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EDITORIAL COMMENT

The Publications Committee having decided that we should now expand in two directions, towards pictorial illustration and creative work, *Theoria* 17 makes, for the present editors, its first incursion into one of these fields. We are happy to have got from Mr H. W. D. Manson a scene from his newest and as yet unpublished play.

The long promised symposium on the Population Problem is here—more of a duet than a symposium perhaps, since there are only two partakers. But we hope that our guests will quaff deep later on, or at least join the party in our correspondence columns.

It is encouraging to have an article in Afrikaans again at last and we hope that it won't prove to be the one swallow of the proverb.

THE EDITORS

POPULATION INCREASE AND NATURAL SELECTION

by D. E. VAN DIJK

IT IS ESTIMATED that, if the present trends were to continue, the human population of the earth would be twice as great in the year 2000 as it is in 1961. Darwin observed that there is a tendency for all organisms to increase in numbers because the offspring in the early stages of their existence are always more numerous than their parents; and further he observed that the numbers of any species remain more or less constant. From these observations he deduced that there must be competition for survival; and, since organisms vary appreciably, he deduced that there would be Natural Selection of favourable variations (Favoured Races as he termed them). That humans are increasing in numbers as rapidly as they are, raises the question of whether they are subject to 'Natural Selection and Survival of Favoured Races'.

The blood condition known as sickle-cell anaemia is so prevalent among the negroid peoples of Central Africa that these peoples might be regarded as a race of sickle-cell anaemics. A study of the condition of sickle-cell anaemia has revealed that individuals inheriting the condition from both parents are abortive and that those individuals not exhibiting the anaemia are much more prone to die of malaria than the sickle-cell anaemics. The sickle-cell anaemics are those individuals inheriting the 'gene' for the condition from one parent only, and their sperms and ova may or may not transmit the gene with equal probability, i.e. half the sperms and ova transmit the gene. It is now well established that the sickle-cell anaemia is relatively disadvantageous in malaria-free regions, but advantageous in malarial areas because it confers on its possessors some measure of immunity to malaria. For the entire population to be sickle-cell anaemics half the individuals beginning development would have to die either from the lethal effect of inheriting the condition from both parents, or from malaria when inheriting it from neither. This is perhaps best expressed diagrammatically:

Constitution of Sickle-cell Father	*Constitution of Sickle-cell Mother*
Sickle gene + 'Normal' gene	Sickle gene + 'Normal' gene
Sperm of Sickle-cell Father	*Ova of Sickle-cell Mother*
(*a*) with Sickle-cell gene	(*c*) with Sickle-cell gene
(*b*) with 'Normal'-cell gene	(*d*) with 'Normal'-cell gene
(*a*) + (*c*) gives:	(*b*) + (*d*) gives:
Double Sickle-cell Progeny	Non-Sickle-cell Progeny

(*a*) + (*d*) and (*b*) + (*c*) give:
Sickle-cell Progeny

The Double Sickle-cell individuals (technically known as Sickle-cell Homozygotes) abort; the Non-Sickle-cell individuals ('normal' individuals) tend to die of malaria before reaching reproductive age; the Sickle-cell individuals (technically known as Sickle-cell Heterozygotes) tend to resist malaria and survive to reproductive age.

Natural Selection quite clearly does operate in man in this case and ensures the survival of favoured races (Sickle-cell Heterozygotes); but in addition to Natural Selection of this type there is the phenomenon of Human Selection (a special case of Natural Selection) which may or may not promote survival. An example is provided by the fortunes of families, royal or rich, in which there is a tendency to marry the sons off to heiresses. In a surprisingly few generations the families die out (i.e. there are no sons) because there has been selective mating for absence of males (heirs) in the mothers' families. This tendency is made stronger when marriage occurs relatively late in the lives of the heirs and heiresses, as such marriages always tend to produce fewer boys than girls. (Conversely, the increased ratio of boys to girls observed in children born during and following wars is due to the relatively greater frequency of young marriages during wars).

It must not be thought that the ratio of the numbers of male and female children of moribund families or young parents is a reflection of a change in the ratio of the sexes of the individuals conceived. It is a question of modification of viability of male embryos. In any group of mammals male embryos at early stages always outnumber female embryos, and they outnumber them more than at later stages. By birth the number of males barely exceeds the number of females, and later in life females exceed males. Human females, having survived the males and reached a certain age, appear to become immortal according to James Thurber. It is apparent that considerable numbers of embryos must abort to influence the sex ratio at birth appreciably. That one quarter of the progeny of sickle-cell anaemic parents should abort becomes less surprising. Examination of the ovaries of pregnant slaughter animals has, in fact, established that the number of ova which were released exceeds the number of embryos found. About twenty-five per cent of mammalian ova do not yield embryos viable enough to survive to birth.

From the foregoing there can be little doubt that Natural Selection (including Human Selection) does act on humans. It is also possible from the foregoing to deduce the influence medico-social services, such as malaria-control, would have on a population. Suppose the population in a malarial area was composed entirely of sickle-cell anaemics (sickle-cell heterozygotes). Completely effective malaria control would promptly increase the population potential by 50% by permitting the survival of non-sickle-cell individuals. If non-sickle individuals were more viable than sickle-cell anaemics the increase would be greater. There would also be

a long term effect produced by gradual elimination of the sickle-cell genes in the abortive sickle-cell homozygotes, and also possibly by a greater number of offspring being left by the non-sickle-cell individuals born, than by the same number of sickle-cell individuals. This effect would result in decrease in the frequency of the sickle-cell gene in the gene-'pool' of the population. The present frequency and rate of elimination of the sickle-cell gene in American Negroes accords well with the presumed time since they left the malarial areas of Africa and the presumed frequency of the gene at that time. The progressive elimination of the sickle-cell gene will mean a progressive decrease in the number of sickle-cell homozygotes and therefore abortions, and there will be an *increase in birth rate* if the conception rate remains unchanged. Two conclusions concerning medico-social services, such as malaria-control, can be drawn: Firstly, medico-social services can increase the survival rate of children born, and also increase the birth rate; and secondly, the survival of the population may become dependent on the continuation of the services. It is the latter which should cause the gravest concern.

The sickle-cell condition is said to exhibit dominance over the non-sickle condition, which is referred to as recessive. It is instructive to consider how the dominance of an advantageous condition such as sickle-cell anaemia might have arisen. It is possible that a change—a mutation—in the hereditary material of an individual occurred, causing a change in the blood pigment of a child whenever this 'gene' was inherited from one parent or both. The change in the individual inheriting the gene from both parents would be greater than when inherited from only one and could have been lethal from the start. The greater viability of the sickle-cell heterozygotes, caused by the resistance of their changed blood pigment to the malaria parasite, would gradually result in the 'gene' becoming more frequent until it was the 'normal' condition. It is probable that the evolution of the sickle-cell condition did not occur in this way; but rather that not only was the spread of the gene through the population gradual, but also the effectiveness of the gene was gradually attained. In other words, a mutation to a *recessive* condition occurred, and only when the new gene was inherited from both parents did the individual exhibit the change, and even then probably only in a slight degree, i.e. only some of the blood pigment was changed. This slight change gave a slight advantage to the rare individuals possessing it and gradually the gene not only became more frequent by selection and by its arising by mutation in more individuals, but also the milieu in which the gene acted, i.e. the gene complex, became modified to enhance the effect of the gene. The gene thus gradually gained dominance and, incidentally, its lethal effect in the homozygotes. The observed tendency for dominance of advantageous genes and recessivity of disadvantageous ones is accounted for under this explanation. The gradual acquisition of dominance does not make necessary the

assumption that an advantageous condition could arise in one fell swoop, and then spread by Selection; it implies that Selection is responsible for both the spread of the gene and also for its effectiveness, including its dominance. R. A. Fisher has remarked that Natural Selection is a mechanism for the generation of a high degree of improbability. It is important to realise that the implications of this are that 'normality'—the possession of advantageous genes —is highly improbable.

A significant fact about mutations in relation to population changes is that a mutation which has occurred in one individual tends to appear in other individuals—there is some potential for the change. Usually the reverse mutation may also occur. When a mutation has been selected for and has become dominant and characteristic of the species, the reverse mutation will be towards a disadvantageous recessive. Mutation in the disadvantageous direction usually has a lower frequency than mutation back to 'normal'. If one disadvantageous mutation occurs for every ten mutations back to 'normal' there will nevertheless have to be 1/10th as many disadvantageous genes in circulation as 'normal' ones, before a balance will be struck. For example, 100,000 normal genes give 1 abnormal; 10,000 abnormal genes give 1 normal; considered together there is no change. As has been pointed out 'normality' is highly improbable. Mutations are occurring all the time in the gene-pool of the human population tending to produce departures from the normal, such as mental deficiency, congenital blindness, deafness, perforated heart septa, etc. Only when these departures are very common will back-mutations to normal take place to any significant extent.

Mutation and Selection are well illustrated by an experiment with a series of races of the fruit-fly, *Drosophila*, which were less fit than normal, i.e. which, owing to various disabilities, tended to produce fewer mature progeny than normal strains. These less than normally viable races were each cultured in crowded conditions for several generations. Their viability increased to normal levels and even beyond, competition having eliminated the various disabilities suffered by the various races or strains by favouring the survival of hereditary material of the individuals reaching maturity and leaving the most offspring. The selection acted upon the variability of the stocks and the uncommon, more viable forms, soon became common. The most significant feature of the results obtained was that when the cultures were subjected to X-rays, the rate of increase in viability or 'fitness' was much greater than otherwise. X-rays are known to increase mutation rates and the increased mutation rates increased the variability in favourable as well as unfavourable directions. That such rarities as favourable mutations should come to be characteristic of particular races of fruit-flies is highly improbable; that they do shows how apt is Fisher's remark.

When Natural Selection is reduced by preventing crowding in

cultures of fruit-flies and by isolating less viable strains so that competition with more viable ones is eliminated, more and more less-viable animals are produced, and the process is hastened by X-rays or other radiation. Not only is Natural Selection a mechanism for generating a high degree of improbability, but it is also a mechanism for *maintaining* a high degree of improbability, departures from 'normality' in some, usually deleterious, direction being more probable than 'normality' and hence occurring when Natural Selection is reduced. In our society numerous activities are having effects on Selection which result in its reduction, and other activities are having effects on mutation rates which must be deleterious when Selection is reduced.

The rate at which human activities bring about change in the communal hereditary material—the gene-pool—is usually small, but the conclusions to which the changes will lead are nevertheless inevitable. J. B. S. Haldane has remarked that mentally defectives are 'the fit' in our society because they produce on the average more offspring than other groups. Unless the mentally defectives are to become the majority something must be done to limit their fecundity. Haldane remarks that the meek (mentally defectives) do tend to inherit the earth and eugenics is an active protest against the fact. The gene for mental deficiency is recessive and thus a mentally defective individual may crop up when two people who may be apparently perfectly normal, but who each possess the gene, reproduce. Only 1/4th of the children of these 'carriers' will, on the average, be mentally defective, but mentally defectives tend to breed together and all their children will then be mentally defective. Congenital blindness and deafness in our society are not serious handicaps to performance of the one function which will determine the frequency of the conditions in the future—reproduction. But it is not the obvious disadvantageous conditions such as mental deficiency, blindness and deafness which constitute the gravest danger for the human race; it is a host of ill-defined malfunctions of every organ of the body that threaten to become common instead of rarities.

The degree to which Natural Selection can be reduced is the degree to which surgeons and social workers, public health authorities and medical practitioners can help individuals to survive to parenthood in spite of hereditary disadvantages. Each child that survives a 'hole-in-the-heart' operation to father or bear children later, tends to bring the day a little nearer when every heart must be so treated; every congenitally blind person passing genes into the general pool tends to bring closer the day when the surgeon performing the 'hole-in-the-heart' operation will be blind. Every atomic bomb, atomic pile and atomic furnace, every X-ray tube brings the pie-bald, blind, deaf, idiotic, spastic, brittle-boned, cancerous future a little nearer. There are no safe doses of radiation in the absence of Natural Selection, not, that is, if by safe we mean safe for the race and not the individual.

The existence of a problem of population increase is being recognized, but for some reason the extent of the problem is seldom appreciated outside zoological circles. The argument is sometimes raised by sociologists that improvement in the living standard diminishes population increase, and agriculturalists, chemists, and physicists wax enthusiastic about the prospect of improved food, material and energy supplies to meet the population increase. But the problem is not merely that more people are born, but also that the composition of the population is changing. It is a question not merely of 'how many?' but also of 'what?'

What is to be done? While the life expectation of every person born should be made as high as possible, some method of preventing the birth of progeny to individuals who could not survive without medical or social protection must be devised. Now that artificial insemination and egg transplantation are practical proceedings, couples technically 'unfit' can produce 'fit' children conceived by other fathers or mothers or by other couples. The average number of children, however, should not exceed the number of breeding adults. These are the minimum requirements to prevent gross deterioration of the human race.

That the study of the mechanics of evolution should be accorded the importance at present reserved for engineering, agriculture, chemistry and physics should be obvious. The study of evolution is *not* a purely academic subject. It is not only because it is essential that deterioration of the human race must be prevented that evolution should be studied, the power to evolve in chosen directions rests with the human race provided that the principles of evolution can be learnt and applied. The difficulties in applying them will be theological, sociological and political rather than zoological.

A change in attitude towards the student of evolution—and of zoology, which is permeated with evolution—is sorely needed. Julian Huxley has been criticized for daring comment on the destiny of man. In fact, the zoologist is the most competent to speak on the subject.

POPULATION: A POLITICAL SCIENTIST'S FOOTNOTE

by E. H. BROOKES

MR VAN DIJK has kindly allowed me to read his article on *Population Increase and Natural Selection.* The notes which follow do not constitute an attempt either to support or to attack his conclusions, for I have not the expert knowledge to do either. They are merely an extensive footnote from the point of view of a student of Political Science.

It is submitted in the first place that the problem of over-population is by no means as immediately urgent as many people suppose and as some might suppose after reading Mr van Dijk's article, although he himself has not said so. An elementary point in population studies, yet one which must be continually repeated, is that there is no such thing as over-population, except in relation to food resources. What appears to be over-population may just as well be too little food as too many people, and this is the situation at present. Localised instances of over-population do exist. Some portions of India, Southern and Eastern China, and even the tribal reserves in the Province of Natal, not one of which produces enough food for its population, are good examples. To these local situations various political and economical remedies are applicable. Among them is the provision of food from outside, which is done in South Africa by the very dubious method of employing migrant labour for wages, and it is done in the extreme case of famine in countries like India and China. It is very desirable that under the United Nations a World Food Bank should exist, with effective measures for bringing food to famine stricken areas. A more radical political reform is the removal of restrictions on immigration, so that those areas of the world where food production exceeds population could receive some of the surplus population of countries in the opposite position. Brazil, by receiving tens of thousands of Japanese immigrants, has done much to ease over-population in Japan.

Coming next to world population as a whole, we have no right to say that the world is over-populated or to call for legal measures to restrict population unless we have brought world food production up to its maximum figure. This the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations has not even begun to do. When one considers the intensive cultivation of an area like Israeli, the terraced vineyards in Switzerland and the rice fields of Java, one realises that most areas of the world are producing only a small fraction of what they could. The attempts of Israeli to reclaim the Negev are being watched with much interest, for if once desert reclamation can be carried out the sources of the world's food supply

can be immensely increased. Ordinary irrigation can also do much in many parts of the world. At the other extreme there is the question of clearing jungle and using it for food crops. There is also the careful selection of seed, by which the most productive crops can be favoured at the expense of others, as the Food and Agricultural Organisation has been doing with rice. Finally there are the immense harvests of the sea which, in comparison with all that is available, have scarcely been touched. It would, of course, by a mere guess, but it is not an unintelligent guess to say that if every food resource of land and sea were thoroughly used the world could probably carry from five to ten times its present population.

It must at once be admitted that this only postpones the inevitable issue. It may postpone it for some centuries, but sooner or later, if the old 'remedies' of war and disease do not operate we shall have to face the real issue of overpopulation.

A final point which I should like to make as a political scientist is to draw attention to the extreme difficulty of legislating to prevent over-population. Every road which we tread leads ultimately to the horror of infanticide. We shrink from the logical consequences of our theories, but this is the only way by which a law restricting population could be effectively enforced.

Consider the alternatives. To compel the use of contraceptives would mean stationing a policeman in every bedroom. To penalise a family for having more than the prescribed number of children is not to reduce population but to ensure that a portion of it is brought up with less than adequate nutrition and other comforts. Impenetrable darkness faces the political scientist as he tries to see any effective *legal* methods of checking over-population.

What of propaganda? The difficulty of propaganda as we have seen it so far with almost monotonous uniformity (the writer knows of only one exception) is that those sections of the community apparently best fitted to bring up children are those which reduce the number and that the poorer classes of the community do not respond to propaganda and continue to have large families. The raising of the status of women and a better distribution of wealth will undoubtedly be of some help, but the redistribution of wealth in the Soviet Union does not seem to have had a material effect on the birth rate of the Union as a whole.

In this analysis we have assumed that the efforts of the World Health Organisation to reduce infantile mortality and to combat disease will be more and more successful, that the expectation of life will be increased and that war will be abolished. Of these assumptions the last is the most questionable. If a third world war were to take place the rate of population increase would be abruptly checked and if it were a nuclear war it would be many centuries indeed before the world would have to trouble about the population question.

Political science is in the position to offer encouragement and

hope as regards this problem for many centuries to come, even though the old population restrictions of war and disease should not prevail. It has the right and duty to point out the necessity of a concerted world effort to increase food production, but once the issue has to be faced, though it be in the far distant future, political science can offer no remedy of its own. We can only hope that in the intervening centuries man will have come to see solutions which are not now available to us. There is no need to try to force population restriction in the meantime which would be far ahead of the necessities of the situation.

DIE INTEGRASIE VAN DIE OERTEKS[1] IN D. J. OPPERMAN SE *BRANDAAN*[2]

Wie schrijft, schrijv' in den geest van
deze zee . . .

—H. Marsman[3]

deur P. D. VAN DER WALT

DIE GEDIG is geen stukkie op rym gebragte filosofie nie: deur die besondere organisasie van stofgegewe en taal, die besondere hantering van die materiaal, kortom, wat Brooks en Warren noem die dramatisering[4] van die materiaal, word die gedig 'n klein wêreldjie met 'n eie bestaansreg. Die digter verkondig nie deur sy gedig nie; die gedig spreek self, demonstreer. So is Opperman se opstel *Kuns is Boos!*[5] 'n betoog oor die verlossingstaak van die kunstenaar, sy probleme, middele en doel, volgens hierdie digter se siening, terwyl die digwerk *Brandaan* die kunstige bewysstuk is van hierdie omskeppingstaak van die kunstenaar in die algemeen en die digter in die besonder: hy moet die waarheid uit die werklikheid verlos deur middel van sy digwoord, soek daarin na die essensiële, die ‚inscape', die goddelike, die ‚logos' . . .[6] Wesenlik kom dit hierop neer dat die opstel uiteraard die verlossingsmotief moet verkondig, dit bly by teoretiseer, terwyl die gedig dit demonstreer—, . . . the best poetry supersedes both religion and philosophy'[7].

