh,
Survivor, souvenir, you grace my desk;
And now it must be time for another tearing,
As the other you is thrust into air and hearing
Somewhere in Budapest. I shall wrap this tooth
And post it to greet you. Quietly, month after month,
While you troubled your mother, while your impatient feet
Drumming like tanks were making her desperate,
I stroked the shapely curve as if I knew
Whether your mother had cried and let you go,
As if fluted, hollow and silent, the huge whale dead,
It would feel the explosion of air around your head.
Your mother was not peeled to let you out,
Her flesh was not reduced; she bled in quiet;
Her entrails are not amethyst and green,
But torn and red and twisted, and unseen.
Your cry was housed; while waiting to rebel,
Bled like a bomb among the crimson walls.*

*And now that you're born, I send this gift, and say
'I knew you, father.' We stood by the choppy sea,
The waves like bullets slapped against the boat,
(I'd never felt a bullet, and nor had it);
I listened with an English helplessness;
He told his story; beyond Akraness
The innocent Atlantic tore the hulls
Of slender ships, as if to guard its whales.*

Laurence Lerner

Diary of a Man

Reading Spenser

Editor's Note:

This record — somewhat to our embarrassment — has been offered to us for publication. It is an extract from the diary of a critic who was returning to Spenser's *Faerie Queen*, some years after having been baffled and antagonised by his first experience of it. It can be seen as an attempt — and, we believe, a sincere one — to clear himself a footing from which to begin his personal study of the poem. After much deliberation we have decided to include it — on the grounds that sincerity, however erroneous and ill-judged, should always be given the opportunity to express itself. The critic, we fear, will find little to interest him here; connoisseurs of the curious may, however, find the record something of a mental adventure, it being a very single-minded pursuit in its way, however misguided and fruitless. The moralist will observe with astonishment the disastrous effect of a fixed idea on the mind of man; the psychologist may find in the record of the tenth day, the signs of eventual escape from an obsession. We, alas, see no reason to hope for more than the replacement of one obsession with another.

1st
Day

Now, anyhow, you can begin. You know the question you have to put to yourself. Here, then:
When a classic is found in hindsight to have laid himself open in the most obvious way to the most damaging kinds of censure — when it is undeniable that other poets have in certain important aspects improved on him to the extent of making him look silly and ham-handed next to them — then what is it that he has in particular of his own that has forced people to remember him? What is it, in Spenser's case, that makes some people want to say that, if a reader doesn't like him, he can't really like poetry — or, at any rate, his liking for poetry is going to lack some of the true elementary gusto?

It must be something very fundamental to poetry that Spenser does particularly well. If one goes back to the beginning, one can agree that there is a skill without which the poetic communication can't begin to work; also that this has to do with the reality of the things the poet names. Perhaps, though, it starts before things: a prerequisite for perceiving them. The poet is able to place the reader within a space, or

perhaps create a space around him. This reader, meanwhile, sits dead centre, the table before him, forearm bent back towards him, book distanced and slanting, while the air around him starts taking on its density and measurements. There is an imbalance in this space, a persistent and regular lopsidedness. Shadows! And so he comes to recognise direction in the flow of light, and breakages in it. There is another space around him now, as he starts to receive the presence of sounds, ordering themselves for him in the distance according to the perspective given by their fading. But the fun really only starts when he begins to be aware of shapes. They swim together to crystallise out of the solvent of light and space: perceived, known, perceived only because known, recognised in their unique claim on him, their resemblance to his mind. What is this sudden coincidence between his curtains (whose flesh, he sees, pales at the edges), and again this Galatea in his book? There is no difference. What happens, happens at the same time both to the things in the book and the things in the room he's sitting in. What matters is the created space, which bears the imprint of the author's violently constructive consciousness: a construction, for all its energy, always more or less incomplete.

Somewhere in that process of construction — early on in the assembly-work, before the emotional and associational man has really come into play — there is a stage that no poetry can circumvent, and which Spenser has made his specialisation

2nd
Day

*A gentle knight was pricking on the plaine,
Ycladd in mightie armes and silver shielde,
Wherein old dints of deepe woundes did remaine,
The cruell markes of many a bloody fielde,
Yet armes till that time did he never wield,
His angry steede did chide his foming bitt,
As much disdayning to the curbe to yield:
Full jolly knight he seemed, and faire did sitt,
As one for knightly giusts and fierce encounters fitt.*

One has it from the start — this sense of being within a specially marked reality, caught up in a strong surge, through which one's aware of the hard earth beating up against the hoofs for springboard — also a kind of weight in everything — a weightiness that's flung into one's consciousness again and again by the spadefuls of alliteration, at other times astonishingly assimilated into that of which we are unconscious, so that one forgets it. But it's always there.

3rd
Day

One thing that you knew from the start you would be brought up against considering when you started reading *Faerie Queene* is the basic rigidity of the stanza. Its interior structure can be pushed around a certain amount, but I suspect a poet could define that amount with a kind of asymptote. Of all poets who have attempted to soften the edges of the stanza and have succeeded in not turning it into a living contradiction (poets like Keats, Shelley), none have been able to give it the inevitability it has in Spenser.

