VOLUME 9
1984
NUMBER 2

THE ALIGARH JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

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The Aligarh Journal of English Studies is edited by A.A. Ansari and published by him on behalf of the Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh. The *Journal* aims at bringing out twice a year (April and October), critical and research articles dealing with subjects in all the main areas of English studies (but with special attention to Shakespeare) together with detailed and careful reviews. Contributions should be addressed to the Editor. They should be neatly typed, double-spaced, and with notes and references at the end. Stylistic and other conventions as recommended in *MHRA Style Book* should be strictly adhered to.

Annual Subscription :

Rs 30.00

£ 3.50 $ 6.00

Single Copy :

Rs 20.00

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SOLITARINESS OF THE VICTIM IN *OTHELLO*

Almost towards the end of the play, when the excruciating inner drama has reached for Othello its climactic point, he expresses his sense of being dazed—his sense, as it were, of the controlling design of the play or the 'resistlessness of events' thus: 'but O vain boast,/Who can control his fate'?[1] (V,ii, 265-66). He further projects the strain of his anxiety-ridden and over-burdened soul by formulating his disconcerting query thus: 'Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil/Why he hath thus ensnar'd my soul and body?' (V,ii, 302-3). The demi-devil — the embodiment of sheer destructive and satanic energy—in this context, it goes without saying, is no other than Iago, and the phrase 'ensnar'd my soul and body'—personality in all its congeries—reflects upon the subtle machinations directed against Othello: the elaborate and intricate web of fraud and guile spun with rare and masterly ingenuity by Iago and in which the protagonists come to be enmeshed. Iago is the medium through whom Othello is hoodwinked, bamboozled and wantonly and callously tortured, and this leads ultimately not only to his own complete collapse and disintegration but also to the abandoning of his love for Desdemona. Iago's innate capacity for doing evil appears to him to be something causeless, infinite and inscrutable: an enigma which frustrates all attempts at its unravelling and is shrouded in mystery. There are two things that attract our attention in this regard specifically and all at once: Othello's impetuous and inundating passion for Desdemona is referred to as equivalent to some sort of 'witchcraft' (the suggestion of the subdual and suspension of the normal reactions being latent

in it) exercised upon the latter in a variety of contexts. Brabantio's stream of accusations flows on uninterrupted and perhaps, without any forethought: he begins by saying:

> That thou hast practis'd on her with foul charms,
> Abus'd her delicate youth, with drugs or minerals,
> That weakens motion: I, ii, 73-75

and expatiates on it alittle later thus:

> She is abus'd, stol'n from me and corrupted,
> By spells and medicines, bought of mountebanks,
> For nature so preposterously to err,
> (Being not deficient, blind, or lame of sense,)
> Sans witchcraft could not. I, iii, 60-64

The intended drift of all these accusations is that Desdemona was utterly hypnotized, her perceptions, otherwise ordinarily acute and alert, were overpowered and kept in abeyance by the administering of potions, medicines and 'minerals', and above all by the application of black magic in the course of Othello's love-making to her. But Othello, more clear-sighted, perceptive and shrewd than Brabantio (believing not in literal 'witchcraft' but in the mysterious and incalculable potency of love) refutes all these charges levelled against him by making a frank, forthright and laconic statement to this effect:

> She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd,
> And I lov'd her that *she did pity them.*
> This only is the witchcraft I have us'd:
> I, iii, 167-69

This seemingly innocuous utterance contains the admixture of an element of narcissism in Othello—an extension of the self-esteem so frequently and so boisterously paraded by him. Moreover, Iago is referred to time and again, mostly by Othello, and with intriguing reiteration (which is both 'harsh' and 'grating') as 'honest' Iago, although honesty as his hypothetically prime and essential virtue, is blatantly denied as many times as it is affirmed. It looks as if 'tis a pageant,/To keep us in false gaze': (I,iii, 18-19). This sort of constant