Wanneer 'n mens Opperman se opstel *Kuns is Boos!* lees, wat eweas *Probleme van die Versdrama*[8] 'n soort ‚oratio pro domo' is, dan word dit duidelik watter waarde en betekenis hy heg aan die Middel-nederlandse Brandaanlegende. Daarom verwonder dit jou geensins dat die gedagte- en gevoelswêreld waaruit die Brandaan-sonnetreeks ontspring het, saamgevat word in die genoemde opstel nie, dat die hele stuk om dié sentrale tema opgebou is net soos die sonnetreeks. Maar die prinsipiële verskil in die gebruik van die Brandaanverhaal as boustof in die opstel en dié in die sonnette is dat dit in die opstel illustrasiemateriaal vir 'n betoog is, terwyl dit in die sonnetreeks die lewensbloed van dié poësie is.

[1] Ek gebruik die woord ‚oerteks' hier om daarmee 'n geskrif aan te dui wat ouer is as Opperman se poësie, in gevalle soos die Middeleeuse gedigte selfs eeue ouer, waarna hierdie digter in sy verse verwys of wat bv. as basis, aanleiding of motto daarvoor dien.

[2] *Engel uit die Klip.* Bloemfontein/Johannesburg, 1950; bl. 45.

[3] *Tempel en Kruis, Verzameld Werk I.* Amsterdam, 1947; bl. 204.

[4] *Understanding Poetry.* New York, n.d.; o.a. bl. 50, 117, 182.

[5] *Wiggelstok.* Kaapstad/Bloemfontein/Johannesburg, 1959; bl. 142.

[6] *Kuns is Boos!, Wiggelstok*, bl. 155.

[7] T. S. Eliot: *The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism.* London, n.d.; bl. 30.

[8] *Wiggelstok*, bl. 91.

In Opperman se versdrama *Periandros van Korinthe*[9] verklaar hierdie heerser-digter (bl. 69):

> Ja, Vader. Die rym neem ook 'n hele lewe in beslag:
> jou doen en dink, jou soek na ander en jou wag.
> Jy leer ou woorde kantel tot 'n nuwe samesyn
> sodat hul dan presies bepaalde vreugdes wek of pyn.
> Jy is 'n heerser, net soos ons, maar jou gebied
> is gans die skepping: die mens, die ster, die riet.
> Jy is die tamariskboom, die spreeus wat daarin sit,
> sowel sluipmoordenaar as heilige wat staan en bid,
> en jy skep na eie wil, maar tog na aangevoelde wet,
> 'n nuwe ryk wat langer lewe as die meeste ryke het.

Hierdie woorde geld ook ten opsigte van die middele wat die digter kan aanwend om die waarheid uit die werklikheid te laat opglans en 'n tydelose skoonheidsgestalte daaraan te gee in sy poësie. As heerser wat 'n nuwe, onverganklike ryk wil skep deur middel van die woord, gebruik die digter ook die literêre verwysing om 'n bykomstige betekenislaag te konstitueer, om 'n nuwe dimensie aan sy gedig te verleen. Vanselfsprekend gebeur dit nie in elke gedig nie en geskied die literêre verwysing op verskillende maniere, net soos daar ook vele ander verwysings is behalwe die letterkundige (geskiedkundige, mitologiese, godsdienstige e.s.m.), maar om die beginsel daarvan as poëtiese struktuurelement en sy funksie in die gedig aan te toon, is dit genoeg om die aandag te vestig op die literêre verwysing, d.w.s. dié na 'n meer of minder bekende letterkundige werk.

Hoe hierdie verwysings voorkom in Opperman se poësie, duidelik herkenbaar, of die aanhaling aangewend in sy oorspronklike vorm, of wel ook versonke en dus skaars herkenbaar omdat dit vlees en bloed van die gedig geword het, d.w.s. hoe die oerteks geïntegreer is en verder ook hoe dit bydra, indien wel, tot die lading van die gedig met 'n ryker betekenis—dit moet van geval tot geval beoordeel word.

Ek stel my dit geensins ten doel om binne die bestek van hierdie artikel alle verwysings in die poësie van Opperman na te gaan, of selfs alle literêre verwysings en toespelings na te speur en die funksionele waarde daarvan af te weeg nie. Genoeg is dit om een karakteristieke geval te ondersoek van hierdie procédé in die aanwending waarvan Opperman nie alleen by 'n erkende digtradisie aansluit nie, maar ook van sy grootste werk geskep het, soos die sonnetreeks *Brandaan* in *Engel uit die Klip* en *Kroniek van Kristien* in *Blom en Baaierd*.[10]

Funksioneel aangewend is die literêre verwysing geen ydele vertoon by die waaragtige digter nie, maar dit open binne die konteks van die gedig vensters op ongekende wêrelde. Ook stel die literêre verwysing geen ongewettigde eis aan die leser en lewer dit

[9] Kaapstad, 1954.
[10] Kaapstad/Bloemfontein/Johannesburg, 1956; bl. 47.

geen onoorkomelike beswaar nie. Daarom verklaar Brooks en Warren: ‚When we come to read traditional literature, we usually find that all the allusions have been cleared up for us, that generations of editors and scholars have prepared the texts and given us notes and comments. The fact that the poet originally used allusions therefore does not disturb us. We have been accustomed to it from school days. We tend, however, to take a different attitude when we confront a poem, like *Prufrock*, by a contemporary poet. We feel that we ought to get it more easily and more immediately. If we do not have already at out disposal the necessary information, we are inclined to think that the poet is wilful or perverse or proud of his learning. It is perfectly true that poets sometimes are wilful and perverse and proud of their learning. But can we, on the other hand, take our own ignorance at any given moment to be the norm of poetry? If we are not willing to make that rather conceited assumption, then it is our responsibility to try to remedy our ignorance. The critics and scholars are there to help us. Then we can try to see if the allusions in a particular poem are really functional, if they really do something for the poem.'[11]

Hoeseer ook geïntegreer in die gedig en hoeseer die gedig ook 'n eie wêreld vorm, die verwysing verbreek die sg. isolasie van die gedig en reik uit na buite die wêreld van die gedig.[12] En as 'n mens nie hierdie verwysings verstaan nie, begryp jy ook nie die gedig volkome nie, word die seggingskrag van die gedig verarm en verflou. Die literêre verwysing, funksioneel en onontkomelik aangewend, dra by tot daardie eienskappe van die goeie gedig: ‚. . . . a richness, a massiveness, and a depth that is baffling if we try to account for it as the padding out . . . of what seems to be the overt and specific statement that the poem makes.'[13] Die literêre verwysing hoef dus geen versiering te wees nie maar kan 'n middel tot objektivering wees, soos in die poësie van Hooft die dikwels so gewraakte ‚dekoratiewe' element daarin 'n funksionele middel is om te ontkom aan geestesnaaklopery en nie net 'n uiting is van modesug nie.

Die gedig se ‚betekenis' lê in sy hele struktuur opgesluit, en van hierdie struktuur kan die verwysing 'n belangrike bestanddeel uitmaak.

Hierdie integrasie van die literêre verwysing in Opperman se kuns, hou verband met wat hy noem die selfkruisiging van die kunstenaar,[14] waarna ook T. S. Eliot verwys in sy opstel *Tradition and the Individual Talent:*[15] ‚What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is

[11] T.a.p., bl. 443.
[12] Vgl. die opstel van dr A. P. Grové: *Die Towenaar in die Fles* in *Beskouings oor Poësie*. Pretoria, 1957; bl. 49.
[13] Brooks & Warren: T.a.p., bl. 571.
[14] *Kuns is Boos!*, t.a.p., bl. 53.
[15] *Selected Essays*. London, n.d.; bl. 17.

more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality.'

Die literêre verwysing word, net al deur die feit dat dit aangewend word, verhef tot ,iets waardevollers' as wat die digter self kan verwoord, dit word 'n objektiewe getuie, 'n hoër gesag waaraan die digter hom onderwerp en waarop hy hom tegelykertyd beroep om groter geldigheid aan sy gedig te gee, want steeds bly die strewe by 'n digter soos Opperman om afstand te doen van die betekenisvernouende aktualiteite. En, funksioneel en onvermydelik aangewend, d.w.s. met die regte ,intensity of the artistic process, the pressure, so to speak, under which the fusion (tussen die oerteks en die nuwe gedig) takes place . . .',[16] word hierdie procédé van integrasie 'n kragtige middel in die hand van die digter om die stofgegewe te ontgin, 'n ,staf' om die ,waters' uit die ,rots' te laat breek, die ,engel uit die klip' te ,verlos'.

Die literêre verwysing van hierdie aard is niks anders as die ,fluit' waarvan Nijhoff in *De Pen op Papier*[17] praat nie—Eliot se ,objective correlative': ,The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an "objective correlative"; in other words a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.'[18]

Uit die amalgamasie wat ontstaan het deurdat die digter ook dié vreemde element ,deur die smal poort van die wonder' laat gaan het, word 'n nuwe, verrassende eenheid gebore wat bydra tot die trefkrag van die gedig—,the sense of something behind, more real than any of (the) characters and their actions'.[19] Hierdie nuwe eenheid, fusie, laat blyk die sin, die ,logos', die patroon wat die digter in die skynbaar sinlose en die verganklike, die chaos, ontdek deur sy gedig, die orde wat hy daarop afdwing, 'n orde wat skeppend en verlossend is. Tereg beweer Eliot: ,For it is ultimately the function of art, in imposing a credible order upon ordinary reality, and thereby eliciting some perception of an order *in* reality, to bring us to a condition of serenity, stillness and reconciliation; and then leave us, as Virgil left Dante, to proceed toward a region where that guide can avail us no farther.'[20]

Die literêre verwysing as struktuurelement of as substraat in die gedig kan net so 'n belangrike instrument wees in die hand van die digter in die organisasie van sy gedig as enige ander wat hom ten diens staan, soos bv. die beeld en die dissipline van die ritmiese patroon of die rym. Daaroor val nie te redeneer nie; alleen of dit funksioneel is en of dit maar blote vertoonsug is, of

[16] T. S. Eliot: T.a.p., bl. 19.
[17] *Hedendaagsche Nederlandsche Novellen.* Pretoria, 1945; bl. 76.
[18] *Hamlet.* T.a.p., bl. 145.
[19] T. S. Eliot: *John Marston.* T.a.p., bl. 231.
[20] *Poetry and Drama.* London, n.d.; bl. 35.

wel 'n ydele poging om moeilike en ‚duistere' poësie te skryf. 'n Digter moet sy poësie skryf soos hy kan; die leser moet dit vat soos hy dit kry.

* * * *

'n Besonder interessante en boeiende vorm van die literêre verwysing is die integrasie van 'n oerteks in 'n moderne gedig: Opperman gebruik 'n ou gedig as grondpatroon vir sy gedig, die stramien waarop hy sy eie verrassend-nuwe patrone weef, soos in die geval van *Brandaan* en *Kroniek van Kristien.*

Die sonnetreeks *Brandaan* in die bundel *Engel uit die Klip* bestaan uit die volgende: *Brandende Boek, Swart Kop, Lintwurm, Tokolosi, Vuurlopers, Kronos, Séance, Man met Horries.*

Soos Opperman in *Kuns is Boos!* te kenne gee, gebruik hy die verhaal van Brandaan om 'n universele beeld te gee van die wese en taak van die kunstenaar soos hy dit sien; dit is die ‚masker', die ‚fluitjie' wat hy gebruik om nie in die persoonlike te bly vassteek nie, om 'n universele geldigheid aan sy siening te gee.

Die titel van die sonnetreeks, *Brandaan*, verskaf hierdie inligting dat 'n mens die gedigte moet lees teen die agtergrond van die verhaal van dié Ierse heilige, maar veronderstel tegelykertyd hierdie kennis, is 'n verwysing daarna.

Die Middeleeuse teks [21] vertel (vss. 21-78) hoe Brandaan, 'n heilige man geboortig uit Ierland en abt oor drie duisend monnike, in ou boeke lees van die wondere van God: twee paradyse bo die aarde, baie groot eilande, 'n wêreld onder hierdie aarde waar dit nag is as dit op aarde dag is, dat daar drie hemele is, 'n vis met land en bome op sy rug, van Judas wat op Sondagnagte genade ontvang. Dit alles betwyfel Brandaan, vervloek die skrywer en gooi die boek in die vuur. Toe verskyn daar 'n engel van God:

> Daar hi stond bi den viere
> daar die boek in bernende lag
> die engel Gods hem toe sprak:

Die engel verwyt hom dat die waarheid nou verbrand is, maar dat Jesus Christus hom gebied om nege jaar lank die seë te beseil om so die wondere van God self te leer ken:

> „. . . du sult beschouwen, wat is waar
> of wat logene zij mede'.

Dit is op hierdie gedeelte dat die eerste van Opperman se sonnetreeks gebaseer is.

[21] Die geraadpleegde teks is dié uitgegee met inleiding en kommentaar deur dr Maartje Draak: *Die Reis van Sinte Brandaan.* Amsterdam, z.j.

Brandende Boek
Dis Pinksternag en voor die kaggelvuur
terwyl ek verse skryf, weet ek die mooi
geskryf is eintlik boos en hierdie uur
moet ek my bundel in die vlamme gooi
as ek God suiwerder wil dien . . . Maar blaaie
en die boek se band krul om en slaan
tot vlerke oop dat daar met geel-blou swaaie
'n engel toornig in die klipboog staan:
‚Jy het die waarheid in die vuur verbrand,
maar nou gebied die Here God dat jy
ook in die gramadoelas van jou land
Sy wondere sien en koninkryk uitbrei'.—
‚En tog, hoe moet ek weet dat onvermom
selfs Jy van God en nie die Duiwel kom?'
Engel uit die Klip, (bl. 47)

Die saaklike, bondige titel, *Brandaan*, verskaf dus nie alleen inligting oor die Middeleeuse teks waardeur Opperman se reeks geïnspireer is nie, maar dit kry dadelik 'n metaforiese funksie en wek 'n spanning tussen twee wêrelde: dié van die Ierse Brandaan en dié van die moderne digter Opperman.

In die eerste sonnet word die basiese spanning: mens-kunstenaar waarvan Opperman in *Kuns is Boos!* gewag maak, vergestalt; die kunstenaar wil telkens afskeid neem van sy kunstenaarskap omdat hy dit as boos ervaar. Maar in sy opdrag om die wondere van God in die werklikheid te leer ken en op te teken, word Brandaan die universele tipe van die digter wat elke ding in sy eie reg en goddelikheid moet uitbeeld, wat die waarheid uit die werklikheid moet verlos en so sy omskeppingstaak moet vervul.

Die wonderbaarlike ervaringe van Brandaan soos meegedeel in die Middeleeuse verhaal, gebruik Opperman slegs as basis en bou selfstandig daarop voort—die oergegewe word geheel en al ‚na 's lands gelegenheid verdietst'.

In vss. 137-257 van die ou teks lees 'n mens dat toe Brandaan wou skeepgaan, hy op die strand 'n reuse-menskop vind wat deur die see uitgespoel is:

Dat hoofd was harde groot:
nie en sag hi des genoot.
Dat voorhoofd was hem breed
wel vijf voeten, God weet.

Hy vra die kop hoe dit onthoof is en wat sy lewensloop was. Toe vertel die kop dat hy 'n heidense man was, wel honderd voet lank en dat hy die skepe in die see beroof het. Maar eendag was daar so 'n geweldige storm dat hy omgekom het. Op Brandaan se versoek dat hy die doop moet ondergaan om sy lyf terug te kry, weier die kop, want eenmaal gedoop, kom hy onder die wet van God en sal swaar boet in die hel vir sy oortreding. Boonop wil hy

nie weer die verskrikkinge van die dood deurmaak nie. Hy verkies om na sy eie donker, rampsalige oord heen te gaan. Brandaan laat hom gaan en die kop dryf weg na 'n plek wat God dit gun.

Swart Kop is 'n toespeling hierop:

Swart Kop

Daar lê waar hierdie stad sak word en roes
en afloopwaters in suur modderbelle
uit die agterbuurte van die aarde wel,
'n strooisgroot kop met hare dig en kroes
en oë soos paddastoele uit die grond.
Ek het geroepe om die kop geloop
en wou dit met die westerwaters doop,
toe sing meteens ou impi's uit die mond:
,Ek ken die aarde reeds waarop jy boer,
en wil nie by jou in jou hemel wees,
maar eerder met voorvaderlike geeste
uit die hel Unkulunkulu roer.
Gaan die wit woede van my oog verby—
jy het my kop reeds van die lyf gesny.'
(bl. 48)

Heeltemal in ooreenstemming met sy opdrag om ,in die gramadoelas van (sy) land' God se wondere en waarheid te leer ken en Sy koninkryk uit te brei deur aan die skeppingsdinge 'n onverwoesbare gestalte te gee in sy poësie, deur die uitspreek van die ,logos' daarvan in sy verse, word die heidense man in Opperman se gedig die ,swart kop' met sy felle aanklag teen die witman van hierdie land en op die hele aarde.

In ooreenstemming met die volgorde van die ou verhaal noem Opperman die derde sonnet van die siklus *Lintwurm*, 'n toespeling op die ,lind-drake' van die Middeleeuse teks (vss. 261-294).

Kort nadat Brandaan-hulle afskeid geneem het van Ierland, kom hulle in groot nood . . .

Want een dier al te wonderlijk
eenen lind-drake gelijk
wilde verzwelgen haren kiel.

Met sy reusagtige bek wil die monster hul skip verslind, maar toe gaan die wolke bo hulle oop en 'n vlieënde hert verjaag die lintdraak, sodat Brandaan met blydskap die Here dank vir die verlossing.

Op hierdie episode in die Brandaanawonture baseer Opperman sy *Lintwurm:*

Lintwurm

Op die solder van die nag lig ek 'n luik
en sien grys onder Leviatan rol
en rits met myle-myle lint die buik
en ingewande van die aarde vol.
Sy beitelkop was êrens weggesteek
waar see en varings van 'n oertyd staan
en met laagwaters was sy suiers bleek
hol kraterkringe van 'n somermaan.
Ek het langs wenteltrappe van die plek
gesak, maar toe met elke tree en drang
voel ek dat spiere aan my spiere trek—
ek is 'n lit in daardie lyf gevang.
Dit sterf stuk-stuk van hom: mens, vis en gras,
maar ewig groei en klou hy—aardevas.
(bl. 49)

Dit is duidelik dat Opperman se sonnet slegs die beeld van die reusagtige lintdraak met die ou verhaal gemeen het, en dan word die lint*draak* ook nog lint*wurm*. Hier het Opperman hom feitlik geheel en al losgemaak van die gegewe, en die beeld van die lintwurm word die motor van die gedig: die geweldige siening van die lintwurm as beeld van die aardse mag, die aardse wat as teenpool in die basiese spanning: geestelik-aards, Opperman se poësie ten grondslag lê. Dit is dan juis ook die taak van die kunstenaar om die geestelike aan hierdie allesomvattende aardse te ontworstel, hoewel dit in hierdie gedig nie eksplisiet so gestel word nie.