But then it wasn't the interior structure that really worried you – it was the rigidity of the stanza as a unit. The alexandrine is so ineradicable a signal that the unit as a unit is indestructible. A carried-over stanza would be a ridiculous anomaly. But it's a more serious thing than an external restraint on the poet. One has the sense with each fresh stanza of a weight being lifted and set in motion by a mysterious energy, continuing hopefully, and then – not over-reluctantly – resettling. The point is that, in every single stanza of the poem, the beginning part will have an energy predictably different from the end part; they will be a different kind of poetry, in which reality will appear differently, the poet (and so the reader) will be using a different sense to apprehend reality, will have a different point of view, a different grasp. Obviously an epic poet cannot allow his reader to be conscious of these changes in the way a lyrical poet, working with a similarly complex stanza, may well wish him to be conscious of them. If there is to be any true epic continuity, the poet must be able to conceive the rise and fall of a stanza as inevitable complements of a whole, and the whole, with its two contrary movements, must represent something so basic to his experience that it's like a pulse, which the reader can assimilate and forget. It will still of course have its effect – and the Antaeus-like cycle, the surge upwards, gradual fall, and momentary rest (just a touch as it comes to earth) – the re-gathering of energy that, in Spenser, and Spenser alone, the next stanza seems to get from the alexandrine, – this, the cycle as a whole, continuously colours our way of seeing things. In this poetry, the rhythm of the stanza strikes one as more significantly expressive than most local rhythms. It gives everything mentioned a particular concreteness, a particular physicality. However much the poetry may soar, it must come down to earth again – soon – and this is the condition of its soaring.

And Spenser is without exception the poet with the greatest gift for making the physical existence of things something vividly felt.

*heav'ns wide hollownesse
the shady lamp
By muddy shore of broad seven-mouthed Nile
Upon his shield their heaped hayle he bore
His neather lip was not like man nor beast
But like a wide deepe poke, downe hanging low,
In which he wont the relickes of his feast
And cruell spoyle, which he had spard, to stow:*

*In her left hand a Cup of gold she held,
And with her right the riper fruit did reach,
Whose sappy liquor, that with fulnesse sweld,
Into her cup she scruzd with daintie breach
Of her fine fingers....*

**4th
Day**

This kind of physical realisation is at the bottom of what one feels to be so different about Spenser's allegory. Take the House of Pride:

*And all the hinder partes, that few could spie,
Were ruinous and old, but painted cunningly.*

Few allegorical poets would let us have such a simple sense of this being after all just the physically existing back of a building (like the slaves' quarters at Groot Constantia) – too much must be suggested that would be irrelevant to the allegorical purposes. In fact, there is a pause in our credence. We have been told what to think, but we still want to look for ourselves. And when we do this, it's not, either, that every detail is imaginatively impregnated for us with the nature of fraud; we simply observe the facts of the matter.

There is the same independence between the obvious moral point and the physical presentation – the two just happening to coincide – in the incidental touches that are such an important part of Spenser's credibility as a story-teller:

*The heapes of people, thronging in the hall,
Doe ride each other upon her to gaze.*

In other words, Spenser guides his reader with a fairly loose rein. But this implies looseness in another sense too, in that the world of Spenser's poem is not a whole imaginatively permeated by his purpose. There are things in it which are just there, and because of this, a lack of balance and perspective. This is apparent in the clumsy and careless way the allegorical structure relates to a supposed moral structure. (Dante is the obvious

comparison). Intellectually, it may be possible to work out a coherent, balanced, hierarchical moral structure from the poem, but in its poetical expression we know instinctively that the emphases are wrong, and the insights don't cohere to indicate a centralised moral view.

5th Day To pursue the charge of looseness – there is also a lack of perspective in the way impressions are given, or a whole scene or atmosphere is built up. To go back to the stanza, the story starts with “A gentle knight was pricking on the plaine”. Details loom as large as the general scene. One moment we see the figure of the horseman in the vastness of the plain; the next we are inspecting the dents in his armour, or being given a close-up of his horse's bit. And there is no consciousness of any need to set the impressions off from each other: in this kind of poetry you just tack the next one on as a new clause in the most immediately convenient way – fit a new chunk into the pattern of your stanza. Sometimes Spenser's procedure – a kind of pictorial narrative – has the primitive indifference to tact in presentation that one finds in the comic-strip. This may be one of the primary gifts of a romancer, at that. (Think of Amos Tutuola).

Certainly, a kind of chunkiness results, which enhances the material presence of whatever the poet turns his eye on. Perhaps this is an effect which comes about negatively, but it does give the sense of the world's independence of the viewer, as something that can't be wished away.

This is an important element in what we feel about the dragon in Ixi:

*His flaggy winges, when forth he did display,
Were like two sayles, on which the hollow wynd
Is gathered full, and worketh speedy way:
And eke the pennes, that did his pineons bynd,
Were like mayne-yardes with flying canvas lynd;
With which whenas him list the ayre to beat,
And there by force unwonted passage fynd,
The cloudes before him fledd for terror great...*

The wood-and-canvas concreteness of the dragon, the weight of the blast this imagery makes us feel in the air-currents he sets up around him, his odiously thinkable way of hopping at the knight –

*Forelifting up a-loft his speckled brest,
And often bounding on the brused gras, –*

make him extra-repulsive because he is a fact and yet the knight has no part in him. He is an unexplained creature, a monster in the fullest sense. His evil is something separate and outside, yet turned on the knight. This is probably worth remarking and remembering for future reference – that in Spenser's psychology evil, however symbolic, threatens as if from the outside. It's felt to be that unmanageable.

6th Day The dragon is intended to be massive. If you want to establish as a basis of your reading that the weight and physicality you find in Spenser are a real phenomenon of his poetry, qualities that are there in everything he sees, a less selective reading is the only scientifically respectable course. What happens when Spenser is dealing with images that by their nature are ethereal, subtle, opalescent?