punning on 'honest' and 'honesty' runs throughout the play and turns Iago into an object of unconscious ridicule, and truth about him explodes only towards the very end in all its terrifying implications. These two factors constitute the motif of 'seeming' and 'being' which is pervasive here as in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, too, and which is succinctly summed up by Iago thus: 'Men should be that they seem,/Or those that be not, would they might seem none !' (III, iii, 130-31) and 'The Moor a free and open nature too,/That thinks men honest that but seems to be so': (I,iii, 397-98) as he is the major exponent and practitioner of the art of 'seeming'. While Cassio, downright earnest and unsuspecting as he is, laments over his dismissal as Othello's lieutenant and equates it with a sense of personal loss of reputation:'Reputation, reputation, I ha' lost my reputation! I ha' lost the immortal part, sir, of my self, and what remains is bestial; my reputation, Iago, my reputation!' (II, iii, 254-57), Iago brushes it off with a hearty chuckle as something utterly inconsequential and irrelevant: 'As I am an honest man, I thought you had receiv'd some bodily wound, there is more offence in that than in reputation: reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit, and lost without deserving. You have lost no reputation at all, unless you repute yourself such a loser'; (II,iii, 258-63). Essentially an egotist in the very roots of his being and his categories of judgment being reductive he denies any existential reality to such a futile notion as reputation: to him it is not something tactile ('I thought you had receiv'd some bodily wound'): it is vaporous and insubstantial, and its loss does not matter so long as one does not have the irritating sense of deprivation coming upon its heels. Similarly, in a later context he avers: 'Her honour is an essence that's not seen,/They have it very oft that have it not': (IV,i, 16-17), meaning thereby that there are countless persons, including Desdemona, who are mistakenly credited with the possession of this rich and invisible 'essence' which is in fact non-existent. The deceitful appearances by which Othello's psyche is bedevilled and led

astray are partly the creation of his own phantasy—as is the case with Macbeth, too—and they are no less equivalent to the fatal web into which Othello is pushed and entangled: a whole mass of lies, falsehoods and fabrications fashioned by Iago's 'diabolic intellect'.

Early in the play, while endeavouring to take the simpleton Roderigo into his confidence, Iago speaks with an odd and uncharacteristic honesty and straightforwardness, which is any way amazing, to the following effect:

> Heaven is my judge, not I for love and duty,
> But seeming so, for my peculiar end.
> For when my outward action does demonstrate
> The native act, and figure of my heart,
> In complement extern, 'tis not long after,
> But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve,
> For doves to peck at: I am not what I am !
> I, i. 59-65

The quintessential phrase here 'I am not what I am' (with the distinct Sartrean ring about it) is also used by Viola in *Twelfth Night* (III, i. 142) but with comic undertones, though. There it links up with the acts of burlesquing and confusions of identity—the source of the comic—which ensue from it: here it becomes the medium of tragic ruin and waste of potentialities and shatters eventually the illusion of romantic love built up by Othello with such eager and passionate involvement. In both cases it implies the gesture of putting on a mask upon one's self—assumption of a role which is in conformity with the pursuit of one's calculated designs and purposes and serves as an effective means of deluding others.

Othello, the chief actor in this hectic war of nerves, is caught between the two contraries; putting it differently one may uphold that himself a duality he is drawn simultaneously and irresistibly towards the polar opposites represented by Iago and Desdemona. He has to make a choice between the steadfast loyalty which is masqueraded by the former and his own burning passion and ardour for the latter. And the choice forced upon him involves the anguish of freedom and

even the unhappy choice which Othello at long last makes is an inalienable adjunct of this freedom. He succumbs to the piercing thrust, the specious logic reflected in the adroitly contrived strategies of the former while to Desdemona—'love's martyr'[2]—he is apparently bound by the ties of love: the 'cables of perdurable toughness'. The two of them instinctively believe in an ideal image and pattern of love and this is anathema to Iago who equates love with lechery: 'a sect or scion' of 'our raging motions, our carnal stings, our unbitted lusts' (I, iii, 330) which betrays his own cunningly controlled sensuality. Othello is prone to jealousy by temperament and Iago very well perceives that the poison injected by him in the body of love will defile and contaminate it. He is therefore bent upon effecting the violent rupture of this sacred relationship whatever the cost involved in embarking upon this odyssey of hate. The 'motive hunting' of 'a motiveless malignity' is the quest on which the critics were sent by Coleridge and which has led to endless and bewildering speculations. At the very outset of the play Iago tries to clarify to himself as well as illuminate the audience regarding the various components of the malignity he so unashamedly bears towards Othello. First, there is the fact of the sense of 'injured merit,' of his being deprived of Othello's lieutenantey and thus the place he legitimately aspires for and languishes after is given to Cassio—'the bookish theoric' —one in whose case, 'mere prattle without practice/Is all his soldiership' (I, i. 26-27). Secondly, he suspects Othello to have had illicit relations with his own wife, Emilia;' I hate the Moor,/ And it is thought abroad, that 'twixt my sheets/ He's done my office': (I, iii, 384-86) and 'For that I do suspect the lustful Moor/Hath leap'd into my seat, the thought whereof/ Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards', (II, i, 290-92). And although he is cautious enough to add a rider :