Nog losser met die oerteks word die verband in die sonnet *Tokolosi* waarin dié half-mens half-dier van die Afrikaanse volksgeloof geteken word:

Wanneer die pietersielie water trek
hoor sy van die rivier 'n soet gefluit,
maar op nat klippe by die oortrapplek
gryp hande uit die water na haar kuit.
En met die padgee van groen stringe slyk
sien sy die halfman, halflikkewaan
los uit die water lig: spits oë kyk
haar tussen borste en vol heupe aan . . .
dat sy eers aarsel, dan verskrik wegvlug
vanuit die drif se sleepsel van verdriete,
maar ingehaal, teensinnig op die rug
tog oorgee aan die vreugde in die riete.
En nege mane lank dink sy verstom
van wié of hoé die nuwe lewe kom.
(bl. 50)

In *Die Afrikaanse Volkskultuur*[22] verklaar Abel Coetzee o.m.: ‚Na sy bou is tikolôsj 'n kort, gesette, dwergagtige swart mannetjie. Hy is heeltemal of slegs halfpad bedek met hare, of hy is selfs halfmens, half-dier. Sy gesig lyk soos die van 'n mens, hond of bobbejaan. Hy het soms 'n lang baard, en sy are, hande en voete is uitermate groot.

Opvallend is sy ontsaglike lang roede en sak, so groot dat hy dit oor sy skouer kan dra. Hy is gewapen met 'n rietjie.

Sy eintlike naam in Xosa is uhili; tikolôsj is 'n Soeloe skimpnaam wat betrekking het op sy kort persoon . . .

Die opvallende daad van die Bantoe tikolôsj is geslagsverkeer met die meide.'

In Opperman se gedig is die Middeleeuse stof so geheel en al verafrikaans in sy tekening van hierdie wellustige half-dier halfmens wat graag by die water in die riete hou en die meide voorlê en dwing tot geslagsverkeer, dat slégs die tweeledige voorkoms vandie tokolosi uitwys na die angsaanjaende meermin van die Brandaanverhaal (vss. 343-367):

> Half was 't visch ende half wijf;
> al ruw zoo was hem dat lijf.

Hierdie vreemde kreatuur, half-mens en half-vis wat deur die water na Brandaan-hulle aangeswem gekom het, het hulle teengekom nadat hulle weggevaar het van die groot vis met die land en bome op sy rug. Brandaan bemoedig sy manne om nie te vrees nie, want hulle het die monster niks kwaads aangedoen nie. Hulle skip sal in Gods naam veilig vaar. Op sy gebed gaan die monster die diepte in, maar die hele dag hoor hulle die onding onder the water borrel en brul.

In sy besondere aanpassing van die ou verhaal ontgin Opperman dan ook slegs hierdie een fundamentele waarheid: die tokolosi as sinnebeeld van wellus, 'n altyd aanwesige ‚monster' in die skepping, in die mens, in die mens-in-die-kunstenaar.

In ewe losse verband met die ou verhaal staan die sonnet *Vuurlopers*, wat die beeld oproep van dié in Natal so bekende godsdiensritus onder sekere van die Indiërs:

Vuurlopers

> Bokant die piesang- en die mangobome
> spring rooi vlamme van die hout ineen,
> en langs die Hindoetempel uit die lome
> wierook begin kalbasfluite eentonig teem
> as die gereinigdes met klam kaalvoete
> die paadjies kies uit die rivier—maar bang
> duskant die oopgeharkte vierkant gloed
> terugstuit, soos nat bruin vullens vasgevang.

[22] Kaapstad, 1953; bl. 45.

Die bok en die pampoen lê oopgebreek,
die priester sprinkel met sy takkie blare
wywaters oor die vure en koel kweek
en voorste ry van die beswete skare.
Dan in vervoering trap die kaal voetsole
lig-lig na Brahma oor tapyte kole.

(bl. 51)

Die ontdekking van ook hierdie ‚wonder' . . . ‚in die gramadoelas' van sy eie land is gebaseer op wat die ou teks in vss. 368-420 verhaal: Nadat Brandaan en sy geselskap lank rondgevaar het, kom hulle by 'n eiland waar dooies soos lewendes te voet op die see gaan en gekwel word deur versengende gloed en bitter koue.

. . . zielen als in mensen gelike
gingen ende liepen daar op de zee;
hem was leider harde wee
van koude ende van grooter hitte.

Op Brandaan se vraag vertel hulle dat hulle tafelknegte was wat nooit die armes se dors geles het nie, en daarom word hulle so gekwel sonder dat hulle 'n druppel water kan kry om te drink. Op Brandaan se gebed word hulle lot dusdanig versag dat hulle geoorloof word om water te drink en hulle hoofde te bevogtig. Daarop buig hulle voor Brandaan, wat met sy geselskap die onheilsplek verlaat met die weeklag van die gepynigdes in hul bitter nood nog in hul ore.

Dit is nie onmoontlik nie, so het Opperman se sonnetreeks sy eie momentum gekry, dat die beeld wat in *Vuurlopers* uitgewerk word, ingegee is deur dié gedeelte van die Brandaanverhaal (vs. 625 vlg.) wat vertel hoe Brandaan-hulle deur 'n storm gevoer word tot by 'n put, die helleput. Dis 'n brandende berg waaruit die klag van die gedoemdes opstyg. Op sy vraag vertel die bestuurder van die hel aan Brandaan dat allerlei slag sondaars daar ly, en toe die gepynigde siele Brandaan om genade smeek, raai die duiwel hom aan om weg te gaan, en vir die verdoemdes sê die duiwel dis te laat vir genade.

So geheel en al is die oergegewe in hierdie sonnet tot onherkenbaarheid ‚verdietst', dat 'n ander moontlike basis die ontmoeting van Brandaan en sy geselskap met Judas kan wees (vss. 1294-1556):

. . . doe verzag Sinte Brandaan
eenen naakten man zaan,
al ruw zittende alleene
op eenen heeten steene.
Hi dogede leed ende toorn:
bezijden was hi bevroren
dore vleesch ende beenen;
b'anderzijde op den steene
was hi zoo heet, dat hi verbran.

Indien dit die geval is dat in *Vuurlopers* bedektelik na hierdie gedeelte van die Brandaanawonture verwys word, soos na die ander twee gesiteerde gedeeltes van die verhaal, dan het 'n mens hier te doen met 'n sametrekking van gegewens—'n bewys van hoe Opperman sy stof met volkome meesterskap beheers.

Die verband van die volgende twee sonnette in Opperman se siklus met die oerteks is egter weer hegter: *Kronos* is baie duidelik gebaseer op vss. 2117-2156 van die ou manuskrip en *Séance* op vss. 2157-2206.

In vss. 2117-2156 van die Brandaanlegende lees 'n mens dat die geselskap op die elfde dag na die ontmoeting met die mannetjie wat die see wou meet, weereens in groot moeilikheid geraak het. Dié keer sien hulle 'n monster van 'n vis, 'n walvis, wat op die skip afswem om dit met sy reuse-muil te verswelg. Drie dae lank het die monster voor die boot geswem, en toe span hy hom om die skip deur sy stert in sy bek te steek. Twee weke lank vaar hulle in dié ring, en as die vis beweeg, word hulle òf die hoogte ingeskiet òf stort hulle in die diepte af. Met die roeiboot probeer hulle selfs land bereik, so teister die vis hulle. Die stuurman huil van wanhoop, maar Brandaan troos en wys sy manne op Gods steun. Daarna sak die dier in die diepte weg en die see bedaar. So verlos God hulle.

Hierdie reuse-vis wat sy stert vasbyt—
Den staart stak hi in den monde
zoo hi alrediepst konde.
Dat schip hi al omme beving:
veertien dagen voeren zi in den ring! —

word vir Opperman slegs die aanleiding tot die siening van die tydgebondenheid van die hele skepping as 'n boakonstriktor wat alles beknel. Is die implikasie nie dat verlossing uit die tydelikheid moontlik is deur die digwoord, soos God vir Brandaan en sy geselskap in die ou verhaal verlos nie?

Kronos

Om ruite en die deure van my huis
buig in die oggendmis 'n boaslang
soos om 'n glas die vingers van 'n vuis,
en hou in ligrooi gordels my gevang
dat ek besef met alle wisselinge
van gevoelens, van getye en die tyd,
bly ek binne die vlees en reekse ringe
van 'n groot bruin boa wat sy stert vasbyt.
Soms op 'n oggend waan ek my verlos:
rooi vink en vlinder tuimel in die son,
by Weza werk houthakkers in die bos
en om die trein verskuif die horison.
Maar snags sien ek hy hou die kosmos styf
gevange in die Melkweg van sy lyf.
(bl. 52)

So gee Opperman telkens 'n gloednuwe vertolking van die ou gegewe, en steeds hou dit verband met die wese en taak van die digter wat soos Brandaan die werklikheid moet leer ken en die goddelike daarin soek.

In hierdie lig moet 'n mens ook die sonnet *Séance* lees en veral in gedagte hou die ‚fetters' waarvan Opperman gewag maak in *Kuns is Boos!*[23]: dié dinge wat die mens in die kunstenaar aan bande lê maar waarvan hy hom as kunstenaar moet bevry.

Séance

Ons is meteens soos in die donker kamer
van 'n skip oor Kaapse waters diep en glad,
dan breek daar tot ons deur uit enkel vame
die geluide van 'n ondersese stad,
wat ons nie sien, maar weet dis waar: ons hoor
'n slaafklok lui en Burgers loop en praat,
perde runnik, 'n klein Maleierkoor
teem êrens, en 'n kokkewiet fluit-lok 'n maat.
En sy wat helder sien, is ons skistlood
wat in die dieptes van die Syn wegsak,
maar peilend in die waters van die dood
raak ons aan die deurstraalde stad gehaak,
Geen kuns of kennis dryf ons verder voort.
Verlos ons van dié strik. Heer, sny die koord.

(bl. 53)

Onmiskenbaar is die basis van hierdie siening van die onherroeplike gebondenheid van die kunstenaar as mens aan onberekenbare aardse kragte soos die verlede, tradisie, die aantrekkingskrag van die lewe, daardie deel van die Brandaanlegende (vss. 2157-2206) wat volg op die voorval met die walvis. Brandaan en sy geselskap geniet pragtige weer ná die ontberinge van veertien dae, maar die skip lê onbeweeglik, sodat die hitte hulle na drie en 'n half week laat swaar kry. Toe kom daar 'n windstoot wat die skip na 'n seldsame oord dryf. Die water was so stil dat hulle van onder af die gelui van klokke waarneem, ook die sang van 'n priesterkoor, perdegerunnik en die geblaf van 'n hond. Horinggeskal en voëlgeluid word van onder die seevlak gehoor en die vrolike gesang van dansende manne en vroue. Hoewel dit so naby klink, sien die manne niks nie. Hulle besluit om die dieplood uit te gooi en vind die bodem sommer naby, maar toe hulle die anker afgooi, kom dit hulle duur te staan omdat 'n onbekende mag dit vashou. Die meester-stuurman is raadop, want kap hulle die ankertou af, kan hulle nooit weer op see anker werp nie.

Boeiend is Opperman se aanpassing in *Séance*: Brandaan se stilstand word 'n séance, wat hier as beeld uitgewerk word om die verbondenheid waarvan Opperman hom in *Kuns is Boos!* rekenskap

[23] *Wiggelstok*, bl. 150.

gee, te demonstreer. Brandaan se skip word ,soos in die donker kamer van 'n skip' maar nou ,oor *Kaapse* waters', die geluide van die ondersese stad word behou, maar die geluide is die verlede van die Kaap wat spreek.

> . . . Klokken luden ende klingen
> ende ook papen zingen . . .

word in Opperman se gedig 'n slaweklok wat lui en 'n klein Maleierkoor wat teem. Brandaan en die syne

> . . . hoorden paarden neien
> ende ook vogelen schreien . . .

en die ooreenstemmende geluide wat deur die werking van die medium, die ,skietlood' in die séance, uit die Kaapse verlede kom, is perde se gerunnik en die kokkewiet wat 'n maat fluit-lok. In plaas van

> . . . vrolike zingen
> dansen ende springen
> van mannen ende wijven . . .

klink hier op die geluide van Burgers wat loop en praat. Ook die slot van die sonnet toon ooreenkoms met die ou verhaal: die wanhoop, die gebed om verlossing, die sny van die koord.

Dit is duidelik dat Opperman nie alleen die oergegewe volkome verafrikaans het nie, maar dat hy in der waarheid die ou stof van die Brandaanverhaal aan 'n ontginningsproses onderwerp het om deur middel van die gedig 'n tydelose en universele waarheid daaruit te verlos.

Die Middeleeuse legende is aangepas, ,verdiets', en in die gedigte van Opperman se Brandaanreeks volkome gedramatiseer; ongekende skoonheid en 'n verrassende sin word in die ou stof gepeil. 'n Nuwe betekenis van die Brandaanlegende word in Opperman se siklus gekonstitueer: Brandaan, in sy vertwyfeling, opstand en bekering, word nie alleen universele tipe van die mens nie, maar veral word hy tipe van die digter met sy besondere verlossingstaak—die ,ek' van hierdie verse. So verleen Opperman aan sy siening en uitbeelding van die digter 'n ongeëwenaarde trefkrag en geldigheid, kry die digtertaak 'n grootse religieuse implikasie.

Dit wek dus ook geen verbasing dat die slotsonnet van die reeks geensins verband hou met die slot van die oorspronklike Brandaan verhaal nie, maar geheel en al organies gegroei het uit die voorafgaande reeks. In die Middeleeuse teks lui die slot dat na die vashaak aan die ondersese stad, Brandaan aan een van sy twee kapelane, Noag (Noë), gevra het of hy ál die wonders opgeskryf het en of hulle nog meer moet sien. Maar die boek is vol en hulle sny die ankertou deur en vertrek na hul vaderland waar hulle verwelkom word en die boek met prag en praal in 'n heerlike kerk plaas. Priesterkore sing Brandaan se eer waar hy die boek op die altaar lê.

Toe daal daar 'n engel neer en sê Brandaan kan bly lewe so lank as hy wil, maar aangesien sy taak volbring is, wag die hemel met ongeduld. Dus, verlangend na die hemel, sing Brandaan sy laaste mis, sterf, en sy siel word deur St. Michael gehaal. Hy word met groot eerbetoon begrawe, en 'n katedraal word ter nagedagtenis van hom bebou met nege altare daarin ter herinnering aan die seereis van nege jaar waartydens hy al die leed met blydskap aanvaar het.

Opperman se slotgedig in hierdie reeks lui soos volg:

Man met Horries

Ek troos my voor die hawekroeg se vuur
toe daar groen goeters gloei: ek was verstrooi;
maar met die weerkyk toe hulle nog voortduur,
het ek hul onder steenkool toegegooi.
Tog, flakkerend uit die rook kom een-een later
die lintdraak, kroeskop en likkewaan
na bo gebeur, afskuwelik en kwater
as my dubbelgangers in die klipboog staan:
,Die waarheid word nie deur die vuur verbrand,
maar lewe in die hart se kaggel voort
en sal daar rook en smeul, maar eindelik brand
en onverwags uitflikker in die woord.'—
Ek het die wondere van God beskryf
en al die monsters uit my hart verdryf.
(bl. 54)

Deur die beskrywing van die wondere ,in die gramadoelas' van sy land, het die ,ek', die digter, nie alleen die ,engel uit die klip' ,verlos' nie, maar ook die spanninge, konflikte wat hy as kunstenaar ken, in sy poësie opgelos.

SCENE FROM A NEW PLAY

by H. W. D. Manson

Morito: And yet I was happy . . .
Abbot: It's odd, but one is . . .
Morito: We were all of us happy, my friends and I,
And spent days walking about on the hills.
The wind cut and the sun shone thin,
But it was the beginning of spring
And the buds of all the blossoming trees
On whippy new shoots shook
Their infant pink fists at the wind;
From the hill tops we saw
The snow lying thin in crusts and patches,
Or deep in drifts on the windward side of hedges
In all the checkered fields below.
It was cold, wet weather and blowy,
But spring;
And we had been walking
All day in the wet hills and were frozen through,
But were happy too and gay
And on our way home we stopped to talk
In the lee of a wine-shop wall.
And there we sat
And talked and talked, drank wine and talked
On and on . . .
For the three of us in different ways were happy
And imagined we were in love.
Abbot: My son, I can see you all so clearly . . .
Morito: Can you? Can you?
Abbot: In my mind's eye
As if you were all sitting here . . .

(The lights go out. When the lights come on again, three young men, Kuwachi, Kurodo and Morito now ten years younger, are seen sitting drinking together in a wine-shop garden. It is spring. There is a blossoming tree against the wall.)

Kurodo: Kuwachi, shut up, will you?—and let me talk too.
Drink your wine down now and be good.
Kuwachi (turning his wine-cup upside down): It's finished!
Kurodo: Already?
Kuwachi: And all of me feels warm and wonderful!
I swear it's wine that makes poets sing!
Kurodo: Well, you're not a poet so leave off guzzling—
And stop spouting—for pity's sake.
Morito: Yes! Please stop spouting!

Kuwachi (gaily): How can I stop?
Must I bottle up my heart till it bursts?
Kurodo: Relax and look up at the sky.
Kuwachi (gaily defiant): Why should I? At the dull old sky?
There—in a word I can tell you—it's blue.
A blackeye is blue—a jowl unshaven—
A bit of old ribbon
What's wonderful in that? But I could tell you . . .
Kurodo: Yes, we know—that she's beautiful—we know it—
You've told us so a thousand times.
Kuwachi: Beautiful! I never said it!
When did I ever use a word like that?
It has a dull, thick-lipped sort of sound,
Like a blubbery, fat kiss—what a foul word!
A blot, a slobber on any woman!
But I can tell you . . . exquisitely . . .
And if you'd only let me,
I could as richly and greenly adorn her
As gay leaves do the trees in spring;
Or if I chose, I could
With pure and lovely whirling words like snow,
Obscure her physical beauty from you,
And let you see,
Only how tenderly I perceive her
Here in my mind's eye . . .
Kurodo: Hold it now! Hold it!
Kuwachi: Hold what? Hold what back? Homage from beauty?
I can no more do that
Than a roaring mountain stream
Can lie as green and dull as a millpond!
Kurodo: Magnificent! But stop it now.
Kuwachi: *Can* you stop a mountain stream?
Kurodo (getting up as if he means business)
I can try . . .
Kuwachi: Enough of this nonsense! I'll stop, I swear!
But seriously, how can you?
Sit like two old owls and stare?
Look! Look up at the blue air all round you,
And the straight white edge of that wall where it meets it!
Dizzy-white and blue!
Look up, Morito!
Doesn't that seem lovely to you
So lovely you could laugh?
Kurodo: . . . Or cry . . .
Love is like a disease to Morito.
Kuwachi: It eats him inside—that's true—like a worm.
Kurodo (with mock gentleness)
We must not mock him, though . . .