*Now when the rosy fingred morning faire,
Weary of aged Tithones saffron bed,
Had spred her purple robe through deawy aire,
And the high hills Titan discovered....*

Let me record here what I probably would have done better to have started with: that Spenser is a spell-binder. This is light and balmy, and one has every sense of ecstatic subtlety and transparency one could wish for.

It comes as a real surprise to look back at the individual parts of one's response. The rosiness of Dawn's fingers has the texture of pigment of skin (and the saffron is a dye); her weariness is a physical ache – a stretch-and-yawn – of boredom; her purple robe is getting sopping wet in the dew. And the spell of glamour that's cast doesn't negative these things. The fact that the effect has been gained with thickly applied colours and not with thin washes changes the final effect itself.

The spell assimilates the intractability of things as the sea can assimilate dolphins:

*A teme of Dolphins raunged in aray
Drew the smooth charett of sad Cymoënt;
They were all taught by Triton to obey
To the long raynes at her commaundement:
As swift as swallowes on the waves they went,
That their brode flaggy finnes no fome did reare
Ne bubling roundell they behinde them sent.
The rest, of other fishes drawen weare,
Which with their finny oars the swelling sea did sheare.*

“brode flaggy finnes” – “finny oars” – “did sheare” – the fishes' fins are if anything made grosser by the implied com-

parisons, not more delicate – the dolphins are big, substantial creatures, who displace their full weight of water – but they are hypnotically banned within the rhythmically streaming element of the ocean – “Upon great Neptune’s neck they softly swim”.

The rest of the passage shows more fully just how astonishing the physical presence of such forms of life in the ocean is felt to be. As with the dragon, their very existingness makes them seem unheard of. It is almost felt as an active travesty of nothingness, but a travesty which is grappled up into the poetry with an incomparable zest and energy. This last holds good just as much even for the recalcitrant repulsiveness of the dragon.

7th Day Give a better account of how the spell cast on you by Spenser’s imagery works.

Very well. Imagine you go to consult a witch and she leads you into a room where the various trappings of her art have been gathered: a broom, a cauldron, a sieve, a death’s head, a magic square and other painted symbols that mean nothing to you. You are no romantic, and no child, and these things have no imaginative significance for you. Nor does the witch attempt to invest them with any. They are just there. And the spell works, simply because the objects were there in the room with you.

8th Day That was an exaggeration, of course. But, leaving fantasy aside, is there any other poet whose evocation of images is so bare – bare of the projection on to it of private associations or moral judgement? Spenser is at the end of the poetic scale furthest from Proust, who would never have used an image that wasn’t saturated with personal significance. Spenser’s images, as evoked, belong to the world outside human beings – the human imagination must make what it can of them, but it will never get a monopoly over them. True – because their physical presence is so real, we are strongly attracted or strongly repelled, and no third possibility exists. But it’s clear that in Spenser these reactions have no reliable moral basis. In some sense, the world of **Faerie Queene** is an extraordinarily unspiritual world. Which does not mean that its creation, the bare solidity of it, does not involve the imagination – a particular aspect of the imagination, here unusually developed.

9th Day I am beginning to find the gap between Spenser’s moral instinct and his instinctive response to the images he creates more and more significant. In Lawrence, this gap could never be:

The dread of the instincts included the dread of intuitional awareness. 'Beauty is a snare' – 'Beauty is but skin-deep' – Handsome is as handsome does' – 'Looks don't count' – Don't judge by appearances' – if we only realised it, there are thousands of these vile proverbs which have been dinned into us for over two hundred years. They are all of them false. Beauty is not a snare, nor is it skin-deep, since it always involves a certain loveliness of modelling, and handsome does are often ugly and objectionable people, and.... (Introduction to these Paintings)

For Spenser, beauty often is a snare; and in his poem, it often is – most literally – only skin-deep. One might well protest against the way Evil is given the most terrifying scope in the romance world of **Faerie Queene**. The loathsome agents of Evil are able, for instance, to take on the exact shape of the person you trust most, and have an apparently unlimited power to enchant, intoxicate, blind the senses. Come to think of it, this is what seduced you into calling Spenser a spell-binder. He knows all about how such enchantments work, for he works in the same way himself. I don't believe one could resist the Bowre of blis if one hadn't been told that one ought to. The intoxication of beauty was for Spenser something that tended to make an absolute claim on one's attention and so was dangerous and misleading, just **couldn't** be trusted. Most people must surely have been deceived often enough by skin-deep beauty to understand his feeling, see that it has validity as well as Lawrence's, at least for one's unguarded moments.

One of the most admirable things about Kathleen Williams's book, **Spenser's Faerie Queene**, is that she is prepared to say that Spenser leaves the reader bewildered in his response – not just because his allegory is complicated, but because he leaves the reader without enough evidence (though Miss Williams suggests the reader gathers the evidence in retrospect).

Even for the strongest and best of them. . . at the time it is a matter of doing what seems to be (but frequently is not) best, fighting unknown enemies and following unknown paths which as often as not end in the dark in a forest full of the lurking beasts of the passions.

She makes it clear that it is the same with the flow of our own sympathies as we meet the problems – and her justification of Spenser in this matter is given in the following terms: "Faeryland is very close to what it feels like to be living in a world whose significance is only dimly and occasionally discernible". Excellent! – a good deal of **Faerie Queene's** charm, its hold on us, must

come from just this. But Miss Williams does not see to what extent this quality is a negative virtue. Isn't one of the points of difference between the world of a work of art and the 'sublunary dusk' (to use her phrase) of the world in which we live precisely that the presentation in art of a situation would contain the whole moral truth about that situation? If one is deceived, one should be able to see afterwards that one need not have been. Spenser's distrust of the senses and of intuition, reinforced by the Puritan distrust of man as a creature, is ultimately a lack of faith in the powers of the part of his consciousness which makes him an artist. So to a certain extent, he gives up – hence the arbitrariness, almost accidentalness of his plan – he has resigned himself to the fact that there will be gaps between his perceptions anyway.