> I know not if't be true . . .
> Yet, I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
> Will do, as if for surety : I, iii, 386—88

he nevertheless enjoins upon himself the task of launching

over the sinister and nefarious plan of wreaking vengeance against him:

> Yet that I put the Moor,
> At least, into a jealousy so strong,
> That judgment cannot cure ; ..
> And practising upon his peace and quiet,
> Even to madness: 'tis here, but yet confus'd;
> II, i, 295—306.

Generally speaking, he is obsessed, in a hazy and indistinct way, by the notion that he is not getting his due and has been shoved off to an inferior position as opposed to Cassio. Even the specific grounds of his discontent as voiced forth from time to time are not entirely convincing; in fact one has the feeling that the first has not been dwelt upon so pertinaciously as to constitute a genuine grievance; only Emilia, perhaps, later on gets near the truth when in a rather hysterically indignant way she bursts out thus :

> I will be hang'd, if some eternal villain,
> Some busy, and insinuating rogue,
> Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office,
> Have not devis'd this slander, I' 11 be hang'd else.
> IV, ii, 133—36

And the second is not substantiated by the slightest shred of evidence anywhere in the play. Neither Othello nor Emilia throws out any hint of mutual infatuation or intimacy nor betrays any hankering after the softnesses of unauthorized and voluptuous love proposed to be indulged in by them. It is also worth pondering over that if Iago really suspected Emilia to be the Moor's mistress how could he reasonably ask her to steal the ominous handkerchief for him, not apprehending that she might as well divulge the secret of his continued solicitude in this regard to her supposed paramour? What seems much more plausible and conducive to belief is that Iago bears an indwelling hatred towards Othello and he offers not reasons but mere pretexts for this hatred born of thwarted personal ambitions and gnawing envy of Othello's blessed marital state: the hatred in fact precedes, in its gestation, the ingenious and twisted process of rationalization. His malevolence

against Othello is pursued with such single-minded concentration and consistency, with such absorption and finesse and he derives such an aesthetic pleasure from the contemplation and execution of his strategies that he almost looks like a pure and disinterested artist. He observes the corrosive effect of his insinuations and obtains a salacious satisfaction from doing so:

> Work on,
> My medicine, work: thus credulous fools are caught,
> And many worthy and chaste dames, even thus
> All guiltless, meet reproach. IV, i. 44—47

Once the plan, formerly inchoate, is defined in his devillish brain he loses no time in working out its details like a conossieur and with a sure and unerring instinct. It may, however, be added that concentrated evil like that of Iago is so complex and ambiguous that it is difficult to probe its depths and intricacies.

Both Othello and Desdemona are unsuspecting targets of Iago's impeccably designed plan of victimization: whereas Othello is credulous and high-strung, 'one not easily jealous, but being wrought,/Perplex'd in the extreme; (v,ii, 346-7), Desdemona, 'the moth of peace', 'So still, and quiet, that her motion/Blush'd at herself: (I,iii, 95-96) is passive and reserved, stoic and unbending in moments of acute crisis and even distress, one who, not unlike Cordelia, 'could not heave her heart into her mouth'. Iago, on the contrary, is the emblem of energetic will, keyed up to unleashing the forces of chaos, one who feels an immense and malicious glee in worrying the helpless fly caught within his web and smashing it utterly and beyond recognition. While trying to put off the silly and pertinacious Roderigo he formulates unwittingly his own value-system thus : 'Virtue? A fig ! 'tis in ourselves, that we are thus, or thus: our bodies are gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners, so that if we will plant nettles, or sow lettuce, set hyssop, and weed up thyme; supply it with one gender of herbs, or distract it with many; either to have it sterile with idleness, or manur'd with industry, why, the power,