Kuwachi: (ironically) No, he is sick . . .
Our poor, sad, very pure, noble, love-sick friend!
(to Morito) Come, come, now don't get angry,
Tell me what she's like, Morito?
Kurodo (to Kuwachi) How can he tell you? What can he say?
Kuwachi: Is he so shy?
Kurodo: Shy, my eye!
Kuwachi: What is it then?
Kurodo: He does not *know*!
Kuwachi: Not know!
Kurodo: Oh he can tell us certainly
Whether she is short or tall;
And if he tried perhaps he could
Inform us whether she were sallow or ruddy,
Pock-marked or cross-eyed;
But that's all.
Kuwachi: Poor devil!
(impudently) Are you telling me, Kurodo,
That he's never felt her thigh?
Kurodo: I am telling you, Kuwachi
That he's never heard her sigh.
Kuwachi: Has he never kissed her nipples?
Kurodo: Never, never kissed her nipples,
Never even stroked her hair!
Kuwachi: Have you never wondered, Morito?
Morito: Wondered what?
Kuwachi: Whether they were rosy-brown . . .?
Kurodo: . . . Or dusky-purple points?
Morito: What?
Kurodo: Not her *eyes*, Morito!
(Kuwachi and Kurodo laugh easily).
Kuwachi: Have you *never* wondered—really?
Kurodo: Is her complexion dark or fair?
Kuwachi: Tall or short?
Kurodo: Long thighed—or stocky?
Morito: How can I tell?
Kuwachi: Well how does she walk?
Morito: Very well . . .
Kurodo: With a long stride?
Morito: I think so.
Kuwachi (to Kurodo): Long thighed . . .
Kurodo: Definitely . . .
Kuwachi: Is she lissom or heavy?
Morito: Neither.
Kurodo: Big breasted?
Morito: Maybe.
Kuwachi (to Kurodo): If *he* says so she *must* be—very.
Kurodo: Big-breasted then, long-thighed—delicious!
Kuwachi: But how big are your hands, Morito?

Kurodo: Let me see?
(Morito unsuspectingly spreads his hands out.)
Kuwachi: Lucky man!
Morito: Why lucky?
Kurodo: They're enormous!
Morito (puzzled): Why lucky?
Kuwachi: He asks why!
Morito: But why? Why am I lucky?
Kurodo: Look at that span!
Oh lucky, most fortunate man!
He can cup round all his girl's big-breasted softness—
With one huge hand!
Morito: Be careful, Kurodo!
Kurodo: Are you cross with us?
Morito: Be careful . . .
Kuwachi (In a mockingly business-like manner)
And now for her belly. Is it . . . ?
Morito: You are trying to shock me, Kuwachi, I know,
But be careful.
Kuwachi: I will be, Morito,
You are very much stronger than I am.
Morito (suddenly contrite): I'm sorry.
Kurodo: Ah, no, Kuwachi, come, can't you see
He's very gentle, not quickly angered,
Our good, old friend Morito—and we've hurt him—
For fun.
Kuwachi (serious for a second): Morito, it's true. I *do* like to shock you—
I'm sorry.
Morito: Why do you try to annoy me, Kuwachi?
Kuwachi: I don't know why. I'm sorry.
Kurodo: All over then, and done, is it, Morito?
Morito: You two are my friends.
Kurodo: Just one thing more . . .
Morito: Say it and be done.
Kurodo: If I tell you what is lovely and true,
That my lover's legs in the moonlight are pearly
And pale and slim as peeled willow wands,
Is it ugly?
Morito: No.
Kurodo: Or if I tell you
That when she lies full length in the moonlight,
Her thighs are like fishes
Or water-smooth shapes,
Can that be ugly?
Or if I say her belly is a dune
And her skin is smooth as wet sea sand
Glimmering under a white moon
Is it ugly? Tell me.

Morito: No. It is not ugly, Kurodo.
Kuwachi (to Morito): We're not really mocking.
Can't you see we're happy—just happy? . . .
Kurodo: . . . And a little bit drunk?
Morito: I see. I do see. You must not be angry with me.
Kuwachi (gaily): We're not! Let's be happy!
Kurodo (to Morito): You sit so silently,
Sometimes we tease you to make you talk.
Morito: You are not cruel to me, Kuwachi—
Nor you Kurodo—I know—
And I do not grudge your joy and gaiety with girls—
It's easy for you.
Kuwachi: And for you?
Morito: Not easy—
Because it's true—I know it's true—
That what I feel for her is just . . .
Kurodo: Say it!
Morito: Lust!
Kuwachi: Ah, but is she lovely?
Morito: I don't know.
Kurodo: Don't *know*?
Morito: I want her. I want her. That's all I know.
Kuwachi: Dear God! But you told her surely?
Morito: Told her?
Kurodo: That you love her . . .
Kuwachi: . . . That she's lovely, haven't you?
Morito: I dare not. Is she? In any case she would see . . .
Kurodo: What would she see?
Morito: That I . . . (he hesitates)
Kurodo: What? Only lust for her? Would she? What of it?
Morito: But it's true! You don't seem to understand—
I do!
Kurodo: Did you hear that vile confession, Kuwachi?
Kuwachi: Shame on you, Morito! But seriously listen . . .
Kurodo: So do we! We want girls too—terribly!
Are we so foul? So hideous, Morito?
Kuwachi and I rave like wolves for them . . .
Kuwachi: Howl like wild dogs if we're deprived of 'em . . .
Kurodo: . . . And would perjure, lie, like two cheap watches
To coax any kitten into bed for a night.
Kuwachi: Are we so dreadful?
Kurodo: Can't you see it's an old game, Morito
Which most girls can play at much better than we?
Kuwachi (to Morito):
Why are you so much worse than we are?
Morito: Because it does not trouble you.
But it disturbs me.
Kuwachi: How?
Morito: It makes me feel sick inside—and ashamed.

Kuwachi: You're Puritanical!
Morito: Am I?
Kurodo: Of course!
Morito (miserably): But if its only lust . . .
Kuwachi: What of it?
Morito: And If I did not love her—after?
Kurodo (jokingly): You would have had her and eased . . .
Kuwachi (ironically): . . . Your soul; your aching soul a little, Morito!
Morito: You are mocking me again.
Kuwachi: A little bit.
Kurodo (to Morito): This woman has moved you—admit it—
I've seen it.
Call it lust or what you will—
Does it matter? If you want her?
Kuwachi: I've never seen you so upset—
Or heard you sigh so much . . .
Kurodo: And speak so little . . .
Kuwachi: . . . Or seen that look in your eye before.
Kurodo: Admit it, Morito, she has, hasn't she?
Morito: Has what?
Kuwachi: Filled your life with only one longing?
Kurodo: And can your dreams dismiss the thought of her?
Morito: What dreams?
Kurodo: Ah, Morito, d'you think I can't see
When your thoughts are a thousand miles away?
Kuwachi: Even when we talk rubbish you nod
And smile as if it were sense.
D'you think we don't notice?
Morito: I'm sorry.
Kurodo: Well we do—
And wonder what is troubling you.
Morito: It's nothing—an odd thought—I'm absent-minded.
Kuwachi: I know what you think about.
Morito: You do not, Kuwachi.
Kuwachi: Don't I? I do. I know you dream of . . .
Morito: What?
Kuwachi: Cold mountains . . .
Kurodo: Harsh country and desert scrub . . .
Kuwachi: . . . The fierce and lonely frontier places
Where fast, cold rivers run,
And trim, professional armies march
Spangling in the sun!
Kurodo: It's a place for all young romantics to go . . .
Kuwachi: Because every defile holds a terrible foe
And every high hill some hope of honour—
And death, you idiot!

Kuwachi: But seriously, now tell me, Morito,
Who is that man who in scarlet and gold
You see wade through those cold, fast rivers? . . .
Kurodo: . . . And tell me, who is he you see
Pushing on through the flurry of arrows
And always the foremost at the front?
Kuwachi: Isn't he only our old friend Morito,
Wonderfully dressed up in scarlet and gold?
Kurodo (puzzled): But who *is* the enemy?
And who lets loose those arrows at you
Which whistle and hiss all about your head?
Kuwachi: That's what interests *me*
Who *is* this enemy?
Kurodo: What bold banner are you bearing Morito,
And who are you leading, in your mind,
To what goal?
Kuwachi: D'you think we can't tell
When your mind starts to dwell
On these ridiculous and fabulous things?
Morito (stoutly): Why do you tease me because I want to be a soldier?
Kuwachi (almost angrily): Why *must* you be? You don't *have* to be!
Morito (passionately): Yes, I must be!
Kuwachi: A soldier? Bah!
You wouldn't be content to take your risk
Like a common trooper when it came
And spend the rest of your time in a stupor
Waiting for the next campaign . . .
Morito (scornfully): That sort of man is not a soldier!
Kurodo: Then who is? Tell me.
Morito: He who can endure
Calamity and hardship,
Pain, dust, sun and the winter rain
Without complaint,
And asks only to be sent where there's strife
And honour is bought with his blood or his life . . .
Kurodo: . . . Then he's a fool—and deserves to die!
Morito: Ay, he must die if fate so wills it,
And not cry out either, or care
If his bones are buried
Or lie bare to the wind.
Kuwachi: Oh, this is madness!
And what's his reward?
Kurodo: What are you looking for there, Morito
In those bitter-cold far away places?
Is it glory you want?
Morito: No, honour.
Kurodo: I see. And glory?

Morito: Glory too—if it comes to me
Though no proper soldier should seek it.
Kurodo: Morito, Morito, what is it in you
That makes you want such things?
Kuwachi (wisely): It's a sickness.
Kurodo (agreeing): It is—a very special sickness, Kuwachi
He seems to hate himself inside.
Kuwachi: Why should he?
Kurodo: That's the mystery—but he does.
I know you, Morito.
Morito: Do you?
Kurodo: Not the easy way up for you—
No paved promotion—but the stiff way up— . . .
Kuwachi: Dedication, solid devotion, and what in the end?
Kurodo: He'll be venerable, crusty, scarred and grey,
All vanity, foolishness, lust burned away,
A half-pay, tired old man who can say—
(mockingly, in an old man's voice)
I was a soldier!
Morito: Is that such a wicked thing?
Kuwachi: Ach, it's a *mad* thing!
Morito: And is there no honour in it at all?
Kuwachi: What is honour? Does anyone know?
These are only dreams, Morito!
Kurodo: Take what's here, what's real . . .
Kuwachi: . . . What's offered . . .
Kurodo: . . . A soft job, a lush girl . . .
Kuwachi: . . . Take them all . . .
Kurodo: . . . They're there for the taking . . .
Kuwachi: Love and leave them.
Kurodo: For dreams go dead
And sour your soul.

(The lights go out.)

CORRESPONDENCE

OTHELLO

Dear Sirs,

My only apology for making yet another contribution to the correspondence provoked by Miss Rappoport's article (*Theoria* 14) rests on the fact that Mr Martin's letter (*Theoria* 16) seems to be an example of an attitude to the play that encourages an evasion of its final impact.

Mr Martin demonstrates—and I think plausibly—that the society within which the action unfolds lays great stress on order and procedure in judicial matters. In the course of his analysis, moreover, he shows that this characteristic is not irrelevant to our assessment of Othello himself. For instance, he suggests that the first Act presents an Othello who respects the authority of the state and the dignity of the law, an Othello whose 'occupation' involves the upholding of order and justice. Thus our notions of the scope of Othello's generalship are enlarged, and his eventual fall made more complete. But Mr Martin goes much further than this. He claims that the theme of Venetian justice leads us to Othello's tragic flaw, and thus makes it impossible for us to 'excuse' him. And it is this, the main point of Mr Martin's argument, that I wish to challenge.

Othello's flaw, as Mr Martin sees it, is that he lacks the 'judicial temper' and does not always observe 'judicial procedures', and Mr Martin substantiates his point by suggesting that Othello's investigation of the brawl between Cassio and Roderigo (II, ii) lacks Venetian thoroughness. Even assuming that Othello's dismissal of Cassio is unjust: that any man but one possessed of a more than ordinary capacity for suspiciousness would have seen through Iago's account of what happened is very doubtful. True, this scene is the beginning of Othello's downfall; but it is also the beginning of Iago's plot. I must ask Mr Martin to return to Miss C. van Heyningen's analysis (*Theoria* 15) of Iago's role in this play, and remind him of Iago's characteristic method of contamination: not the presentation of a fool-proof case, but the use of an image of perfect trustworthiness. Iago is mirrored in Othello's reply to him:

> '. . . I know Iago
> Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter,
> Making it light to Cassio.'

There are moments when the only defence against an Iago is a degree of mistrust incompatible with generosity. That this statement is unpleasant should not prevent us from seeing that it is true.

My second reason for questioning Mr Martin's argument is that to elevate neglect of Venetian standards of procedure into Othello's tragic flaw, is to give that procedure an importance it

does not have in the play. I need go no further than Mr Martin's own article to illustrate this, for Mr Martin, in developing his argument consistently, is forced into an untenable position. He concludes with the statement that Othello's suicide has 'a terrible appropriateness, for he . . . has denied what Venice stands for'. It is undeniable that Othello has acted unlawfully: a murder, by definition almost, is that which 'denies' the law. But Shakespeare does not write five acts to demonstrate a self-evident truth. Othello kills himself because he feels, in a wave of grief and horror far beyond the capacity of even the most responsive audience, the utter monstrousness of his action. It is true that at this point Othello, having broken the law of Venice, is confronted by the law of Venice. But contrast his words,

> 'Blow me about in winds, roast me in sulphur,
> Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire . . .'

with Lodovico's statement, as quoted by Mr Martin:

> '. . . You shall close prisoner rest
> Till that the nature of your fault be known
> To the Venetian state . . .'

and it will become plain that, in the face of Othello's capacity for experience, 'Venetian order' is small indeed.

My final argument against Mr Martin's contention is that, as I have hinted, his point of view has the effect of shielding us from the tragic force of the play. Mr Martin, with every other reader of the play, says to himself: 'This is horrible: how can a man kill the woman he truly loves?' And he attempts to answer this question by seeking, on good authority no doubt, a 'flaw'. Now to find a flaw will render the position in which Othello finds himself a little less terrible to us. For if Othello kills Desdemona because originally he was careless of Venetian procedure, we will be able to say: 'He could have remedied this and been safe'. We will be able to retreat into such a statement as 'We cannot excuse Othello', and afford ourselves the relief of knowing that we stand in a position from which there is an escape. But this will also have the effect of reducing Shakespeare's play to the level of a warning and an example. Shakespeare does not wish us to find a 'flaw' in the sense Mr Martin understands it. On the contrary, he takes great pains to make perfectly clear that Othello's appalling act is the result of the depth and passion of his love for Desdemona—so much so that in the very scene in which the murder is committed, Shakespeare makes him say, watching her sleeping form:

> '. . .But once put out thy light,
> Thou cunningest pattern of excelling Nature,
> I know not where is that Promethean heat
> That can thy light relume.'

To wish to find a conventional flaw in *Othello* is to wish to blunt

the edge of its tragic theme, for in it Shakespeare demonstrates that a great capacity for feeling, while being the measure of our nobility, can at the same time be a deadly danger.

Yours truly,

J. A. BERTHOUD,
University of Natal,
Pietermaritzburg.

Dear Sirs,

A brief reply to Mr Martin:

(1) Othello *is* just in dismissing Cassio. A soldier on duty, drunk at his post, deserves summary dismissal, especially one in command, especially in troubled times. How he comes to be drunk is irrelevant.

(2) True, Othello is not a Venetian. But Shakespeare prefers Othello to the Venetians. Except Desdemona, and she shows magnanimity, not 'justice' when she whispers with her dying breath, 'Nobody. I myself'.

A small person can achieve the 'Venetian' virtues. Only a great one can err as Othello does.

Yours truly,

CHRISTINA VAN HEYNINGEN

NADINE GORDIMER

Dear Sirs,

Though I heartily agree with most of what Mr Woodward says in *Theoria* 16 about Nadine Gordimer, I should like to add a minor comment or two.

Mr Woodward quotes the following passage from *The Lying Days*. Joel says to Helen,

> 'You always set yourself such a terribly high standard, Helen, that's the trouble. You're such a snob, when it comes to emotion. Only the loftiest, the purest, will do for you. Sometimes I've thought that it is a kind of laziness, really. If you embrace something that seems to embody all this idealism, you feel you yourself have achieved the loftiest, the purest, the *most real.*'

'I was disconcerted' says Mr Woodward, 'when I came on this passage at the end of the book. It had seemed to me that the authoress was identified—to excess—with all the falseness and pretence of her heroine throughout the book; but I suddenly saw that she was acute enough to cover her own tracks by this interpolated objectivity at the end. It is, however, no more than a trick, an evasion. If this girl's development were seen with a true objectivity it should have been visible through the whole texture of the novel's

development, and not just brought in to balance up the books at the end. As it stands, it is a device for having your cake and eating it; so that this ending does not, in fact, strike one as a genuine distancing and grasp, by the author, of the experience, but just as one more attitude struck; the concluding paragraphs do not convince one that the sensibility is any way modified.'

I would go further. I would say that the passage shows very confused thinking about what snobbery is, and is a thinly-disguised and ill-justified boast. Helen's standards are not high. The author's accounts of her love-making and of her attitude to her parents, for example, show her to be cold, vain and—yes, 'vulgar' is the word (it is Mr Woodward's).

But no more of this, except to contrast her with Katherine Mansfield, of whose 'swiftly impressionistic technique', says Mr Woodward, hers is 'strongly reminiscent'. So it is. But what a world of difference!

Katherine Mansfield, in spite of doing only little things, as Lawrence indirectly complained, was a good writer, and was growing better when she died at the age of thirty-four. The reason is that she was always struggling for humility, for clarity. 'I am not crystal clear', she would say. I am 'full of sediment'. 'One must learn, one must practice to forget oneself. I can't tell the truth about Aunt Anne unless I am free to enter into her life without self-consciousness'.

It is just the truth about Aunt Anne that Nadine Gordimer cannot tell. She never forgets herself enough to enter deeply into another life—or even into her own. Consider, for example, the following passage quoted by Mr Woodward:

> 'The synagogue sent an elderly gentleman who dwindled from a big stomach, outlined with a watch chain, to thin legs that ended in neat, shabby brown shoes, supple with years of polishing. He wore glasses that made his brown eyes look very big. He had a small beard, and his face was pleasantly pink and planned in folds—a fold beneath each eye, another fold where the cheek skirted the mouth, a fold where the jaw met the neck, a fold where the neck met the collar. There was even a small fold beneath the lobe of each ear, as if the large, useful-looking ears had sagged under their own weight and usefulness over the years.'

This is well observed, but it is opaque, not lit up from within by imaginative understanding (as, incidentally, Alan Paton's characters are). Nobody has entered deeply into the man from the synagogue and lit a lamp inside him by which his face and form might be read, or partly read. Contrast with this Katherine Mansfield's account of Miss Moss and the man who picks her up, at the end of her story, *Pictures*. Miss Moss is a fat contralto singer past her prime, unable to get a job in the midst of the depression of the 1914-1918 war. She has one and threepence in the world, her landlady has threatened to eject her if the rent isn't paid by eight o'clock

that night, and she's had nothing to eat all day. In her optimistic self-deceiving way she has drifted into the Café de Madrid, subconsciously knowing, but not admitting to herself, the way out she is going to find.