The limitations I have already noticed in Spenser's imagination must be at any rate partly due to these things. The process of penetrating the world with the aid of his senses and their intuition was one that was suspect to him before it had really got going – at any rate at an exceptionally simple stage, for a poet. Hence, for a poet of his gifts, the portion of existence which his imagination was able to fill, is extraordinarily limited. Inside this limitation he is able to make things exist with an intensity nobody can rival. He poured all his excess powers into doing something which was less than he should have been capable of doing.

The temptation that most commentators on **Faerie Queene** will fall into is to forget that, of a poet, we ask first and foremost, not wisdom about the things of the world, expressed in a more or less suitable and adequate form, but the addition of a new sense to our armoury – a new faculty to question our surroundings with. Spenser gives a sense of the physical presence of things – but what has this to do with his moral vision? Especially if the loathing or delight that the physicality of things excites in us is deliberately shown to be suspect?

10th Day On reflection, it seems there is indeed an evaluative sense-organ wakened in us by Spenser's presentation of things, a sense before which they reveal themselves for what they really are, morally. How can I have ignored it all this time? This is the sense developed not through an understanding of beauty (to which Spenser's heroes respond naively, not to say simple-mindedly), but as the result of a lifetime spent jealously guarding one's 'honour'.

So you have it then. Understanding what you mean by 'honour' here should be the purpose of your further reading. In

what proportions does it unite self-reliance, loyalty to a social code, religious humility? What is this thing 'honour' that it should have such clear ideas about things, simply by watching the effect that their existence, appealing to one as a fellow-creature, has on one? Perhaps a better understanding of Marvell's **A Dialogue between The Resolved Soul, And Created Pleasure** would help you, though Spenser is different again. But one feels it over and over, as particularly in the Bowre of blis: an uneasiness in the presence of what makes no demands on one, flatters one with the sense of rewards that are no more than one's desert, renders the spirit effete with its offer of security.

It is a thing understandable in terms of the literary critic's watchfulness against the too easy appeal – surely the most shameful trickery to have succumbed to, because of the element of flattery that was in it. Isn't the intensity of the loathing released on the unveiling of Duessa's true form in Book I partly a reflection of this – the particular anger, basically self-directed, that one feels at having been duped in this way? (Though admittedly the passage seems neurotic in a way that can't be entirely explained in these terms.) Nothing is as hateful as the thing one was once deceived by.

Arthur, of course, who is responsible for the destruction of Duessa's disguise, is the central embodiment of this power which can shatter the illusory –

*But all that was not such as seemed in sight
Before that shield did fade, and suddene fall.*

And what is there in him that, almost before we see him act or speak, we recognise in him the kind of person who, simply by his arrival on the scene, clarifies all issues – a friend, in short? You would have done better to have concentrated on Spenser's creation of people, his ability to make one feel the presence of a friend or an enemy. He presents all his heroes already surrounded with an aura of familiarity and affection. What is it? Partly the romance tradition, the associations clinging to the knight errant; partly a caste feeling, surely? There is a sense of 'us and them' at times, which one often feels as a limitation, a snobbish belief that there is a 'right' way to be or to do things.

But then, what of a creation such as the satyrs? I mean before Spenser fits them into his allegorical scheme – when he is simply invoking their presence:

*A troupe of Faunes and Satyres far away
Within the wood were dancing in a rownd*

The nobility we sense in them comes from a subtle and humanly strange relation to the earth, such as could only be conceived by the broadest and freest kind of imaginative power. When Spenser goes off on such a track as this, one doesn't feel like talking about limitations.

But this is enough to go on with.

Peter Strauss



GENETIC BLUEPRINT OF ROSES, ETC.

*Flowers with no future,
who mark life's joys and sorrows
lifting indelible*

*brief stillnesses out from time,
of greater moment than
the linked minutes in a man*

*are the immediacies
of your recalled tomorrows.
Within the flawed rose stands:*

*not law but its consequence,
not organ but impulse,
not synapse but memory,*

*not cells but their function,
not atoms but their temper,
not extent but intent:*

*a text of the rose entire.
Perfect, within each man
the willed perfection towers.*

Douglas Livingstone

THE HERITAGE

*I think of those unworldly men
beat out of hide, circumventive;
their galliass wives alien*

*across from the book between them.
Tramping plains and blue ravines: snake-
tracks down: up flanks: around wagon-*

*mining rocks: over parched aloes,
to the abuse of perched baboons.
Eternal hatreds, jealousies*

*born of each ford and decision;
brief alliances, longterm feuds
of cousin-cousin, father-son.*

*Mutated by wind, sun and thorn,
become indigenous: with wheels,
gunpowder, a black book to swat*

*in disarray the tribes aside.
Then banged the years of rifle-fire,
and days of burning homesteads passed.*

*With peace the cartridge-pouch remained
a while, as did the leather book.
In steel glass banks and hospitals,*

*from theatres and tennis courts
their history's incredible;
and yet today: a search for myths.*

*Somewhere the psychic break occurred:
a century was slipped: then life
of sorts, was taken up in this.*

*The book, read rarely now except
on farms where lamps are lit, still serves
of course. The rest seems myth enough.*

Douglas Livingstone

THE MAN BEHIND THE VERSE

What do you think of pleasure? Are you quite easy in its company? Marlowe wrote a short poem, and three other poets made conscious derivative poems.