and corrigible authority of this, lies in our wills. If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason, to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions' (I, iii, 319-30). Iago here sounds very much like Edmund–his counterpart in *King Lear*: a thoroughgoing sceptic and amoralist, one whose seventeenth century rationalism flies in the face of Gloucester's superstitiousness and provides a foil to it. The image of the gardener is brought in with a view to stressing man's manipulative power and self-sufficiency; constituted as we are we can make the circumambient Reality bend to our proclivities and make our histories according to our own choices. We reap what we have sown and much depends on the stamp we are capable of putting on the initial experience. Iago not only recogizes the sinister potential and the menacing explosiveness of the buried sexual energies but also lays emphasis on human volition and the self-determining and self-evolving capacity of reason. He thinks in terms of being lord of his own self (and thus holds an object lesson to Roderigo) and knows how to keep the fury and tumult of instinctive sensual urges by the exercise of rational constraints.

In spite of his disclaimer

> How am I then a villain,
> To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
> Directly to his good? Divinity of hell !
> When devils their blackest sins put on,
> They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
> As I do now: II,iii, 339-44

Iago is not only the supreme incarnation of evil but he is also most scrupulously dedicated to the task of corrupting and undermining Othello's will by engendering the canker of doubt and suspicion in his mind. All his efforts are directed towards that end as he is fully aware that Othello is liable to falling into a paroxysm of jealousy and once he has thus fallen it would be pretty difficult to extricate himself out of it. He therefore initiates the process by dropping in, advisedy,

the calamitous word :

> O,beware jealousy;
> It is the green-ey'd monster, which doth mock
> That meat it feeds on. III, iii, 169-71

Iago's main strategy consists in making Othello suspect his wife with Cassio and thus cause him intensely agonizing pain particularly because no ocular proof in such a delicate case can be provided but only such stray hints and guesses as may be pieced together to form some semblance of evidence. Iago, audaciously and with a streak of malice in his tongue, suggests that Othello's case is all the more desperate and pitiable because he is torn between love and doubt and these two are closely interwoven and, as co-ordinates, are entirely inseparable :

> That cuckold lies in bliss,
> Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger:
> But O, what damned hours tells he o'er
> Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves'.
> III'iii,171,-74.

And although Othello declares unequivocally: 'I'll see before I doubt, when I doubt, prove,/And on the proof, there is no more but this :/Away at once with love or jealousy !' (III, iii, 194-96), Iago at once sidetracks the issue and insinuates the distinction between 'an erring barbarian' ('an extravagant and wheeling stranger,/Of here, and everywhere: I,i, 136-37) and 'the super-subtle Venetian', between two distinct types of sexual behaviour—the primitive and the sophisticated. Othello bursts suddenly upon the Venetian 'courtesy-culture' with the animal ferocity and dark shadowy power of a Heathcliff and his vehemence and impetuosity seems to be at odds with the Venetian's slippery charm and seductiveness. The colour 'black' is symbolic of both lasciviousness and jealousy, and the black moor is warm-hearted, passionate and vulnerable. And juxtaposed to him is the fragility and sophistication of one who finds it obnoxious even to utter the word 'whore'

without letting her lips be besmeared as with the touch of pitch. Whereas Desdemona is steeped in the Venetian mores, Othello is more or less to be equated with the kinetic energy of under-nature which erupts the jealously protected glassy surface of that particular society which is represented by her. Iago has more in common with Othello than with Desdemona in that being himself blood-inspired and having also the Falstaff-element in him he knows that love is not so much a matter of chivalric and Petrarchan idealism as the consummate flowering of anarchic and devouring instincts, too. He maintains a sort of distance-mechanism, but conceding the inflammable quality of Othello's disposition he cryptically suggests that Desdemona, no less lascivious than Othello, is nevertheless, capable of concealing her promiscuity beneath the veneer of feminine hypocrisy and deceitfulness :

> In Venice they do let God see the pranks
> They dare not show their husbands: their best
> conscience
> Is not to leave undone, but keep unknown.
> III, iii, 206-8