> 'It was almost dark in the café. Men, palms, red plush seats, white marble tables, waiters in aprons, Miss Moss walked through them all. Hardly had she sat down when a very stout gentleman wearing a very small hat that floated on the top of his head like a little yacht flopped into the chair opposite hers.
>
> "Good evening!" said he.
>
> Miss Moss said, in her cheerful way: "Good evening!"
>
> "Fine evening," said the stout gentleman.
>
> "Yes, very fine. Quite a treat, isn't it?" said she.
>
> He crooked a sausage finger at the waiter—"Bring me a large whisky"—and turned to Miss Moss. "What's yours?"
>
> "Well, I think I'll take a brandy, if it's all the same."
>
> Five minutes later the stout gentleman leaned across the table and blew a puff of cigar smoke full in her face.
>
> "That's a tempting bit o' ribbon!" said he.
>
> Miss Moss blushed until a pulse at the top of her head that she never had felt before pounded away.
>
> "I always was one for pink." said she
>
> The stout gentleman considered her, drumming with her fingers on the table.
>
> "I like 'em firm and well covered," said he.
>
> Miss Moss, to her surprise, gave a loud snigger.
>
> Five minutes later the stout gentleman heaved himself up.
>
> "Well, am I goin' your way, or are you comin' mine?" he asked.
>
> "I'll come with you, if it's all the same," said Miss Moss.
>
> And she sailed after the little yacht out of the café.'

Every sentence of this is irradiated with pity and understanding. For example, even the first two sentences of the quotatation are written as if from inside Miss Moss's consciousness. A sense of the terrible daring, the dread, the horror of the step she is taking is produced by the piling up of frightening detail: 'Men, palms, red plush seats, white marble tables, waiters in aprons'—as if they were all tigers, snakes, lions, cannibals, followed by 'Miss Moss walked through them all'. The 'very stout gentleman' is ridiculous in his 'very small hat that floated on the top of his head like a little yacht,' but seen through Miss Moss's eyes, he is even more horrifying—her vague dread is strongly conveyed. 'Her cheerful way' seems typically plucky in the circumstances. The man's coarseness and vulgarity as he crooks 'a sausage finger at the waiter', blows a puff of smoke full in her face, and with contemptuous condescension remarks on the 'tempting bit o' ribbon' brings home to the reader the sordidness of the step Miss Moss is taking, the way she is giving up her rights over her own self to a

stranger grossly inferior—it is a squalid sale. The most inappropriate loud snigger with which, to her own surprise, Miss Moss greets the man's advance shows the pent-up nervousness in her, uncontrollably bursting out—it could only have been imagined by a writer who, for the time being, *is* Miss Moss, and forgets herself utterly in the completeness of her 'charity' towards human creatures.

This is a crude account of one or two of the details which stir the Katherine Mansfield passage to life. One could go on at much greater length, with greater subtlety. There is no feeling—no humour, sympathy, fear, despair—animating by means of deeply-imagined detail any paragraph by Nadine Gordimer. We are told what her characters feel, we are not made to feel it. I think Mr Woodward will agree that the distance between Katherine Mansfield and Nadine Gordimer is immense.

Yours truly,

CHRISTINA VAN HEYNINGEN

THE ADDITIONS TO KYD'S *SPANISH TRAGEDY*

by C. VAN HEYNINGEN

I BELIEVE that the interpolations to *The Spanish Tragedy* are unmistakeably by Shakespeare. For this view there is apparently not a rag of external evidence; but the dates are right, and none of the known facts are against it—unless we count the famous two entries in the producer Henslowe's diary, recording in so many words that he paid Ben Jonson for writing the additions. But critics of repute have taken for granted that Ben Jonson was only an intermediary: as both Lamb and Fitzgerald say, Ben Jonson never has and never could have written anything at all like them. Both suggest the agency of 'some more potent spirit', and mention Webster. Webster, in my opinion, never got anywhere near the depth of sincerity, and the consistently and powerfully moving quality of these passages, nor did he ever, even at his best, show the same originality of insight. Only Shakespeare could have written them; they reveal his peerless quality, and are in the style of his best and ripest period, the period round about *Hamlet*, the period, in fact, when we know that the additions were written. The blank verse with its irregularity—its halting, breaking off, rushing on, and so on, under the stress of powerful emotion—is the verse of *Hamlet;* the attitude to life is Shakespeare's, who, as Coleridge remarks, keeps to 'the broad high way' (unlike Webster, Tourneur and such), dealing with the central human emotions, and not concerning himself with 'interesting adulterers' and queer aberrations. Fortified by the memory that the great Coleridge himself, best, most penetrating and least prejudiced of critics, pronounced the style to be Shakespeare's, I hope to demonstrate the grounds for my belief by examining, in what follows, the additions themselves.

The editor of the 1952 World's Classics edition of *Five Elizabethan Tragedies*, which contains Kyd's famous play, admits that the interpolations are 'poetically' good, but 'dramatically' he maintains 'they make nonsense of the plot and Hieronymo's character'. Dr Frederick S. Boas, editor of the definitive edition of Kyd, regards them as mere 'excrescences' on the play. To Dr Boas the great beauty of *The Spanish Tragedy* is its 'elaborate plot'. Well, as for that, many a detective story or thriller has a more ingenious plot, and one that is tighter knit and more economical. The main plot (leaving out the unintegral figures of the Ghost and Revenge, the superfluous subplot about Alexandro and Viluppo, and the hardly less superfluous one about Serberine and Pedringano) goes roughly as follows: Horatio, a young son of Hieronymo, Marshal of Spain, has unhorsed and captured Balthazar, son of the Viceroy of

Portugal, in battle, giving him to Lorenzo, nephew of the Spanish King, to hold to ransom. In Spain, the captive Balthazar falls in love with Lorenzo's sister, Bellimperia, daughter of the Duke of Castile; and when she rejects him in favour of Horatio, Balthazar and Lorenzo, on surprising her and Horatio at midnight in Hieronymo's garden, stab Horatio to death, hang up his corpse, and incarcerate Bellimperia. Hearing an outcry, Hieronymo and his wife Isabella rush out to find their son's dead body swaying in the wind. From time to time, they both go mad with grief. Hieronymo thirsts for revenge, but at first doesn't know who the murderers are; even when he picks up a letter from Bellimperia, written in blood and telling all, he thinks this may be a fake; but in the end, an accident reveals that the lady has spoken the truth; Lorenzo and Balthazar are the men. Hieronymo then ponders revenge, and often blames himself for weakness in delaying it. It is part of his office as Marshal to arrange shows and pageants, and at last, he promises to 'fit' the King and the Duke of Castile with a play to entertain the visiting Viceroy of Portugal and celebrate a pact between the two countries. With the connivance of the bereaved Bellimperia, now set free and betrothed to Balthazar, he chooses as his cast Lorenzo, Balthazar, Bellimperia and himself. The ensuing play-within-the-play demands that Hieronymo should stab Lorenzo, and Bellimperia first Balthazar and then herself. Both do the stabbing in good earnest. Whereupon Hiernoymo shows his own son's corpse to the other two fathers, exults in his revenge, bites out his tongue and then stabs the Duke of Castile and himself. Poor Isabella meanwhile has run mad and killed herself, without anybody's appearing to notice. This plot, I must confess, though full of the kind of situation called 'good theatre' doesn't seem to me to deserve immortality on its own merits.

The first interpolation Dr Boas regards as 'a sop to a debased theatrical taste', because it represents Hieronymo as going mad immediately after finding his son's murdered body, instead of long afterwards, as in the version that is pure Kyd. Let us examine this judgment. The addition comes just after a mixture of fairly dramatic verse with the kind of sheer rant that drew Ben Jonson's fire:

Isabella: O gush out, tears, fountains and floods of tears,
Blow sighs, and raise an everlasting storm,
For outrage fits our cursed wretchedness.

Hieronymo: Sweet lovely rose, ill-pluckt before thy time,
Fair worthy son, not conquered, but betrayed
I'll kiss thee now, for words with tears are stayed.

This is out of stock: every successful Elizabethan playwright had shelves-full of this kind of thing on hand, ready for the next occasion. Between these two speeches Shakespeare inserts his first addition (Act II, scene v, 46-97) and the whole thing comes alive with Shakespeare's own kind of insight and language. Unfortunately there's no room to quote it all. He begins by imagining

Isabella dramatically as suddenly stopped in mid-speech, horrified by something in her husband's aspect:

'Ay me—Hieronymo—sweet husband, speak.'

He *has* been speaking, so that we're made in that exclamation to see Hieronymo's face all at once grown stark, as full consciousness of an unbearable thought knocks for admission. Hieronymo jibs at the thought, refusing it, as a horse refuses a jump. Horatio can't be dead: that is too terrible to be borne; and suddenly his brain turns as he makes himself believe instead that Horatio's only late; he's not there certainly, but it's only that he hasn't yet come back from a visit to Balthazar.

'He had no custom to stay out so late.
He may be in his chamber; some go see.'

This kind of thing is the essence of madness, surely? Shakespeare didn't need psychiatry to tell him that a sudden earthquake in the passional life could produce this turning of the brain away from intolerable fact into dream that is more tolerable. Hieronymo has been riding the crest of fondest pride in his son, and he says:

Hieronymo: His Majesty the other day did grace him
With waiting on his cup: these be favours
That show he cannot be short-lived.
Isabella: Sweet Hieronymo.
Hieronymo: I wonder how this fellow got his clothes?
Sirrah, Sirrah, I'll know the truth of all!

And again he sends someone to look for him.

This has Shakespeare's very note: a complex of profoundly-felt emotion expressed in simple, natural language—the kind of language that seems to come so easily, for we all feel the emotion and ideas it conveys at once. The lines are full of the illogical comfort we drink from trivial signs when the drained heart is thirsting for comfort. He was 'frolic and merry' at supper, Hieronymo has said; so of course he can't be dead. The dear boy, so considerate of his parents, is never late; so how could he be so immeasurably inconsiderate (the crazy mind implies) as to be dead? These *are* his clothes, but since the man in them is dead, and Horatio can't be dead, it must be someone else wearing them: someone must have borrowed them. And so on—the reasons why he can't be dead are so feeble; the feeling that produces them such fathoms deep. Even Isabella's distressed exclamation, "Sweet Hieronymo", trying to check his madness, has all the expressiveness that two words in Shakespeare can gain from their context.

And what could be more Shakespearean in its penetrating naturalness than the words showing the next twist the crazed mind takes when Hieronymo calls one of the servants to look at the corpse:

Hieronymo: Pedro, come hither; knowest thou who this is?
Pedro: Too well, sir.

Hieronymo: Too well, who? Who is it? Peace, Isabella:
Nay, blush not, man.
Pedro: It is my Lord Horatio.
Hieronymo: Ha, ha, St. James, but this doth make me laugh,
That there are more deluded than myself.
Pedro: Deluded?
Hieronymo: Ay.
I would have sworn myself within this hour
That this had been my son Horatio:
His garments are so like. Ha, are they not great persuasions?
Isabella: O, would to God it were not so.
Hieronymo: Were not, Isabella? dost thou dream it is?
Can thy soft bosom entertain a thought,
That such a black deed of mischief should be done
On one so pure and spotless as our son?
Away, I am ashamed.

That his dear wife should think such horrible thoughts ! Yet *her* believing them, as he sees she does when she goes on to reason with him, shocks him out of the comforting lie, and in the lines that follow, with their profoundly dramatic changes and pauses and rhythms, and the intensity of passion in the love and grief they express, how is it that everybody but Coleridge has missed Shakespeare's own voice and style?

Hieronymo: It was a man, sure, that was hanged up here;
A youth, as I remember. I cut him down.
If it should prove my son now after all
Say you? Say you? Light, lend me a taper;
Let me look again. O God,
Confusion, mischief, torment, death and hell,
Drop all your stings at once in my cold bosom,
That now is stiff with horror; kill me quickly:
Be gracious to me, thou infective night,
And drop this deed of murder down on me;
Gird in my waste of grief with thy large darkness,
And let me not survive, to see the light
May put me in the mind I had a son.
Isabella: O sweet Horatio, O my dearest son.
Hieronymo: How strongly had I lost my way to grief.

'A youth as I remember. I cut him down.' One hears the old man's uncertain voice. The finding of the body and the cutting down took place only a few minutes ago; but his whole life has changed so that it seems to have happened a long, long time since, so far back that he can hardly remember the details.

Consider the piercing eloquence with which the violent swerving back from madness to sanity is expressed in the two lines:

'If it should prove my son now after all
Say you? Say you? Light, lend me a taper.'

The startled, terrified tone of his voice is in them, as realisation begins to pierce thro' him slowly like a stiletto. And in the next part with its heavily trembling rhythms and sad weight of words as we feel to the full the utter collapse of hope; in the sad, passionate outcry, the capacious punning imagination of a line like 'Gird in my waste of grief with thy large darkness'—as if he contained within his own body a burden large enough to match the darkness—and in the penetrating knowledge of the heart conveyed in the simple image of the last line, in which the whole fit of insanity is summed up: 'How strangely had I lost my way to grief'—surely in all these things we should have recognised that it is Shakespeare's voice, unmistakeably his, that we hear?

Of the next addition (Act III, scene ii 65-74) Boas says that though the irony of it is fine, it's 'dramatically inappropriate', because it reveals Hieronymo's scheme of vengeance prematurely. The passage is short and bitter; Hieronymo, having picked up Bellimperia's 'bloody writ', though he thinks the note may be a trap, could hardly be expected, when he meets Lorenzo immediately afterwards, to show no sign. Kyd makes him pass off the meeting blandly, but Shakespeare inserts this little touch: Lorenzo has asked with sham kindness what is troubling Hieronymo, and Shakespeare makes the old man answer:

> 'a thing of nothing:
> The murder of a son, or so—
> A thing of nothing, my Lord.'

whereupon with a 'why then, farewell' (Kyd's words) Lorenzo passes on. This hardly seems to me like divulging a plan for revenge. It's not as if Horatio's murder and Hieronymo's grief have been or are to be at any point kept secret. The poetic effect of the old man's bitterness is intense; the effect on the plot is nil.

Boas calls the next addition—Hieronymo's outburst to the two Portingales—'a bare-faced interpolation', preferring, as more integral to the play, the way Kyd himself uses these two extras. This udgment is very surprising, for this is the sort of thing that Kyd makes the Marshal say when the Portingales ask him the way to the Duke of Castile's:

> 'There is a path upon your left hand side
> That leadeth from a guilty conscience
> Into a forest of distress and fear.
> There you shall meet with melancholy thoughts,
> Whose baleful humours if you but uphold,
> It will conduct you to despair and death . . .'

and there

> 'Yourselves shall find Lorenzo bathing him
> In boiling lead and blood of innocents'

And so on. 'A riot of sombre fancy,' Boas calls it. A patch of dull fustian, rather! (And by the way this surely would reveal the Marshal's enmity to Lorenzo, to whom it would probably be

reported, far more than the Shakespearean addition we have just discussed.)

But even Boas admits in passing that the Shakespeare speech to the Portingales (though of course he doesn't know it is Shakespeare's) is 'masterly'. I shall have to quote the whole of it:

'Tis neither as you think nor as you think
Nor as you think; you're wide all:
These slippers are not mine, they were my son Horatio's.
My son—and what's a son? A thing begot
Within a pair of minutes, thereabout,
A lump bred up in darkness, and doth serve
To ballace these light creatures we call women;
And at nine months' end, creeps forth to light.
What is there yet in a son,
To make a father dote, rave, or run mad?
Being born, it pouts, cries, and breeds teeth.
What is there yet in a son? He must be fed,
Be taught to go, and speak. Ay; or yet,
Why might not a man love a calf as well?
Or melt in passion o'er a frisking kid,
As for a son? Methinks, a young bacon,
Or a fine little smooth horse-colt
Should move a man as much as doth a son,
For one of these, in very little time,
Will grow to some good use; whereas a son,
The more he grows in stature and in years,
The more unsquared, unbevelled he appears;
Reckons his parents among the rank of fools;
Strikes care upon their heads with his mad riots;
Makes them look old, before they meet with age.
This is a son:
And what a loss were this, considered truly?—
O, but my Horatio
Grew out of reach of these insatiate humours:
He loved his loving parents,
He was my comfort, and his mother's joy,
The very arm that did hold up our house;
Our hopes were stored up in him.
None but a damned murderer could hate him.
He had not seen the back of nineteen year
When his strong arm unhorsed the proud Prince Balthazar,
And his great mind, too full of honour,
Took him unto mercy,
That valiant but ignoble Portingale.
Well, heaven is heaven still,
And there is Nemesis, and Furies,
And things called whips,
And they sometimes do meet with murderers:

They do not always scape, that is some comfort,
Ay, ay, ay; and then time steals on,
And steals, and steals,
Till Violence leaps forth like thunder,
Wrapt in a ball of fire,
And so doth bring confusion to them all.'

Here it is as if 'sweet Shakespeare', in the only truly Revenge Tragedy he ever had a hand in, set his imagination the task of considering: 'What kind of feeling would it be that would make a gentle-natured old man go mad for grief and kill for revenge?' The result is poetry expressing more powerfully than any other I can think of in literature what the love of a father might be.

The starting mind, obsessed but capricious, of a man in a fit of insanity is in the rhythm and fancy of the first three and a half lines. The next dozen have a beauty and insight and a happiness of phrase that Webster might have attained to (that occasionally inspired poetic journalist, with every gift but integrity); but as the passage gets into its stride there seems little excuse for not recognising the degree and sort of mastery that only Shakespeare is capable of.

The words are those of a man dizzy and bewildered with pain, wondering what can be sufficiently important to make him feel this blind agony. A son, after all—and he sums up, as people often secretly do, in time of grief, all the shortcomings and the heavy cost to themselves of the person they have lost, in the hope of feeling the loss less bitterly. Sons are begotten almost by chance, are a nuisance all through babyhood and boyhood. A baby animal is more fetching and more useful. And in adolescence sons cause more heartburning than ever: they kick over the traces, despise their parents, make them seem old. Every word of this, of course, is true of every son that ever breathed. But in the midst of this self-protecting rationality Shakespeare makes us feel in the rhythm of the lines how suddenly the father's heart melts with contrite and passionately loving recollection: 'O, but my Horatio . . .'. It's chiefly the eloquent rhythm that makes us feel the profound conviction in that cry of deep love, matched with execration as deep: 'None but a damned murderer could hate him'. And then when he pictures his son met in combat with a proud prince, valiantly conquering and as gallantly sparing him, the image that he calls up of his charming boy, so full of courage and magnanimity is too lively—it is too much for him. The rhythm shows how his mind shies away from the too-intense pain and swerves towards the balm of revenge: 'Well, heaven is heaven still . . .' 'They do not always scape, that is some comfort'. In the next five lines his brain turns, for a moment he is mad again—in rhythm and words we see him slyly, secretly nodding his 'Ay, ay, ay' and hear the insane, cunning sinister undertone: 'And then time steals on, And steals and steals', and then the burst of sound with which desire for violence discharges in him the short but voluble image of the

thunderbolt, full of sudden terror and divine retribution, with a threatening mutter as it falls away, 'and so doth bring confusion to them all'—an image that again has the ring of Shakespeare's own voice in it. Is there any other playwright of the period whose writing has so much of the natural rhythm of speech in it, so perfectly fused at every point with poetic rhythm?—in the natural, yearning sound of these simple lines, for example:

'He loved his loving parents,
He was my comfort and his mother's joy,
The very arm that did hold up our house'?