*Come live with me and be my love
And we will all the pleasures prove....*

and then he lists all the pleasures he has in mind. Bright pleasures, rural and idyllic, without qualification or irony, they are a string of delights to entice a woman's eye. The poem ends

*If these delights thy mind may move
Then live with me and be my love.*

He is no consciously subtle wooer. The expectation is of a beautiful accord with his love. The tone is ardent, excited at the prospect of such delight. The mundane reality is neither called on nor excluded — he just isn't thinking of it. The pleasure and delight in prospect is strong enough to hold his attention — his evocation of it is strong enough. For the religious terminologist, he believes in pleasure; for the Nietzschean, his physiological make-up is robust enough for him to be joyful.

But the characteristics of the poet will be seen in contrast with the three others.

Donne's derivation is nearest the original.

*Come live with me and be my love
And we will some new pleasures prove,
Of golden sands and silver brooks,
With silken lines and silver hooks.*

Donne has the same pleased desire for sensual (sexual?) pleasure and delight. When the woman is bathing in the stream "Each fish will amorously to thee swim, Gladder to catch thee, than thou him". The associations of a woman, naked, in a clear running stream, surrounded by **amorous** fish, are associations of pleasure at beauty, and excited sexual delight. There is given in the poem, by these associations, the live beauty of the woman Donne has in mind. He has, as Marlowe, the same affection, love, expectation of pleasure and delight. But witty Donne has satirist's eyes — "silken lines and silver hooks". He expects a subtle, sly woman. **Bait** he titles his poem. And the poem isn't an enticement for the woman, as Marlowe's quite openly was; it is more a witty, satiric comment. "Thou thyself art thine own

bait", Donne says. He is hard, brilliant, satiric. Although the poem is formally addressed to the woman, the stance of the poet is often so objective that he seems to be standing by, sardonic and critical – and it would be a sophisticated, intellectual woman who would be personally pleased to be called a 'bait'. Donne sees the comic side, expects guile and subtlety from the woman (which Marlowe in his poem wouldn't) and knows he'll fall all the same. He accepts the position with easy, ironic good humour. "That fish that is not caught thereby, Alas, is wiser far than I". Donne would take the pleasure, and wants it for its sensuous desirability; but he would also take along his intellectual brilliance, satiric wit, for good company – in case the other went hard on him?

Maybe it was his constant expectation of the headsman on the next day that drove Raleigh to his moralisms. His first verse is by a man whose trusts have been constantly betrayed, a man soured by disappointments and deceits;

*If all the world and love were young,
And truth in every shepherd's tongue,
These pretty pleasures might me move
To live with thee and be thy love.*

"Pretty pleasures" – superciliousness and contempt. In his direct taking issue with the list he gives of the pleasures from Marlowe's poem, he says they "soon break, soon wither, soon forgotten: In fancy ripe, in season rotten".

What has a strong pleasure got to do with its own impermanence? This is Sunday School moralising counselling virginity. Raleigh's vituperation "in reason rotten", draws its strength from a disbelief in the present, and therefore in the pleasures of the present. I mean, he sees the skull beneath the skin: "But could youth last, and love still breed, Had joys no date, nor age no need".... He is overweighted with foresight. The energy of his expectations of pleasure and delight is insufficient to distract his morbid mind from the miserable future he sees. He looks at life and youth, and sees only death and grey hair.

He is the case of the man enervate with despair. He says "rest complains of cares to come". Even his rest is troubled. But his poem is a refutation of Marlowe's. But Marlowe doesn't talk of rest. Marlowe has "Shepherd swains shall dance and sing, For thy delight each May morning" Marlowe promises "beds of roses", probably more for pleasant exertion than rest, but certainly not for the rest from the weariness with life in Raleigh's poem. Marlowe's shepherd and his love will "sit upon the rocks by shallow rivers, to whose falls Melodious birds sing madrigals".

This is the quiet of fullness and pleasant satiety, of luxuriation, not rest from weariness and age.

Raleigh only allowed pleasures to heaven. His energy, instead of finding physical pleasure, went into the sort of gallows-humour that writes, as it awaits the headsman's axe,

*Seeing my flesh must die so soon,
And want a head to dine next noon*

Day Lewis is the sick nihilist. His reaction is one of incredulous deriding disbelief. Why?

*Come live with me and be my love
And we will all the pleasures prove
That peace and plenty, bed and board
And chance employment may afford.*

The first verse has technical skill, and humour and slickness that stick the lines in the memory. But what disgust and despair is in his tone when he views his future;

*At evening by the sour canals
We'll hope to hear some madrigals.
Care on thy maiden brow shall put
A wreath of wrinkles.*

No prospect of delight at all. His very viscera and musculature must be degenerate for such heavy sarcasm as this in answer to Marlowe's expectation of joy and delight.

*Hunger shall make thy modest zone
And cheat fond death of all but bone –
If these delights thy mind may move,
Then live with me and be my love –*

Disgust and despair. Beaten he was, by the war perhaps. "But lost in Flanders by medalled commanders, The lads of the village are vanished away".

His is the joyless evaluation – faced with the question of life his answer is "It is no good".

So, you can see the psychology behind Marlowe's poem, as in contradistinction to the more self-revealing psychologies behind the other three poems.