Earlier a similar stance was taken when Iago was still busy with deluding Roderigo into believing that Desdemona might with the passage of time feel fed up with the Moor, and if Roderigo were to succeed in cutting off Cassio's thread of life, then he would surely get the chance of ingratiating himself into her favour and ultimately enjoying her in carnal passion : 'When the blood is made dull with the act of sport, there should be again to inflame it, and give satiety a fresh appetite, loveliness in favour, sympathy in years, manners and beauties; all which the Moor is defective in: now, for want of these requir'd conveniences, her delicate tenderness will find itself abus'd, begin to heave the gorge, disrelish and abhor the Moor, very nature will instruct her to it, and compel her to some second choice. Now, sir, this granted (as it is a most pregnant and unforc'd position) who stands so eminently in the degree of this fortune as Cassio does ?' (II, i, 225-

36). Here he is not, perhaps, referring specifically to Desdemona's disposition as conforming to the Venetian mores but seems to generalize upon the vagaries of human nature which, according to his own lights, follow the lead of the appetites, advancing insidiously from one degree of carnal satisfaction to the ensuing one. Inferentially, it also glances at the fact that Desdemona, in the event of feeling surfeited with the Moor, will be looking, just for a change, towards Cassio who is physically much more captivating than anybody else. And later, with the barely concealed malicious purpose of stinging Othello, he surreptitiously suggests :

> I do not in position
> Distinctly speak of her, though I may fear
> Her will, recoiling to her better judgement,
> May fall to match you with her country forms,
> And happily repent. III, iii, 238-42.

Othello, far from being a man of infallible and proven judgment, is extremely vulnerable, takes to suggestion with as much alacrity as a cat laps milk and notwithstanding his flamboyant assertion : 'I'll see before I doubt', is capable of being overwhelmed by violent passion and urged on to precipitate action accordingly. In spite of Desdemona's earnest prayer 'Heaven keep that monster from Othello's mind'! (III, iv, 161) and her poignantly naive belief : 'I think the sun where he was born/Drew all such humours from him' (III, iv, 26-27) the spark of jealousy despite its being ignited in him by Iago had lain dormant in him all along as something which might be regarded as an indispensable ingredient of his pagan, savage and barbaric disposition or temperament. Desdemona had made fervent, unambiguous, total commitment to going to the farthest length in order to urge upon Othello to 'splinter Cassio's fortunes' and canvass for his re-instatement to the position of consequence and prestige from which he had fallen as an inevitable effect of a pretty well-engineered, sordid and judiciously-timed brawl with Roderigo:

If I do vow a friendship, I'll perform it
To the last article; my lord shall never rest,
I'll watch him tame, and talk him out of patience;
His bed shall seem a school, his board a shrift,
I'll intermingle everything he does
With Cassio's suit; therefore be merry, Cassio,
For thy solicitor shall rather die
Than give thy cause away. III, iii, 21-28

What adds fuel to the fire, that is, confirms and accentuates Othello's worst suspicions concerning Desdemona's dubious authenticity is the 'strong and vehement importunity' with which she continues pestering the Moor so as to leave him hardly any breathing-space :

Why then to-morrow night, or Tuesday morn,
On Tuesday noon, or night, or Wednesday morn:
I prithee name the time, but let it not
Exceed three days : I' faith, he's penitent,
And yet his trespass . . .
is not almost a fault
To incur a private check: when shall he come?
III; iii; 61-68

It is characteristic of Iago's dry and sullen objectivity that, despite his malevolence, he is apt, occasionally, to form an unbiased judgment of Othello : 'The Moor, howbe't that I endure him not,/ Is of a constant, noble, loving nature;' (II, i, 283-84) as well as of Cassio thus : He has a daily beauty in his life,/ That makes me ugly: (V, i, 19-20). He can look without blinkers, has a hawk's eye with regard to situations, persons and their hidden, untapped motivations. And yet what is said of Othello by Emilia to the effect : 'They are not ever jealous for the cause,/ But jealous for they are jealous' : (III, iv, 158-59) is very much applicable to Iago only if one were to substitute the word 'jealous' by the word 'malicious'. He is in fact incredibiy and overwhelmingly so and manages to incite Othello to the highest pitch of provocation though he does it imperceptibly and in instalments, and then brings about a radical and thorough enervation of his will power. Ini-

tially he pretends to be Othello's confidant and well-wisher, capable of prying into crevices which remain opaque to his vision and makes a tentative and exploratory approach without sounding dogmatic, prepossessed or fussy over mere trifles. The nearest analogue to him is the toad in the Garden of Eden, making sly and circuitous overtures to Eve with the express and sinister purpose of bringing about her complete subdual and collapse, and Othello constituted as he is, pitiably lacks the capability either of putting him in the wrong or perceiving the duplicity that lurks behind his artifice :

> Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more;
> For such things in a false disloyal knave
> Are tricks of custom; but in a man that's just,
> They are close denotements, working from the heart,
> That passion cannot rule. III, iii, 124-28

In his incrimination of Desdemona Iago proceeds warily and with undue circumspection, always giving the impression that he has an open, receptive and flexible mind, is given to an impartial and objective assessment of things and persons, sifting and weighing every little bit of evidence before arriving at a definitive conclusion. But inspite of his deftly improvised piece of dissimulation, a piece of subtle and black artistry :

> I entreat you then, . . .
> You'ld take no notice, nor build yourself a trouble
> Out of my scattering and unsure observance;
> It were not for your quiet, nor your good,
> Nor for my manhood, honesty, or wisdom,
> To let you know my thoughts. III; iii; 152-58

he continues dropping casual, though provocative, hints which not only make Othello feel nettled, stung and uncontrollably furious but also enable him to develop a kind of hallucinatory obsession about the imagined infidelity of Desdemona. It may however be added that the pretension not to disclose his innermost thoughts—the plea being that

such thoughts ought not to be wrenched away from the sanctuary wherein they lie embedded and even a mere slave enjoys the privilege of keeping them to himself – is really aimed at not only whetting Othello's curiosity but also keeping him on tenter-hooks.

The impact which Iago succeeds in making on Othello may well be gauged by the vast distance that the latter traverses from his initial idealistic fervour:

> But that I love the gentle Desdemona,
> I would not my unhous'd free condition
> Put into circumscription and confine
> For the sea's worth. I, ii, 25-28

and 'If it were now to die,/'Twere now to be most happy' (II, i, 189-90) and playing variation on it in a slightly different key thus:

> Excellent wretch, perdition catch my soul
> But I do love thee, and when I love thee not,
> Chaos is come again. (III; iii; 91-93)

to calling her the cunning whore of Venice', a 'lewd minx' or a strumpet who is all but wily, treacherous and chameleon-like. The last quoted passage oscillates between doting adoration and the anticipatory disgust and revulsion caused by the operation of the poison already injected by Iago—and which comes to assume such alarming proportions later. The pace of action in the play is accelerated in proportion to the swiftness with which Iago eats into the vitals of Othello-Desdemona relationship. Othello is not only 'one that lov'd not wisely, but too well':, but also one who is 'most ignorant of what he is most assured' (Cf. *Measure For Measure)* and yet he brooks no delay in initiating the action he proposes to take. One minor but significant contributory factor in this hellish drama is the unlucky dropping of the handkerchief by Desdemona—something done inadvertinently, though, yet something which is fraught with disastrous consequences.

The 'antique token', the charmed handkerchief (sewed in her prophetic fury by an Egyptian sibyl) has more or less the status of a totem and may be regarded as a 'terrific symbol' of Othello's love and jealousy.

There is some point in Lawrence Lerner's claim that 'Othello won Desdemona from the life of reason'[3], but to proceed from this to the assumption that it was so because the handkerchief was invested with some magical potency in almost Brabantio's connotation of the term is to make an unwarranted and untenable claim. Brabantio did believe firmly, and to himself irrefutably, in the exercise of magic by Othello in an exactly literal sense, believed, that is to say, in some form of occultism. The truth of the matter, on the contrary, is that the handkerchief symbolizes the mystery and the terror of love which might induce the lovers to fuse their two distinct and separate identities into some kind of indissoluble oneness. It is also not for nothing that a direct encounter between Othello and Cassio which could disentangle the knot pertaining to the loss of the fabulous handkerchief was studiously avoided at all costs and thus Othello's unfounded suspicion of Cassio's supposed sexual intimacy with Desdemona was allowed to deepen and intensify. To arouse Othello's ingrained susceptibility to jealousy Iago has been proceeding in such a well-conceived and systematic way that he comes to contemplate with a sort of gloating contempt the possibility that Othello's heightened state of anxiety and perturbation will not leave him in peace and serenity and he is most likely to be bereft of the balm of restoraitive sleep :