Is there any other who can so melt the heart? Not Ben Jonson, no—his forte is a ravishing sensuousness, or a brilliant comic verve, with a capacious, enterprising, imaginative, Elizabethan richness in it, never this human insight; not Webster, who can be moving one moment, but shows his corrupt heart, and moral confusion, the next. We ought to have known, without the external evidence, that it was Shakespeare. Moreover, this addition produces exactly what was needed—a perfect understanding on the part of the audience, of how this gentle-hearted old man, by the very depth of his capacity for love and sweetness of spirit, is moved to madness and the need for revenge.

Of the next addition, containing the 'painter's part' much-advertised in later successive printings of the play, Boas says, though praising it, that it is merely 'in conception, a replica of that between the Marshal and the old Bazulto in the next scene'.

The Kyd passage is good, undoubtedly—very good, for Kyd—so good that Shakespeare apparently didn't want his addition to replace it, and it was left in. Quite possibly, I think, it was the quality of this piece of Kyd that made Shakespeare want to try his hand at improving it. I quote a brief passage to show Kyd at his best.

An old man called Don Bazulto, coming in with other petitioners, after a good deal of cold bombast about how his case

'May move the hearts of warlike Myrmidono,
And melt the Corsic rocks with ruthful tears,'

offers Hieronymo a petition. Kyd goes on

Hieronymo: What's here? The humble supplication
Of Don Bazulto for his murder'd son.
Senex: Ay, sir.
Hieronymo: No, sir, it was my murder'd son:
O my son, my son, O my son Horatio!
But mine, or thine, Bazulto, be content.
Here, take my handkercher, and wipe thine eyes,
Whiles wretched I in thy mishaps may see
The lively portrait of my dying self.
(He draweth out a bloody napkin).
O no, not this; Horatio, this was thine;
And when I dy'd it in thy dearest blood,
This was a token 'twixt thy soul and me,

That of thy death revenged I should be.
But here, take this, and this—what, my purse?—
Ay, this, and that, and all of them are thine;
For all as one are our extremities.

1st citizen: O, see the kindness of Hieronymo!

2nd citizen: This gentleness shows him a gentleman.

Hieronymo: See, see, O see thy shame, Hieronymo;
See here a loving father to his son!
Behold the sorrows and the sad laments,
That he delivereth for his son's decease!
If love's effects so strives in lesser things,
If love enforce such moods in meaner wits,
If love express such power in poor estates:
Hieronymo, when, as a raging sea
Toss'd with the wind and tide, o'erturnest thou,
The upper billows' course of waves to keep,
Whilst lesser waters labour in the deep:
Then shamest thou not, Hieronymo, to neglect
The sweet revenge of thy Horatio?

This has more than a touch of genuine, natural grief. The rhythm of the first three lines has a passionate movement and a sound of wild sorrow in it. Hieronymo's gesture of taking out his handkerchief to wipe the old man's eyes is natural and tender, and when the handkerchief he draws out proves to be that which he soaked in Lorenzo's blood his shock and horror are conveyed by sound and rhythm too so that they touch the heart. But after that the imagination moves more and more stiffly, and his self-blame is expressed in language of a pattern unemotionally orderly and logical. After Hieronymo has gone through a rather routine account of how he dreams of following the murderers into hell—again in language too coolly logical to express the tumultuous grief he is meant to be feeling—Kyd ends with a fine imaginative touch, which Shakespeare has partly imitated:

'Then will I rent and tear them, thus and thus,
Shivering their limbs in pieces with my teeth
(Tears the papers)

Petitioner: Oh, sir, my declaration!
(Exit Hieronymo, and they after)'

Now let us examine what Shakespeare writes—in a passage Boas regards as 'in conception a replica' of what Kyd has written. Unfortunately the addition as a whole is too long to quote:

Two of Hieronymo's servants, Pedro and Jacques, sent into the garden at midnight with torches, begin the scene by giving an eloquent picture of the old Marshal's state of mind. They tell

how he 'grows lunatic and childish for his son', speaks to him at table, as if he were there,

'Then starting in a rage, falls on the earth,
Cries out: Horatio, where is my Horatio?
So that with extreme grief and cutting sorrow,
There is not left in him one inch of man.'

Hieronymo enters, and a scene wildly and passionately dramatic follows. In his madness he searches, as mad people do, for the son he has lost, in all kinds of impossible places, prying into crevices, beating down bushes, and so on. He starts on seeing his two servants, takes them for spirits, and asks why they're carrying torches. They reply, because he told them to. 'No, no', he cries, 'you are deceived—not I, you are deceived,'

'Was I so mad to bid you light your torches now?
Light me your torches at the mid of noon,
When the Sun-god rides in all his glory;
Light me your torches then.

Pedro: Then we burn daylight.

Hieronymo: Let it be burnt; night is a murderous slut,
That would not have her treasons to be seen,
And yonder pale-faced Hecate there, the moon,
Doth give consent to that is done in darkness
And all those stars that gaze upon her face,
Are aiglets on her sleeve, pins on her train,
And those that should be powerful and divine,
Do sleep in darkness when they most should shine.

Pedro: Provoke them not, fair sir, with tempting words;
The heavens are gracious, and your miseries
And sorrow makes you speak, you know not what.

Hieronymo: Villain, thou liest, and thou dost nought
But tell me I am mad: thou liest, I am not mad.
I know thee to be Pedro, and he Jacques,
I'll prove it to thee; and were I mad, how could I?
Where was she that same night when my Horatio
Was murdered? She should have shone: Search thou the book
Had the moon shone, in my boy's face there was a kind of grace
That I know—nay, I do know—had the murderer seen him,
His weapon would have fallen and cut the earth,
Had he been framed for nought but violence and death,
Alack, when mischief doth it knows not what,
What shall we say to mischief?

The heart-rending way this illuminates the cause of the crazy twist its logic has taken doesn't need to be emphasised. Could anybody but Shakespeare have made the pretty fancy of the stars being aiglets on Hecate's sleeve, pins on her train, carry a meaning so cutting? They were being mere ornaments, instead of agents of

God. And how in the old man's petulant cry ' . . . and thou dost nought But tell me I am mad' his desperate sense of wounded justice wells up: it is not he who is mad; it is everybody else, for only he and Isabella understand the iniquity of what has happened. And how the sweetness and innocence of the old man—his unworldliness and his enormous strength of feeling show through his inability to understand how anyone can fail to love his son: 'Had the moon shone—in my boy's face there was a kind of grace . . .' It must have been dark: the murderer couldn't have seen him. But at that thought still blacker misery overwhelms him, for the world is dreadful indeed if such things can be done by accident—in ignorance: 'Alack, when mischief doth it knows not what, What shall we say to mischief?'

When Isabella presently comes out, the desolation of these two old people is felt all the more for their vain attempts to help each other bear their lot. For want of room, I shall have to leave out the portion about the tree that 'grew and grew, and bore and bore,

> Till at the length
> It grew a gallows, and did bear our son'

a passage to the feeling ingenuity of which, Webster, in his best moods, might have been equal.

But Webster has never, even in the best parts of his best plays. risen to the height of the rest, which is the famous 'Painter' scene, It is part of Hieronymo's office as Marshal of Spain to hear petitions and try cases. A painter now knocks, demanding 'justice'.

> 'O, ambitious beggar, wouldst thou have that
> That lives not in the world?'

cries Hieronymo.

> 'Why, all the undelved mines cannot buy
> An ounce of justice; 'tis a jewel so inestimable
> I tell thee God hath engrossed all justice in his hands,
> And there is none but what comes from him.'

God is just, that's still his comfort; but when the painter tells him that *his* son too has been murdered, he sends everybody else away and sits down with him for a comfortable talk: 'Was thy son murdered?' 'How dost take it?' and so on. His unhinged mind takes what comfort it can from being interested in the way its madness takes it. Presently Hieronymo goes on: 'Canst paint a doleful cry?'

Painter: Seemingly, sir.

Hieronymo: Nay, it should cry; but all is one. Well, sir paint me a youth run through and through with villain's swords, hanging upon this tree. Canst thou draw a murderer?

Painter: I'll warrant you, sir: I have the pattern of the most notorious villains that ever lived in all Spain.

Hieronymo: O, let them be worse, worse; stretch thine art, and let their beards be Judas his own colour, and let their eyebrows jutty over: in any case observe that. Then, sir, after some violent noise, bring me forth in my shirt, and my gown under mine arm, with my torch in my hand, and my sword reared up thus: and with the words "What noise is this? Who calls Hieronymo?" May it be done?

Painter: Yes, sir.

Hieronymo: Well, sir, then bring me forth, bring me thorough alley and alley, still with a distracted countenance going along, and let my hair heave up my nightcap. Let the clouds scowl, make the moon dark, the stars extinct, the wind blowing, the bells tolling, the owl shrieking, the toads croaking, the minutes jarring, and the clock striking twelve. And then at last, sir, starting, behold a man hanging, and tottering and tottering, as you know the wind will wave a man, and I with a trice to cut him down. And looking upon him by advantage of my torch, find it to be my son Horatio. There may you (show) a passion, there may you show a passion. Draw me like old Priam of Troy, crying: "the house is afire, the house is afire, as the torch over my head". Make me curse, make me rave, make me cry, make me mad, make me well again, make me curse hell, invocate heaven, and in the end leave me in a trance—and so forth.

Painter: And is this the end?

Hieronymo: O no, there is no end: the end is death and madness. As I am never better than when I am mad; then methinks I am a brave fellow; then I do wonders; but reason abuseth me, and there's the torment, there's the hell. At the last, sir, bring me to one of the murderers; were he as strong as Hector, thus would I tear, and drag him up and down.

(He beats the Painter in.)

All this is extraordinarily true of madness. The madmen in Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* are mere Grand Guignol stuff compared with this. For a mind that contact with reality only sears, tries to keep away from it as long as it can, yet must distract itself with some kind of entertainment. And as there is nothing else in a madman's mind but what has made it mad, it entertains itself with details found on the fringe of the central reality: 'the clouds scowling, the moon dark, the stars extinct, the winds blowing, the bells tolling, the owl shrieking, the minutes jarring, the clock striking twelve'. Imaginary details (like the way the murderers' eyebrows 'jutty over') are piled up, in mounting excitement, with the real cries. The picture called up wavers violently in and out of reality; at the height of it the vision of the murdered man's body, waving

in the wind, is dreadfully real; and as Hieronymo raves on: 'There may you show a passion, there may you show a passion', he tumbles back into sanity for a short moment, and with it into a sadness fathoms deeper than the height of the frenzy from which he has dropped:

'Painter: And is this the end?

Hieronymo: O no, there is no end: the end is death and madness. As I am never better than when I am mad; then methinks I am a brave fellow; then I do wonders; but reason abuseth me, and there's the torment, there's the hell.'

And since no one can endure hell, he leaps back again into his frenzy, finding relief in violence of action as well as words.

Boas complains that this addition lacks 'dramatic plausibility'—apparently because he thinks it unlikely that the painter would come to Hieronymo's garden at midnight. Yet he's come to report the murder of his own son, so he might. But the scene has a much more important kind of plausibility, in that, along with the other additions so far, it fully motivates the whole play at the core—a task that Kyd had left rather scrappily done. If Hieronymo's grief for his son were not felt by the audience to be great enough to send him mad, his being intent upon a bloody revenge would be incredible in one of so sweet a nature. Shakespeare makes both the grief and the madness extraordinarily present to us.

It remains to discuss only the last addition, dismissed by Boas in these words: 'It is hard to believe that the same hand was responsible for this magnificent interpolation' (i.e. the one just dealt with) 'and for the very inferior "additions" in Act IV, where Hieronymo . . . instead of preserving "harmless silence" flings undignified and heartless taunts at his foes.'

In the original Kyd, Hieronymo has revealed in a convincing speech his motive for revenge and the way he has worked the killings; then as he runs to hang himself, he is intercepted. The King, the Viceroy and the Duke demand to know why he has butchered their children; he replies, 'What lesser liberty can Kings afford

Than harmless silence?'

vowing that despite their threats, he will not speak; and adds:

'Pleased with their deaths, and eased with their revenge
First take my tongue and afterwards my heart.'

'Harmless silence', I think, whether dignified or not, would not have contented the perpetrator of a revenge so long meditated, and now so strongly relished. Shakespeare, being Shakespeare, if he is dealing with revenge must penetrate to the heart of a savage outrage committed by a far from savage person, and show us his emotions when it is done; he makes it his business in this addition to show us exactly what Hieronymo feels.

After making sure that Lorenzo, Balthazar and Bellimperia

are all dead (though he regrets that Bellimperia insisted on taking her own life), he says to his fellow-fathers:

'Nay, then I care not; come and we shall be friends;
Let us all lay our heads together.
See, here's a goodly noose will hold them all.'

There's a very ironic good-fellowship in this: they are all bereaved now, and only an equal sorrow can make them equal.

'O damned devil', cries the Viceroy, 'how secure he is.'

Hieronymo: Secure? Why dost thou wonder at it?
I tell thee, Viceroy, this day I have seen revenge
And in that sight am grown a prouder monarch
Than ever sat under the crown of Spain.
Had I as many lives as there be stars,
As many heavens to go to, as those lives,
I'd give them all, ay, and my soul to boot,
But I would see thee ride in this red pool.

Cast: Speak, who were thy confederates in this?

Viceroy: That was thy daughter Bellimperia:
For by her hand my Balthazar was slain:
I saw her stab him.

Hieronymo: O, good words: as dear to me was my Horatio
As yours, or yours, or yours, my Lord, to you.
My guiltless son was by Lorenzo slain,
And by Lorenzo and that Balthazar
Am I at last revenged thoroughly,
Upon whose souls may heavens be yet revenged
With greater far than these afflictions.
Methinks, since I grew inward with revenge,
I cannot look with scorn enough on death.

King: What, dost thou mock us, slave? Bring tortures forth.

Hieronymo: Do, do, do; and meantime I'll torture you.
You had a son (as I take it) and your son
Should have been married to your daughter; ha, was't not so?
You had a son too; he was my liege's nephew
He was proud and politic. Had he lived,
He might have come to wear the crown of Spain—
I think 'twas so: 'twas I that killed him;
Look you, this same hand 'twas that stabbed
His heart—do you see? this hand—
For one Horatio, if you ever knew him:
A youth, one that they hanged up in his father's garden,
One that did force your valiant son to yield,
While your more valiant son did take him prisoner.

Viceroy: Be deaf, my senses, I can hear no more.

King: Fall, heaven, and cover us with thy sad ruins.

Cast: Roll all the world within thy pitchy cloud.

Hieronymo: Now do I applaud what I have acted.
Nunc iners cadat manus
Now to express the rupture of my part,
First take my tongue, and afterward my heart.
(He bites out his tongue.)

Has the deep satisfaction of a bloody revenge (an emotion quite foreign to most of us) ever been more powerfully conveyed? 'Revenge is a kind of wild justice', says Bacon—it is wrong, Hieronymo so desperately feels, that nobody understands how endlessly wicked was the murder of Horatio. He must make someone understand it. Eleven of the lines, 'Speak, who were thy confederates' . . . to 'With greater far than these afflictions', are Kyd's own, slightly transposed, and in them Kyd has made this point: by killing their children, Hieronymo feels he has made the fathers understand something—at least something—of what has happened. The rest of the passage makes us realise the deep, full, exultant sense of fulfilment that sates the aged father. 'But I would see thee ride in this red pool': the words and rhythm are grimly buoyant and they make a curiously dark and dreadful impression, suggesting a small, familiar space (a 'pool'), with the unearthly agony and strangeness of Hell in it (in 'ride' and 'red'). (How feeble, by contrast with the strong poetry of these two plain monosyllables is the ranting nonsense of Kyd's lines about Lorenzo bathing "in boiling lead in blood of innocents.') Fully content as he is with his dark triumph, Hieronymo's own life, his own danger, are less than nothing to him. This is powerfully expressed in

'Methinks since I grew inward with revenge
I cannot look with scorn enough on death.'

'Grew inward.' His thoughts have been abstracted from the world about him, and from sanity, for a long time. Meanwhile the need for revenge has been growing inside him like a child in the womb and at long last he's been delivered of it.

The King's enraged shout:

'What, dost thou mock us, slave? Bring tortures forth.'

brings the enthusiastic reply, 'Do, do, do,' and in taunting the fathers by recalling the greatness that once lay in store for the murdered boys, the old man openly and proudly rejoices that it is he that has destroyed such hopes:

'He might have come to wear the crown of Spain—
I think 'twas so: 'twas I that killed him;
Look you, this same hand 'twas that stabbed
His heart—d'you see, this hand—
For one Horatio, if you ever knew him;
A youth, one that they hanged up in his father's garden,
One that did force your valiant son to yield,
While your more valiant son did take him prisoner.'

The revenge is entirely and utterly one of love. He stretches out his withered old hand tauntingly, boasting that it is this same wrinkled hand that has achieved all this for the son of whom he is

so overwhelmingly proud—the son on whose account so consuming a sense of injustice has flamed in his heart, that it has burnt away every shred of care for himself, or for anyone or anything else. Horatio at nineteen had shown himself very much the superior of his two contemporaries, both of higher rank, and deemed of far more importance than himself; he had been braver than either, and magnanimous to both—conquering Balthazar in battle, but sparing his life, and giving Lorenzo the honour of bearing off the royal captive. He had been undervalued and then filthily rewarded, with murder at the dead of night. Hieronymo's contempt for the murderers of his son is unlimited, and, Shakespeare makes us feel, absolutely just and right, as his revenge seems absolutely just and right. As if they recognise this, the King and the other two fathers give themselves up for the moment to total despair:

King: Fall, heaven, and cover us with thy sad ruins.
Cast: Roll all the world within thy pitchy cloud.

And so, having dealt, as only he could, with the theme of a private revenge at every key-point in another man's play, Shakespeare had done with it, and was free to take hints from Kyd's play for another theme, for *Hamlet*, which is hardly a Revenge Tragedy at all, but instead is something very much more.

'THE TIME IS OUT OF JOINT'

A STUDY OF HAMLET

by R. T. JONES

'EXCEPT FOR the original murder of Hamlet's father,' says Professor Wilson Knight, hypothetically annihilating the fundamental datum of the play with an easy gesture,

> 'Except for the original murder of Hamlet's father, the Hamlet-universe is one of healthy and robust life, good-nature, humour, romantic strength, and welfare; against this background is the figure of Hamlet pale with the consciousness of death. He is the ambassador of Death, walking amid Life.'[1]

This is not, it would seem, the same Hamlet whom Goethe described—

> 'A beautiful, pure and noble being, moral in the highest degree, but lacking the robustness that makes the hero, collapses under a burden which he can neither bear nor throw off; every duty is holy to him, but this one is too hard. The impossible is demanded of him: not something inherently impossible, but something that is impossible for him. How he writhes, twists, agonizes, advances and withdraws, continually reminded and continually reminding himself, and at last almost loses sight of his purpose, yet never recovers his joy!'[2]

For although Goethe admits inadequacies in Hamlet, he never doubts the holiness of Hamlet's task; whereas Wilson Knight sees Hamlet's mission as a diabolical one, and confers a kind of respectability upon Claudius. Coleridge, like Goethe, never doubts that Prince Hamlet himself is the focus of one's sympathy in the play; one may even suspect that for him, and for a century of critics after him, Hamlet is a mirror in which the reader's (or the spectator's) own beautiful but unfortunate soul is reflected:

> 'Hence we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action, con-

[1] G. Wilson Knight, *The Wheel of Fire*, ch. III.