An interesting thing about Marlowe's idea of pleasure, is that he had no class prejudice in giving it to his dramatic characters. In the *Jew of Malta*, Ithamore, a Turkish slave, says to Bellamira, a prostitute who has seen better times (excellent times too, when she flourished amidst pleasures of the mind and body – "From Venice merchants, and from Padua were wont to come rare-

witted gentlemen, Scholars, I mean, learned and liberal") that they will "sail from hence to Greece, to lovely Greece. I'll be thy Jason, and thou my golden fleece....Thou in those groves, by Dis above, Shalt live with me and be my love". The speech is full of bright scenes, visions of lushness and pleasure. Dis being 'above' is Marlowe's quite gentle amusement with the scene, and it is as near as he gets to satire of the relationship. As a dramatist, his giving these lines to a slave to speak to a prostitute is a full generosity. Ithamore has a delighted, sexual excitement – "thou my golden fleece" – very sensuous – and he also has that line that haunted Marlowe with scenes of enjoyment and connubial gratification and accord – "live with me and be my love". The lack of irony is what is most notable to the student of the dramatist's psychology.

But from what has been said so far, it might seem to have been argued that Marlowe was an unthinking buffoon of a lyrical pastoralist. So it is well to see some examples of other characteristics of his drama. This first is an example of a type of harsh sense of humour.

In the **Jew of Malta**, Pilia Borza is described by Barabbas, who is both scared of and sardonically amused at him; "A shaggy, tottered, staring slave, that when he speaks, draws out his grizzly beard, and winds it twice or thrice about his ear; whose face has been the grindstone to men's swords; his hands are hacked, some fingers cut quite off; who, when he speaks, grunts like a hog, and looks like one employed in catzerie and cross-biting; such a rogue as is the husband to a hundred whores". The audience must enjoy the description, and Barabbas's emotions in giving it; but they will also see the formidable, uncompromising power of the ruffian, a power that cannot be out-faced or diminished by any indignant and amused summary. Even though he is also comic, he is as harsh and uncompromising a reality as Barnadine in **Measure for Measure**, who, although his death warrant is come, flatly refuses to fall to his prayers and then be executed, and so exit.

Then Marlowe can turn easily to that side of life that we are even less calm with than with an uncomfortable hard sense of humour; he can see the frightening, violent aspects of life, unalloyed and unqualified with the defences of irony or moral reprobation that a lesser dramatist would need. That Marlowe was at home with, and could watch, clear-eyed, (without that despairing, modern sense of absurdity, that life is fractured, inconsistent and meaningless) the horrors of life, is seen by the most cursory reading of **Tamburlaine** – as when the hundred virgins come out of besieged Damascus to plead him not to sack the city, and Tamburlaine orders them to be speared by the

horsemen, who then "on Damascus walls hoisted up their slaughtered carcasses" – or in the grizzly scene of the captive emperor Dajazeth, who, driven desperate by Tamburlaine's goading him, brains himself by running against the iron bars of his cage; this is followed by his wife's discovering him dead, and after a terrible, hysterical, screamed record of Tamburlaine's goading and savagery – "Go to my child; away, away. Ah, save that infant, save him, save him. The sun was down, streamers white, red and black. Let the soldiers be buried. Hell, death, Tamburlaine, hell" etc, she also brains herself. Or one could turn to Tamburlaine's stabbing his gentle pleasure-loving son because he was not a soldier and had not won any honour.

One even wonders, when one looks at Marlowe's plays, with their black comic, or bloody endings, whether he had a taste for the cruel and barbaric – and this would, to us, be a curious travelling companion for such a similarly sustained taste for such sensuousness of idea as "I'll cull thee out the fairest courtezans and bring them every morning to thy bed" (long, luxurious, fresh mornings, not hurried nights – nights would be for the pleasure of sleep – "confound these passions with a quiet sleep"), or for such a rapturous, sexual tone as brings to life Faustus's consolation for coming damnation: "Was this the face that launched a thousand ships, And burnt the topless towers of Illium? – Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss". (This, surely, is Marlowe's apotheosis of sexual pleasure.) The speech ends, "and none but thou shalt be my paramour" (exeunt Faustus, Helen, and Cupids).

Perhaps only the man who had the strength of mind to look clearly and unflinchingly into the worst horrors of life, Tamburlaine rampant, savage, cruel, in jubilation at his continual bloody triumphs, and Faustus, panic-stricken, snatched by devils to hell, perhaps only he, in his ease, could take the best pleasures unqualified and whole?

John Vear

DAVID PLAYING TO SAUL – REMBRANDT

I

*Withdrawn to play into the picture
His subtlety, and stand outside.
This is David.*

*What did they pick you for, to play
Up with the curve of your harp
From your breast to the self-pity of a king?*

*Don't you know it's dangerous, a broken hero?
But – inexplicable way of artists –
You were honoured, that's all.*

II

*He's tying the turban of a king.
He listens to his fathers' voices,
Telling him what the mission means.
He questions his harp with raised eyebrows.
No fear: he is ironic; he is whole.
As a satyr looks down on a nymph,
And feels only the last threads of his desire
Which has been filled,*

this is how he smiles under his beard.

*He is shadowed, his fingers,
His hands can hardly be seen to touch the strings,*

III

*But they unbind, and rejoin,
And this man's shame grows shameless,
And tears burn his breast-bone.
He discovers strength in the love of his doom.
The turban is knotted, the head can bear it,
And the lozenge-shaped hand, like the head of a snake,
Rests more firm on the shaft of the spear.*

JAPANESE WOODCUT

*The handsome man's daughter,
Herself a cupid's bow, bends over his face
In all attention, putting lipstick on his pursed mouth.*

*In the foreground,
A mother's oblique comfort finds for one second
Its answer here
In line*

*Where the adolescent girl, her long neck bent,
Stands in fresh sorrow. In one corner*

*A lion-footed bowl of antique workmanship
Filled with rice like money, chopsticks, a teapot.*

Two extra sandals (a glimpse through the doorway) – Whose?

GOLDEN-HEADED CONURE

*Oh Mrs Merdle, bright-eyes,
Look at you now! An object of laughter.
Look, your little nest of crimson and gold
Has come off on your feathers! Brass
Vehicle of jungle laughter and hate.*

Ah, Fortuna! This was a fine woman once.

THINGS

*The slender ring that binds a man's life!
And some few things in it are enchanted.
Faces and flowers, lamp-bulbs and lilac- ;
Every man, unerring, his choice Pierian roses.*

Dreams and returns are the only reminders.

*Till the journey by water where they glow again –
Copper forests and the black lakes –
And his chosen colours cluster into their primal glare.
To be held in the dark – this bouquet,
These impossible perfumes – on the doorstep.*

Peter Strauss

REVIEWS:

BACK IN THE USSR

The main locale of the novel is a special prison, (a research institute employing highly qualified political prisoners) in an outer suburb of Moscow. The setting is Stalinist Russia and the vast novel (600 pages) extends over a time span of only 3 days.

Solzhenistyn uses no innovations in his treatment of time. His failure to utilise the time sequence effectively produces a general clumsiness in the structure of the novel. The novel opens with Volodin, a member of the Foreign Service, warning a prominent doctor of his impending arrest. From here, we move immediately to the special prison Mavrino. No mention is made of Volodin for another 65 chapters. Instead, we are immersed in the life of the Special Prison, its working, the research involved, the prisoners, the warders and Stalin.

On the publication of the translated novels in the West, Solzhenistyn was acclaimed "a writer of rare honesty and unusual talent". What the reader is most struck by on reading his latest novel is the writer's struggle between honest expression and his attempt to flatter Western preconceptions of life and political organisation in Russia.

Solzhenistyn's attempts to flatter Western sensibility are generally crude and awkward. The sense of unreality, of the artist's deliberate attempt to make a statement, permeate phrases such as

"For this handful of Germans, thrown by fate into the golden cage of a special prison in the heart of this bleak and barbarous country...."

"And having the normal human capacity to identify himself with others he failed to see these men as they were made to be at his political education class."

"The First Circle" by Alexander Solzhenistyn

"It wasn't that she had stopped believing in the reality of the imperialists' dark designs."

His treatment of Stalin is on the whole sensationalistic.

"The name of this man was forever headlined in the world's newspapers, intoned by thousands of announcers in hundreds of languages, declaimed by orators, piped by childish voices, chanted in benediction by priests."

The intended irony falls flat because of the heavy-handed treatment. Solzhenistyn's portrayal of Stalin's thoughts is similarly unconvincing.

"But then it was not easy to be the greatest man alive".

"However routine the occasion, he insisted on dressing the part of the man of destiny. With his iron will his unshakeable resolve."

"Why was it that the people he liquidated had always managed to be right about something."

"Stalin could not help thinking that, although people called him the wisest of wise, they had still not given him his full due."

The constant references to Stalin as the Policeman's Best Friend, the Greatest Strategist in History, the Great Generalissimo, the Sailor's Best Friend, the Immortal One, etc., can only be seen as clumsy attempts at irony. Nowhere are we given examples which might contradict the statements and thus give the irony some force.

Solzhenistyn makes no real attempt to understand the man Stalin. We see Stalin as weak, frail, bad-tempered, egocentric and incapable of intelligent thought. These may be valid interpretations; what we object to is that we are told what we ought to think about Stalin, we are given no convincing illustrations. The descriptions stand out as shabby attempts to establish a point.

The theme Solzhenistyn tries to develop is man's search for a soul. The prisoner Nerzhin manages to establish a calmness and security in himself which even transfer from the special prison cannot break. Solzhenistyn's attempts to portray a similar development in other characters fails.

Volodin, the Foreign Minister, is eventually arrested. The sequence of his arrest and the succeeding 10 hours is one of the most skilfully handled in the novel. The movement from the artificial time conscious sphere of the upper class strata of Mos-

cow to the timelessness of the prison is effectively captured. We see the man's inability to understand what is going on in the prison. He collapses before the combined forces of the interrogators and the warders. The shallowness of his previous life, his inability to understand the fundamental truths of human existence all become glaringly obvious to him. The idea of the prison as the catalyst whereby man arrives at his essential human dignity is well utilised in this section. It is unfortunate that this idea fails in the general context.

The scenes in which Volodin is expecting arrest are unconvincing and artificial. They appear as blatant statement by the artist on the shallowness of the upper class society.

It is always difficult to assess a translation. The phrasing here is often awkward and the language frequently becomes sentimental and trite. We read

"In this way, the cunningly wrought chain
broke at the link formed by a woman's heart."

"Her father and mother still loved each other
like two newlyweds."

"One of them (curls in hair) alone would have
been enough to ensnare the heart of a young
poet."