[2] 'Ein schönes, reines, edles, höchst moralisches Wesen ohne die sinnliche Stärke, die den Helden macht, geht unter einer Last zugrunde, die es weder tragen noch abwerfen kann; jede Pflicht ist ihm heilig, diese zu schwer. Das Unmögliche wird von ihm gefordert, nicht das Unmögliche an sich, sondern das, was ihm unmöglich ist. Wie er sich windet, dreht, ängstigt, vor- und zurücktritt, immer erinnert wird, sich immer erinnert und zuletzt fast seinen Zweck aus dem Sinne verliert, ohne doch jemals wieder froh zu werden!' Goethe, *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre*, Bk. IV, ch. 14.

> sequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakespeare places in circumstances, under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment:—Hamlet is brave and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve.'[3]

Wilson Knight's different account of the 'delay' in the play goes with a different valuation of Hamlet's role:

> 'Hence Hamlet's disordered soul symbolizes itself in acts of destruction: he thinks so closely in terms of death that he can perform no life-bringing act . . .'[4]

There is, indeed, a breath-taking twist at the end of Wilson Knight's essay—one which seems for a moment to reverse the whole tendency of the essay; at certain points in the play, he says, 'we glimpse, perhaps, a thought wherein death, not life, holds the deeper assurance for humanity.'[5] Perhaps, then, when Wilson Knight speaks in this essay of 'death', he means what we commonly designate as 'life'; but if that is so, we can never again be sure that we know what he means. Whatever mysterious illumination may emerge from such meditations as this obscure utterance invites, it remains an afterthought; the essay has done its work; the romantic Hamlet has been discredited, and Hamlet the ambassador of Death installed in his place.

If Wilson Knight were alone in this view of *Hamlet*, we might be able to discount his interpretation of the play as a whole and profit gratefully from the light that he is enabled, by the very unorthodoxy of his approach, to throw upon aspects of the play generally left dark by the more conventionally directed beams of earlier critics. But Mr D. A. Traversi too seems to see Hamlet as a destructive force, when he speaks of

> '. . . the disease which, emanating from Hamlet himself, expands from his wounded nature to cover the entire action.'[6]

Even Professor L. C. Knights, whose essay on *Macbeth* may be this century's most important single contribution to our understanding of Shakespeare, appears to speak of Hamlet as neurotic ('As in many neurotics, Hamlet's exaggerated sense of unworthiness . . .'[7]), and affirms that 'the desire to escape from the complexities of adult living is central to Hamlet's character.'[8] To equate what Hamlet desires to escape from—life in the Denmark

[3] S. T. Coleridge, *Notes and Lectures upon Shakespeare*, ed. Mrs N. H. Coleridge; Notes on *Hamlet*.
[4] Wilson Knight, *loc. cit.*
[5] *ibid.*
[6] D. A. Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., ch. IV.
[7] L. C. Knights, *Prince Hamlet*, first published in *Scrutiny*, vol. IX, no. 2 (1940); reprinted in *Explorations* (1946).
[8] *ibid.*

of Claudius—with 'the complexities of adult living' (which we, of course, take in our stride every day) is to ignore the importance of the corruption that L. C. Knights himself points out in the Danish court, and, in effect, to ignore that inconvenient murder that we have seen Wilson Knight set casually aside. The suggestion that there is nothing radically abnormal in the situation in which Hamlet finds himself is more explicit here:

> '. . . there are scenes where Shakespeare seems deliberately to point a contrast between the common sense and common kindliness of "normal" people and the obstinate self-centredness and suspicion of the maladjusted individual: Act I, scene ii is, I think, such a scene, for the unfavourable impression made by Hamlet's sullen replies to the sensible suggestions of Claudius and Gertrude can hardly have been unintended.'[9]

In the course of a hasty reading of L. C. Knights's new *Approach to 'Hamlet'*, which has just arrived here, I have found none of these assertions repeated. But this does not mean that they have been retracted; only, I think, that in the intervening twenty years the writer has come to express himself less forcefully, more cautiously. One would have expected a compensating growth of subtlety and complexity in the later work, and indeed one might occasionally find it; but generally the later vision is only dimmer, more diffused than the earlier—

> '. . . Hamlet does not merely see the evil about him, does not merely react to it with loathing and rejection, he allows his vision to activate something within himself—say, if you like, his own feeling of corruption—and so to produce that state of near paralysis that so perplexes him.'[10]

Nothing in the later book indicates that L. C. Knights has abandoned the views that I have illustrated from his earlier work.

* * * * *

That the Romantic approach to *Hamlet* is being discarded is no great calamity. What impels me to invite attention to the change is the fact—as it appears to me—that the modern alternative, some versions of which I have illustrated, bears less relation to the play itself than did its predecessors. Now it might be plausibly argued that this does not matter: Coleridge's criticism was able to make the play accessible, and thus useful, to a Romantic age, and if modern criticism can make the play serve *our* contemporary needs, it does not matter if the play is turned into something quite other than what Shakespeare intended. I have, as the reader may soon have reason to suspect, some sympathy for this view, irresponsible though it may appear; for, after all, the task of the critic is to serve *us*, to help *us* to relate the play to our own lives here and

[9] *ibid.*
[10] L. C. Knights, *An Approach to 'Hamlet'*, ch. II.

now: not, surely, to serve Shakespeare, who is dead, and no longer needs, if he ever did, the help that critics can give.

But in this case—that of *Hamlet*—even this argument cannot justify the current critical distortion. For this is not a constructively contemporary way of being wrong about the play. The new *Hamlet*-criticism does not bring the play (and Shakespeare's unique intelligence) into the service of the real needs of our time, but only subserves it to the anti-heroic prejudice of our time.

Let us consider first the Denmark in which Hamlet is placed in the play—that background of 'healthy and robust life, good-nature, humour, romantic strength, and welfare' that Wilson Knight writes about. The play opens with two soldiers—sentries—meeting.

> '—Who's there?
> —Nay, answer me: stand, and unfold yourself.'

A soldier does not normally, unless he is on patrol in enemy territory, refuse to answer a challenge; these two show a mutual distrust (before recognizing each other) that goes beyond the proper limits of military caution. The opening of the play with soldiers at night suggests war, or a threat of war or insurrection; the behaviour of these soldiers, all on edge, makes it clear that they are not attackers, and are not at all sure what they are guarding against (the question is asked by one of them later in the scene). For the present, we sense that the State is in some danger. Then the soldier who is going off duty says to the other,

> '— . . . 'tis bitter cold,
> And I am sick at heart.'

The first comment is a perfectly natural one, the second alarmingly unsoldierly. Both comments are made—and, even more surprisingly, accepted—in the same matter-of-fact way, as if in that place being sick at heart had become as common as being cold.

After these indications of uneasiness, the ghost of the dead king seems to be an embodiment of the general sense that something is wrong—that death dwells in the land. Of course it is at the same time a very 'real' ghost; but ghosts do tend to manifest themselves in response to something in the heart of the beholder. And the phrase 'the majesty of buried Denmark' which Horatio uses in addressing the ghost, although it means literally 'the late king of Denmark,' suggests irresistibly that the very majesty of Denmark is dead too, the glory of the land itself entombed.

The late king is remembered as a soldier:

> '—Such was the very armour he had on,
> When he th' ambitious Norway combated:
> So frown'd he once, when in an angry parle
> He smote the sledded Polacks on the ice.'
> '—With martial stalk . . .'

He is remembered, that is, as a very different king from his successor, Claudius, who has his own characteristic way of dealing

with a threat of armed invasion, as we find in the next scene:

'— . . . we have here writ
To Norway, uncle of young Fortinbras,
Who, impotent and bedrid, scarcely hears
Of this his nephew's purpose . . .'

The technique is successful; the invader, young Fortinbras, is called off by his impotent and bedridden uncle, the king of Norway. The peaceful outcome is better, perhaps, than bloodshed: perhaps; the shedding of blood is not always the worst thing that can happen to a state. But Claudius, be it remembered, is in a sense a good king: a good managerial king. As such he knows that the real power in a state is not vested in young men with swords but in their impotent, bedridden uncles; so he sends a polite note through the proper diplomatic channels.

Earlier in the scene Claudius has revealed his managerial discretion characteristically in conflict with nature. Commenting on the recent death of the late king, his brother, and his own speedy marriage with his dead brother's wife, he says:

'—Yet so far hath discretion fought with nature . . .'

And the grotesque maldistribution of feeling that follows suggests that nature has scarcely survived the conflict:

'—With one auspicious, and one dropping eye,
With mirth in funeral, and with dirge in marriage . . .'

Soon we find the conflict between discretion and nature enacted in Claudius' sound advice to Hamlet, who persists in mourning for his dead father:

'—Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
To give these mourning duties to your father:
But, you must know, your father lost a father;
That father lost, lost his, and the survivor bound
In filial obligation, for some term
To do obsequious sorrow. But to persever
In obstinate condolement, is a course
Of impious stubbornness. 'Tis unmanly grief,
It shows a will most incorrect to Heaven,
An understanding simple, and unschool'd . . .'

This goes on for some time. It is, as I suggested, sound advice; we cannot at any point deny its reasonableness; why then is it so nauseating? We might ask the same question about that famous good advice that Polonius gives his son.

'—Neither a lender nor a borrower be;
For loan oft loses both itself and friend,
And borrowing dulls the edge of husbandry . . .'

I need quote no more; the entire speech has been solemnly copied into thousands of autograph albums, and turned up the other day in an anthology of gems of English poetry compiled by the Principal of the Teachers' College of the Orange Free State. (it is called *Music in their Dreams.*) But the example I have quoted may serve to illustrate what is so nasty about this kind of good advice: it ignores

the human relationship, the value of the generous impulse, which is worth infinitely more than the money that may never be repaid. At the heart of all this advice lies the basic injunction to distrust and thwart, in oneself and in others, every warm and generous impulse; to be prudent in all things, and never to let one's heart rule one's head.

The recipient of Polonius' good advice does not command our sympathy, for he, a moment earlier, has been poisoning his sister's ears with equally sound and prudent advice concerning her relationship with Prince Hamlet. She too has been urged to be cautious—the keynote of the speech is the reiterated injunction to *fear* possible consequences—and the spontaneous impulses of her naturally trusting heart are ignored as being of no importance. When her father adds *his* contribution of good advice, those impulses receive even worse treatment: he mocks them, twisting her words, sneering at her account of Hamlet's declarations of love. She shows herself weak in allowing her relationship with Hamlet to be so wisely and dirtily discussed by her father, without making any protest; and when he forbids her to see her lover again and she replies 'I shall obey, my lord,' her weakness is felt to be a positive treachery: we know then, if we did not know it before, that there are times when one must not obey one's father nor listen to his good advice.

It will be noticed that speeches of good advice occupy a large part of the first act of the play. These speeches are memorable and frequently quoted, but have never, I think, been given their proper importance in an account of the play as a whole. Clearly they are not offered for our approval; on the contrary, we feel them to be a symptom of a radical corruption in those who speak them, a symptom of something rotten in the state of Denmark. They can only come from men who have good reason to distrust their own hearts, and who have cause to fear the free activity of natural impulses and intuitive apprehensions in those who live near them. The insistent outpouring of good advice—an abnormality whose existence outside the play as well as within it is attested by the frequent use made of Polonius' speech out of context—seems thus to have two related motives.

First, the speaker tries to conceal his own insecurity from himself by emphatically asserting certain certainties to anybody who will listen. The sound of one's own voice confidently affirming incontrovertible verities produces, as most teachers will have noticed from time to time, a soothing effect upon oneself, while the accompanying sensation of power over minds assumed to be less mature than one's own may give one an illusion of strength. Regarded in this way, the good advice given to Hamlet by Claudius, and that given to Laertes and to Ophelia by Polonius, would appear to be compulsive rather than politic: the speakers behave as they do because they cannot help it.

But the other motive is one of policy: the advisers seek to

dominate those whom they advise. Again the deeper motive is fear—but now the fear of discovery. Claudius' crime has been well concealed, and he knows it cannot be discovered by any process of observation and deduction. But it may be discovered, or strongly suspected, by intuitive processes; and it seems reasonable to suppose that one who has reason to fear discovery by such means will generally be inclined to stifle every manifestation of the non-rational, intuitive faculty in those near to him. This he will be the better qualified to do because, within himself, the perpetual need to suppress his sense of guilt and inadequacy will have familiarised him with the techniques of using reasoned argument to overcome feelings, in the fight (as Claudius puts it) between 'discretion' and 'nature'.

I have hovered thus uneasily between the general and the particular because, although my concern here is with the play, it seems to me that in discussing the compulsive outbursts of unsolicited advice in *Hamlet*, the critic ought to be able to count on at least as much help from the psychologists as he can when dealing with the compulsive washing of hands in *Macbeth*. The former symptom is surely far more frequently observed, yet it seems, as far as I can ascertain, to have received no systematic attention. My general comments and suggestions, therefore, I offer for the approval, modifications or disagreement of psychologists, if any should find the matter worth investigating.

In the meantime, perhaps it will be agreed that Polonius' advice is an expression of his unwillingness to trust his son. It is no accident that the next time we see Polonius, he is making elaborate arrangements for setting a spy on his son: it is the wholly appropriate sequel to the good advice, simply a different manifestation of distrust. He does not even trust the spy to use his own judgement, but gives him absurdly over-detailed advice. And in the next scene Claudius and his queen (Hamlet's mother) are setting spies on Hamlet—first two old friends of his, then Ophelia herself, whose too ready obedience to her father has made her now a docile tool of his policy so that she can be used as a decoy to trap Hamlet.

Advising and spying—these seem to be the characteristic occupations of Claudius' court. These activities, I hope I have made clear, do not seem to me to be compatible with that 'healthy and robust life, good-nature, humour, romantic strength, and welfare' that Wilson Knight finds in the court of Denmark. They seem to me to suggest far more the reactions of frightened old men when they fear that the inquisitive and imaginative young may smell out their secret corruptions.

'Something,' as Marcellus says, 'is rotten in the state of Denmark.' The line is often quoted, but all too rarely in connection with the play itself. I have tried to suggest that an examination of the play should begin, not with the usual question 'What is wrong with Hamlet'? but with the question—which the play itself proposes far more explicitly—'What is wrong with Denmark?'

Once this question has been considered carefully, it may well appear that there is not so much wrong with Hamlet as one commonly assumes. He is indeed, as L. C. Knights says, 'maladjusted'; but the sane individual in a diseased society is just as maladjusted as the neurotic individual in a healthy society. It may be that in a radically corrupt society maladjustment is the condition, the price and the surest sign of health in the individual.

* * * * *

It is only gradually that Hamlet attains a full awareness of the nature of the corruption that he senses around him. At first he tries to account for his nausea, his disgust with life, by dwelling on his mother's hasty re-marriage after the death of his father. But his insistence, in that first soliloquy, is only partly convincing; his mother's infidelity is, as he knows, a part of the evil, but it is not all. He knows that there is something else, something carefully concealed beneath the managerial wisdom and discretion of the new king. His hearing the truth from a ghost symbolizes the intuitive, non-rational way in which he noses out the hidden root of the corruption: the fact that Claudius has murdered the dead king.

In Claudius, as we saw, discretion fought with nature, and won without any great difficulty. And amidst all the wisdom, all the discretion of the court, Hamlet is the one man who has the courage to follow his own intuitions and his own sometimes quite irrational impulses.

> '—. . . Let us know
> Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
> When our deep plots do pall . . .'

He knows that there are truths that cannot be arrived at by the processes of logical reasoning:

> '—There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamed of in our philosophy.'

I suggested earlier that the ghost of the dead king seemed to be an embodiment of the general sense that something was wrong—that death dwelt in the land. Hamlet is not the only person who sees the ghost; he is not the only person who senses a rottenness in the State. But he *is* the only person who dares to follow the ghost when it beckons him, to follow his suspicion through to the end.

> 'Marcellus: . . . But do not go with it.
> Horatio: No, by no means.
> Hamlet: It will not speak; then I will follow it.
> Horatio: Do not, my lord.'

And Horatio warns him that to follow such a thing—ghost or intuition—wherever it may lead is to risk madness:

'—What if it tempt you toward the flood, my lord,
Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff
That beetles o'er his base into the sea,
And there assume some other horrible form,
Which might deprive your sovereignty of reason
And draw you into madness? think of it . . .'

Finally Marcellus and Horatio try to restrain him by force; and it is then that this Hamlet whom Goethe saw as 'lacking the robustness that makes the hero', this Hamlet who, according to Coleridge, 'loses the power of action in the energy of resolve' and has an 'aversion to real action', draws his sword against his friends with the angry shout:

'—. . . My fate cries out,
And makes each petty artery in this body
As hardy as the Nemean lion's nerve.
Still I am call'd. Unhand me, gentlemen,
By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me!
I say, away! Go on; I'll follow thee.'

The ghost's disclosure of the murder that lies behind all the wise moralizing of Claudius' court comes to Hamlet almost as a relief at first: his duty is now clear; he must avenge his father's murder. Momentarily, everything is simplified for him. But he is not only the son of a murdered father—he is, after all, Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, and he has a prior duty towards the living.

Most critics either condemn Hamlet for his hesitation in carrying out his duty, or else offer excuses for it. It seems to me that they all assume too easily and too arrogantly that they know what his duty is. What they assume, of course, is that Hamlet's simple duty is to kill Claudius, and thus avenge his father's murder, as soon as he possibly can. It is natural that the ghost of the murdered man should take this view; he, after all, is suffering all the pains of purgatory because he was murdered without being given time to repent. But the play does not give us only one point of view; it does not restrict *us* to this ghost's-eye view of a living man's duty. Hamlet himself has to discover for himself, moment by moment, what he must do; and if we, in our comfortable detachment, suppose his task to be a simple murder, we are being considerably more naive than he is. A radically corrupt society is not made clean merely by killing the man at its head. Perhaps nothing can cleanse it, but Hamlet, the man who has seen the heart of the corruption, is under an obligation to try.

'—The time is out of joint: O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right!'

Each one of us has some right to echo these words; each one of us has been born to set right some part of the disjointedness of our own time and place as we see it—and to be called mad, perhaps,

and spied upon for our pains. But Hamlet, as the true prince, is especially and inescapably 'born to set it right'.

In practice, Hamlet rejects the Ghost's simple way of 'setting it right'. He continues, during most of the play, to be bitterly uneasy in his mind about his failure to do what the ghost expects of him—his failure to behave as a young man of spirit should, conventionally, behave under such circumstances. But he does not, in fact, fail or hesitate to take action to cleanse the State. He consistently refuses to accept or to compromise with the corruption that surrounds him, and gradually fits himself to be used as the instrument of fate or providence for the purgation of that corruption. He deals differently, and impulsively, with each manifestation of this corruption as it presents itself to him: he sends Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to precisely that death to which they were to have escorted him; he confronts his mother with her guilt, with a brutality and insistence clearly painful to himself and rendered necessary by her moral stupidity, until she is forced to see that guilt clearly in herself; and finally, with the same even-handed justice, he compels Claudius to drink his own poison. In none of these acts is Hamlet a planner: that is not his function. His task, a far more difficult one than planning a revenge, is to keep himself constantly free of corruption and open to the promptings of his impulses, to be unafraid and ready whatever comes.

No creative work so profoundly strange and new as *Hamlet* continues after so many centuries to be, can be interpreted or described in terms of familiar and current concepts. If, in what follows, I appear to digress, it is because

> '. . . On a huge hill,
> Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and he that will
> Reach her, about must, and about must go,
> And what the hill's suddenness resists, win so.'[11]

And when I suggest—as I shall—that Hamlet distinguishes himself as a *practical critic*, I hope I shall not be suspected of reducing him to a mirror of my own *métier*, as the critics of the nineteenth century reduced him to an image of their own souls; for in describing him in that way I wish to compare what Hamlet does in the play not only with what some of us purport to do with literature, but with what we all do all the time, whether we want to or not, in our relationships with people. We all judge continually, even if we give no expression to our judgement other than the gesture with which we close the book we have just read, or the slight movement of the eyebrow with which we pass from one painting to another, or the duration of the pause before returning to our work after a visitor has left the room. There is no escape: we are all critics. The only choice we have in the matter is whether we will be careful critics or frivolous ones, honest critics or dishonest ones. Criticism, or evaluation, is thus not merely my profession, but is an unceasing

[11] John Donne, *Satire III.*

and universal activity, an activity central to the human condition. My references to *literary* criticism will merely illustrate the more general activity, rather as Hamlet's advice to the players is a dramatist's illustration of it.

Where literature is concerned, a *practical* critic is a critic of particular works as distinct from the *theoretical* critic who formulates general statements about literature. But to call Hamlet a *practical* critic may justifiably be taken to mean more than this—to mean not only that Hamlet's judgements are concerned with the particular situations in which he finds himself (rather than with politics and society in general), but also that they are expressed in a practical, as opposed to a theoretical way; just as the most practical of practical critics may be the parodist. Thus Hamlet's criticisms of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, of Laertes, and of Claudius, consist finally not merely in killing them, but in turning back upon themselves the particular deaths that they have contrived, or connived at, for him. This is the only way in which he can bring them at last face to face with their own particular guilts. With his mother, too, he expresses his criticism practically. He does not philosophize, moralize, theologize or otherwise theorize about the re-marriage of widows; and indeed the general question of the propriety or impropriety of marrying one's deceased husband's brother scarcely arises in the whole play: what Hamlet does is to take this particular re-marriage, and, using two portraits, conduct a practical criticism of the two kings. To have convinced Gertrude in theory that a widow ought not to marry her late husband's brother would only—could only—have led, at best, to her saying, 'I suppose you're right,' and perhaps, 'I won't do it again.'

There are, then, several degrees of practicality. To say that because Hamlet is not one to rush from the battlements as soon as he has heard the ghost speak, burst into the banqueting hall, and there slaughter Claudius with a wild yell—to say that because he does not do this he is not practical, is to condemn most people except the few great murderers as unpractical.

But is Hamlet really a critic? It might be urged that because his actions stem frequently from sudden impulse, they cannot deserve the name of criticism. This would imply that a critic is one who judges coldly, objectively, rationally, weighing the evidence on one side and on the other, until, without allowing any trace of human feeling to enter into his decision, he formulates a judgement that can stand as absolutely just. Such a critic, if such there be, could conceivably be replaced by a highly complex calculating machine, which could fit a new experience into the appropriate category, if somebody had first provided it with categories and the tests for deciding which is the appropriate one. He could not—any more than could the cybernetic device—create new categories; he could only apply stock tests to new situations. The categories and the tests are taken over from somebody else, and their mere application may be called second-hand judgement.

First-hand judgement, which probably has more directly to do with the heart and the bowels than with the head, can achieve some degree of independence of pre-determined categories and tests. It presupposes a willingness to discard or modify one's general theories and beliefs, if they should be irreconcilable with the new judgement of the new experience. I must return to this later.

Although the first-hand judgement in its simplest form might be exemplified by the observation 'That man makes me sick,' it is, of course, in its more complex forms, inseparable from the operation of the intellect. A certain poem may make my heart beat faster, as my mind unfolds successive panoramas of breath-taking new meanings from it: that is still a first-hand judgement. And the intellect has a further task—to make the necessary adjustments in this judgement, to compensate for my own known eccentricities, discovered in the course of past comparisons, in discussion, between the first-hand judgements of others and my own. And it remains largely the task of the intellect to formulate the judgement in words calculated to communicate it to others. I shall not, then, I hope, be accused of describing the critic's task as a purely physiological process. As Langland says,

> 'Al is not good to the gost that the gut askith,
> Ne liflode to the lykam, that lef is to the soule.'[12]

The intellect has an important part, then, in the whole process of criticism. But the essential act of evaluation takes place elsewhere. Using the word 'judgement' to mean that strictly rational process that I have called 'second-hand judgement', D. H. Lawrence says,

> 'The only justice is to follow the sincere intuition of the soul, angry or gentle. Anger is just, and pity is just, but judgement is never just.'[13]

('My soul,' he says, 'is the wholeness of me.') And practical criticism cannot mean the application of any defined or definable criterion to the new poem, person or situation. Being a good critic is not a matter of having what is smugly called a sound set of values, and then applying them confidently to the particular experience. Any belief we may have about what a good poem is, or about what constitutes a good man, or a good society, may well be nothing but a nuisance when we have to decide about a particular poem, man or society. Any great poem—and lest I appear to beg the question I will define greatness in literature as inexhaustibility of meaning—will knock one's neat theory into a cocked hat; and so will any man who is deeply good and not just conventionally good.

Theories, formulated beliefs, defined criteria, even such a definition as I threw out in my last sentence, all these have some use; but they must always remain provisional: every new experience must be freely permitted to challenge them. For a belief rests

[12] William Langland (?), *Piers the Plowman*, A-text, Passus I, lines 34 & 35.
[13] D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, ch. 2.

on no more than a generalization from experience; and we must therefore concede to each new experience the same right to modify the belief, as the earlier experiences had to establish it. The particular is the only absolute: certain things we have experienced and we know them to be good or bad—know with the wholeness of ourselves, whatever our poor heads may say. The head, after all, is generally doomed to try to catch up with us as best it can. And as it is the deviser of universals, it will often resist the impact of a new experience that threatens the stability of established beliefs or theories.

Hamlet has at first, like the critics, a neat theory about what he must do. He must kill Claudius. That is the proper way for a young man to behave on learning that his father has been murdered. That is what Laertes does: exactly what is expected of him. Revenge must, conventionally, be swift, bloody and horrible.

'Claudius: . . . What would you undertake
To show yourself your father's son indeed,
More than in words?
Laertes: To cut his throat i' th' church.'

That's right, my lad! That's guts! Laertes has given the correct answer, and Claudius might well have said here, if he had not already said it in approval of an earlier answer by Laertes,

'—. . . Why now you speak
Like a good child, and a true gentleman.'

Claudius is clearly relieved to find that Laertes can be counted on to do what is expected of him, to behave predictably; he can be managed. Hamlet, on the other hand, never gratifies Claudius with a correct answer, and Claudius fears his unpredictability. Hamlet, being the true prince, cannot—although he has the power, being 'loved of the distracted multitude'—lead a rabble against Claudius as Laertes does. However much he may think he blames himself for weakness in not taking action as Laertes does, he cannot, in fact, try to destroy order and degree as Leartes does; he cannot create anarchy in the State, for that would be to purge the State of its corruption only by destroying it utterly. He does not choose to become king by the election of the rabble, and thus to place kingship itself in the hands of the rabble.

The quality of leadership in Laertes is founded on nothing more profound than a community of stock attitudes with the rabble: it is that kind of leadership that is only a slight modification of followership. Claudius sees it, and knows that he can work on such stock attitudes in Laertes:

'—Let him go Gertrude: do not fear our person:
There's such divinity doth hedge a King,
That Treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will.'

And we may imagine Laertes, poor fool, immediately taking off his hat. We know how little divinity hedges *this* king, and so does Claudius; but his bluff works perfectly with Laertes. Hamlet, on

the other hand, has shown unequivocally how clearly *he* is aware of the lack of any divine hedge around Claudius; that is why Claudius fears Hamlet so much more than he fears Laertes even when the latter has most of the population at his back.

For all his fury, Laertes utters only passionate platitudes; and in him there is not the slightest doubt that the conventional way for a murdered man's son to behave is the right way. He is the perfect foil to Hamlet's delicate care and soul-searching.

When Hamlet finds Claudius praying he has the perfect opportunity to kill him, the chance he has been waiting for to commit the bloody act of revenge right gruesomely—it would be remarkably similar, and not accidentally so, to cutting his throat in the church. But his whole self rebels against his head. For although, to the rational intellect, this man is Claudius, Hamlet's father's murderer, a bloody, bawdy villain, a remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain—yet in fact it is not such a villain that he sees under the point of his poised sword, but quite the contrary: a man in an agony of prayer. Murder ends all possibility of change in the victim, perpetuates him, at least in the vivid and ineradicable memory of the murderer, in the very act and posture of his final moment; and it is not *this* Claudius that Hamlet chooses thus to perpetuate.

So Hamlet judges in the midst of the situation, not in a mental abstraction; when it comes to action, he can kill only the murderer, not the penitent in agonies of irredeemable guilt. There are many Claudiuses within Claudius, and if Hamlet is to kill the one who murdered his father he must wait until he catches him in the act of comparable villainy. Yet the theoretical obligation of conventional revenge continues to haunt his thoughts.

> '—Yet I,
> A dull and muddy-mettled rascal, peak
> Like John-a-dreams, unpregnant of my cause,
> And can say nothing: no, not for a King,
> Upon whose property, and most dear life,
> A damn'd defeat was made . . .'

If, with such provocation, he has not taken the prescribed revenge, then surely, he says, there is no insult that he would not swallow meekly; he must be a coward; he can hardly recognize himself, and questions, in effect, his own identity.

> '—Am I a coward?
> Who calls me villain? breaks my pate across?
> Plucks off my beard, and blows it in my face?
> Tweaks me by th' nose? Gives me the lie i' th' throat,
> As deep as to the lungs? Who does me this?
> Ha? Why, I should take it: for it cannot be,
> But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall
> To make oppression bitter, or ere this,
> I should have fatted all the region kites
> With this slave's offal, bloody, bawdy villain,
> Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain!
> O Vengeance!'

The desperation here is the penalty that those who follow their deepest impulses must pay; the voice of convention that speaks within oneself is the terrible one, not what the neighbours say. Here is Hamlet in a stock situation and he is not reacting to it as a noble young man should: he is *not* in a mad rage, as he had confidently expected to be.

The real horror of that predicament must be quite clearly understood—the horror of finding that one does not feel what everyone is supposed to feel, what one has confidently expected to feel. This horror is so central to some of Hamlet's soliloquies that, at the risk of both superfluity and absurdity, I shall suggest an analogy. Imagine a young man of to-day, with a normal emotional equipment derived largely from Hollywood films and young men's talk, finding himself, after weeks or months of contriving, in a dark room with a young lady of the approved dimensions (and legally permitted pigmentation)—and then discovering that she simply means nothing to him and that all he really wants is a cigarette. Will he not feel his masculinity, his very identity, which he has always taken for granted, falling away in shameful chaos?

Hamlet, in a situation for which appropriate action is prescribed by all accepted convention, finds himself not responding in the way that he has expected. He tries at first to whip himself up into an appropriate emotional state (as, no doubt, would the young man in the analogy)—but then sees, with complete clarity, how disgusting it is to strain for an emotion which, even if achieved, would be artificial. After that cry, 'O Vengeance', there is a short pause, and then,

> 'Why, what an ass am I! Ay sure, this is most brave,
> That I, the son of the dear murthered,
> Prompted to my revenge by Heaven and Hell,
> Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words,
> And fall a-cursing like a very drab,
> A scullion! Fie upon't: foh!'

There, at any rate, is a first-hand judgement: 'Fie upon't: foh!' He will belabour his feelings no more. As D. H. Lawrence makes one of his characters say: 'I only feel what I feel.' It takes a rare courage to make that assertion.

Before we come to Hamlet's next, and most famous, soliloquy, he has committed himself to a course of action. But he is still not sure that he will behave as he thinks he should. Yet surely, he tells himself, if he is a man, he must kill Claudius; that is all there is to it; is he a man, or is he not? To be, or not to be, that is the question: it is as simple as that. So he seems to say: but it is far from being a simple question in fact. The unreality of that stressed simplicity is confirmed by the fact that no two critics seem to be in agreement about its meaning.

> '—To be, or not to be, that is the question:
> Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer

> The slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune,
> Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,
> And by opposing end them . . .'

Now if being and not being are seen as representing two possible courses of action for Hamlet, what are they? And, a more difficult question, which is which? To put his choice fairly logically (while bearing in mind that to do so is to distort it, because some confusion is of its essence), Hamlet can either put up with things or resist them. It is important to notice that each of these courses is seen as having a certain nobility; for Hamlet, stoical acceptance *may* be as noble as resistance. Now the second course of action is variously interpreted: it is commonly identified with 'not to be' and taken to mean suicide, but surely the things that Hamlet considers opposing are the 'troubles' of the State of Denmark as well as his own—to take arms against a sea of troubles is to pit his strength against this flood of corruption that he feels to be overwhelming and hardly possible to overcome, even while he makes the affirmation that it *is* possible ('And by opposing end them')—the affirmation of possible success without which no action is possible. Certainly the image of an armed man opposing a sea implies a suicidally quixotic venture, but not an attempt to escape through self-slaughter. So the alternative is to suffer the corruption, although it stings him continually, or to resist it although the consequence of resistance is death.

Now if the first line of the speech had been 'To live or not to live' (which, I notice, is what an Afrikaans translation of the play reduces it to), if Hamlet had reduced the question only as far as that, his choice would now be clear: it is better to live than not to live (for reasons that the rest of the speech makes clear); so it must be better to suffer than to resist hopelessly and suicidally. But Shakespeare did not choose a less obvious formulation merely to puzzle the paraphrasing schoolboy: like any good poet he means primarily what he says. His Hamlet reduces the question further than that: he says, 'To *be* or not to *be*'. (I stress this because it is difficult to look closely at over-familiar lines.) And it may be that to suffer passively is not to be, to lose his very identity —not merely his conventional identity ('The glass of fashion', the Hamlet whose loss Ophelia mourns), but his true identity—to surrender the very wholeness of himself. Conversely, to resist, however hopelessly, however suicidally, may be the only way of *being*. We need not here resort to modern existentialism: L. C. Knights usefully quotes from Boethius—

> 'For that is which retaineth order, and keepeth nature,
> but that which faileth from this, leaveth also to be
> that which is in his own nature.'[14]

The obligation to resist, for Hamlet, is not a matter of acting

[14] Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*, Bk. IV, Prose ii; quoted in L. C. Knights, *An Approach to 'Hamlet'*, ch. IV.

on principle; it is based purely on the discovery that, in the situation in which he finds himself, resistance is the only way of preserving his very identity, even at the cost of his life. Clearly it is not on principle that he acts, but on impulse. It will be remembered that at the beginning of the play Hamlet would have left Denmark and returned to Wittenberg if he had not, so to speak, been refused his passport by Claudius. And if Hamlet has now, in this speech, come very close to the realization that there are times when the only way of saving one's life is to lose it, or that it will profit him nothing to gain the whole world (the world whose splendours he celebrates even in the depth of his distress) and lose his own soul (the wholeness of himself), it is important to notice that he has reached this point without the guidance of revelation: it is not, for example, Christian dogma that leads him into martyrdom. It appears that even a sceptic can be a martyr.

And in the rest of the speech it is a sceptic who faces death, without the consolations of any faith; without even that faith that can assert that there is nothing after death.

But here we approach the most breath-taking paradox of the play. For it turns out that the rejection of all belief, the rejection of everything that can impede the fully spontaneous impulsive response to the particular situation, itself implies a belief in some kind of direction—some form of fate, providence or pattern in human life, never fully accessible to reason. For why else should one trust, and act upon, impulses that one does not understand? It is Shakespeare's discovery, and, in the course of the play, Hamlet's; not mine.

> '—. . . Let us know
> Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
> When our deep plots do pall: and that should teach us
> There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them how we will.

It is in that conviction that Hamlet attains to the condition in which we find him just before he becomes the instrument of the final convulsive purgation of Denmark in which he, too, is to die:

> '—. . . If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all: since no man knows aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?'

The impression that this speech makes is incomplete when it is taken out of its context, where Hamlet's sweetness and gaiety show us the precise quality of his readiness. A grim determination, after all, would not have served; fate's chosen and consenting instrument needs an easy, relaxed readiness for whatever may come, even for death. It is in that readiness that Hamlet's greatness lies.

* * * * *

Now in justice to Professor Wilson Knight, I must put in a last word for Claudius. Claudius, as I observed earlier, manages

the State pretty well; and the only obstacle in the way of his continuing to do so is his nephew and stepson, Hamlet, who appears to be mad—or, more precisely, badly maladjusted. As Polonius usefully reminds us,

> '—Mad call I it; for to define true madness,
> What is't but to be nothing else but mad?'

Polonius is more right than he knows: there is no objective norm of sanity in the individual—only of conformity with the norms of a given society, which may itself be diseased. Sometimes a man's sanest words and actions may be used as evidence of his insanity; for in a neurotic society the sane man will be silenced. And perhaps we cannot altogether blame Claudius for his attempts to silence his delinquent nephew. He has, it is true, a murder on his conscience; a brother's murder at that. But most of us, I think, have something, if not something of that magnitude, on our consciences, and we can sympathize with Claudius' sensible way of getting on with his job in spite of it. It is not, surely, a gross cynicism to suggest that most of the real work in this world is done by men who have something locked in their memories that they would not wish anybody to discover. We cover up pretty well, on the whole, thanks to the tacit agreement we have among ourselves not to dig up each other's buried skeletons. But it does give us a nasty turn sometimes when some young innocent starts sniffing around our back gardens. We can't let him dig up whatever may be buried there; after all, my conscience is my own affair. Perhaps a friendly word of advice will bring him to heel. If not, we have to set spies on his track until we dig up something in *his* back garden: then perhaps he will listen to reason. If that won't work, the spies can at least find out how much he knows. If he is really dangerous, it may be possible to send him to England, out of the way. And it may be possible to make sure that he will not come back.

People like Claudius (who are many) have their ways of dealing with people like Hamlet (who are very few), even to-day. We may feel that, for the sake of the smooth running of society, for the sake of progress, for the sake of being nice to everybody and everybody being nice to us, it's just as well that they have their methods. Or we may feel that smoothness, progress and general niceness are not such great virtues after all, if they are based on a deep-seated corruption; and that for all its appearance of rolling along comfortably,

> '—The time is out of joint; O cursed spite
> That ever I was born to set it right.'

But those who accept such a destiny must be prepared to follow their impulses and intuitions into very dangerous places.

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