Solzhenistyn's use of symbolism is clumsy. The laboured explanation of the title comes in the first chapter. The special prisons are compared to the first circle of Dante's Hell. The reference is repeated at the end "Mavrino is the best, the highest, the first circle of Hell. It's almost Paradise". These words are unsatisfying in context, uttered as they are by the sensitive Nerzhin. No cynicism is intended, rather the resounding ring of conviction. It is unfortunate that Solzhenistyn chooses to use his characters to make statements entirely unrelated to their own thoughts in an attempt to secure a unity in the work. The real weakness of the work is its failure to hang together as a novel. The Mavrino prison is generally handled convincingly and perceptively. Where the work collapses is in Solzhenistyn's attempt to extend his perceptions into a discussion of the political frame-work of Russia.

It is in the ending that Solzhenistyn markedly illustrates his quality as a writer. The prison vans are disguised as food lorries. The novel ends with a Parisian journalist commenting on the well organised food supplies. The point is deftly made and the irony sound and we are left with a sense of the mystery of Russia.

Mary Johnstone

BULLETING

MR. DE BRUYN

The title of Mr de Bruyn's most recent book of verse is taken from a short poem. We read

*God is dead. Long live God.
The dogs bark, but
the caravan moves on*

and at the bottom of the page a note 'Durban 1964-68'. There is also a picture of a horse-drawn caravan which is moving away with a dog tied to it. The dog is barking at two other dogs, these loose. What are we to make of Mr de Bruyn's labour of 4 (maybe 5) years? We know Nietzsche said "God is dead" (if only because Mr de Bruyn has said so two pages before, giving a different reason for the demise). We know the British say "the King is dead, long live the King" when the old king dies and the new succeeds. We know a proverb that means criticism will never really stop progress (change). If Mr de Bruyn thinks he has built a coherent and convincing poem out of this, then I must have missed something. (The reader is invited to try for himself). Speculation on the significance of the poem seems worthless, however, when we see how Mr de Bruyn, in his other poems, not only changes "God" to suit his mood, but never progresses far beyond a Sunday-school level of discussion with whatever "God" he chooses.

In the preceding poem **Mid-Ocean** we see the writer's concern that God has left the universe unshepherded and lost

*But what is our course
And which is our port
And who, as of now,
Shall decide to decide*

In **Prayer** God is asked to keep the writer in pain enough to let him write good poetry (lots of suffering helps you know) after which God can take away the pain. (God is lured with the promise of a song to his glory). In the manqué-Hopkins of **Bewilderment**

"Bulletin to the Rabble", Phillip de Bruyn, illustrated Chris Lovell, Buren publishers, 1969.

God brings the writer low, makes him live on hands and knees and has "greater burdens up (his) sleeve". We read of a God who finds the writer as repugnant as the writer finds the "ugly wasp". We also have God as the great advertiser in **For advertising men only** where we read

*God knows it's hard to find
A thing that's fresh
To say of life.*

(One does not know the extent of God's responsibility when reading

*But somehow babies go on being born,
The product still sells well)*

In **Camouflage** God is the generous spirit who gives most creatures means of escape while providing "much healthier fare" for Mr de Bruyn and all the other "Lions who feed on Life". (I do not think that that is meant to be self-parody).

In **Germination** Mr de Bruyn seems to make a decision to discard the notion of an active God:

*Rid me, Lord, of my too-many selves –
For how can I be self-possessed
When I'm possessed by several selves?*

*But God, as Aristotle knew,
Is not an active force,
And either acorns into oaks will grow
Or just be feed for swine.*

I do not think that Mr de Bruyn can argue that all these conceptions are poetically valid. Mr de Bruyn's "God" is eventually nothing more than a figure of speech, and a very confused figure at that.

The standard procedure of the poems is neatly encapsulated in **White Bird**. We read

*White bird low on storm-dark sea
What meaning has your flight for me?
So steadily and straight you fly
So resolutely all pass by;
Your wings the wavetops almost meet
Yet always them of contact cheat
White bird free of storm-dark sea
Like you I'd have my caught soul be.*

The writer picks a simile and equates it with something else without any real force or imagination or power or fusion entering the process. Boats going out to sea = people dying (Big

boats = important people, little boats = unknown little people). The journey of the ship = the journey of the human life in time. Wasp/person = (or does it ?) person/God. The spectacle of Mr de Bruyn limply following his similes home is not a pleasant one. The banal rhymes of **White Bird** reveal the rhythmic disaster in full but there is not one poem in which Mr de Bruyn earns full approval for technical competence.

White Bird also shows another of Mr de Bruyn's tendencies that of a sentimental and nostalgic approach to nature. (See also **Cedarberg, Storm Lilies**.) John Wain writes

I knew I was not animal or plant:

My way was harder:

in **Time Was** and the whole poem acts as a useful corrective to Mr de Bruyn's type of identification.

In spite of the title of the collection, the writer shows a fond hope for 'communication' and what some may think an unhealthy attitude to his art. In **Kilroy was here** we read

This moment

I shall not spend on needs of now;

I'll put it in these lines instead

And hoard it thus

For you, some future self,

Who one day to this verse will come.

Reach out to me, O self-to-be

And let's play leapfrog over Time.

about which comment seems unnecessary.

I think **Harrismith** the best poem in the collection, even though it is a structural failure and that whatever is being said (if anything is, of course!) isn't satisfactory. The poem is finally only three incidents into which the poet is pumping desperately (O river of willows, river of weeping!) but the reporting has a certain interest.

If Mr de Bruyn is an advertising man, this book would justify the suspicions of every English Department about the debasing effects of advertising. These are hard words but Mr de Bruyn will always be able to dismiss me as one of his 'sterile academics', so I am not too worried about his feelings. For those who are interested in poetry or in being poets, this is a drastic example of the need for dedication, discipline and thought.

Mediocribus esse poetis

Non homines, non di, non concessere columnae.

Ian Glenn

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