> Look where he comes, not poppy, nor mandragora,
> Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
> Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
> Which thou owedst yesterday. III, iii, 335—38

This reflects Iago's firm and unmistakable awareness of his own assured future success in carrying out his plan to throw Othello headlong into a frenzied state which was not to allow him any respite. And so consummate is Iago's skill in mani-

pulating things that inspite of his very brief and fugitive moments of scepticism Othello is brought round so completely that he identifies himself unhesitatingly with Iago in the attempt to locate Desdemona's sin and punishing her home as best he can. In an oration of pretty inflated rhetoric (Iago pooh-poohs it as 'bombast circumstance'), with its clear accent on self-exhibitionism, Othello—the dupe of his own egotism—swears to be revengeful thus :

> Like to the Pontic sea,
> Whose icy current, and compulsive course,
> Ne' er feels retiring ebb, but keeps due on
> To the Propontic, and the Hellespont:
> Even so my bloody thoughts, with violent pace
> Shall ne'er look back, ne'er ebb to humble love,
> Till that a capable and wide revenge
> Swallow them up. III, iii, 460—67

In this variety of rhetoric which may rather imprecisely be designated as the anti-sublime the image for 'bloody thoughts' of capacious revenge is provided by the Pontic Sea and emphasis is sought to be laid on the irreversibility of the current because the swelling tide of the fury which propels Othello remains unabated. And with an alacrity of spirit Iago, modulating his 'deflating, unbeglamouring, brutally realistic'[4] mode of utterance so as to make it approximate to that of Othello, invokes the natural phenomena to bear witness to his total self-surrender to his master (no better than a 'slave of passion') in implementing his wholly perverse designs thus :

> *Iago.* Do not rise yet. (*Iago kneels*)
> Witness, you ever-burning lights above,
> You elements that clip us round about,
> Witness that here Iago doth give up
> The excellency of his wit, hand, heart,
> To wrong'd Othello's service: III, iii, 469—74

And this grim parody of mutual self-dedication is climaxed by his solemnly adding further: 'I am your own for ever' (III, iii, 486). Here the victim and the victimizer become one, the

walls of separation, if they existed earlier between them, crumble (Ribner calls it the symbolic union of Othello and Iago)[5] and any iota of doubt which protruded itself formerly on to their relationship is eliminated altogether, thus bringing to Othello strong and unassailable conviction about the genuineness and authenticity of Iago's posture. This also goes to show that Othello, hypersensitive in his fundamental attitudes and pattern of behaviour as he is, is highly vulnerable and may be prevailed upon to enter into a sort of pact with Mephistopheles (Iago). He lets himself slide into the power of his (Blakean) Spectre and can be egregiously led by the nose 'as an ass'. Putting it differently one may uphold that his own fallibility provides the tender soil for Iago's evilness to be grounded in.

Middleton Murry puts his finger in the right place when *apropos* of *Othello* he maintains that it is 'the drama of the destiny of a woman who loves entirely, and a man who loves entirely yet cannot quite believe that he is entirely loved'.[6] According to Othello's own avowal it was the simple recital of his romantic adventures 'Wherein of antres vast, and deserts idle,/Rough quarries, rocks and hills, whose heads touch heaven,/It was my hint to speak, such was the process': (I,iii, 140-42) and his exotic evocation in his 'travel's history' of 'the Cannibals', 'the Anthropophagi' and the 'hair-breadth scapes' i'th' imminent deadly breach' which had bewitched Desdemona and threw her into a state of rapture and ecstasy. From this it is quite apparent that their love-relationship, believed to be suffused with the glow of chivalric idealization reflected in Desdemona's assertion that she 'saw Othello's visage in his mind,' (I, iii, 252) nevertheless failed to grow into a firm, stable and indissoluble union of their splendid physical selves. Othello continues to remain a romantic visionary all along and Desdemona a passive and inert recipient of the violence and terror of his love. Of reciprocity or the spontaneous give-and-take of love there is hardly any palpable trace in the play. Murry regards Iago as

'one whose function it is to bring 'the seed of death that is in the love of Othello and Desdemona to maturity'.[7] But despite Othello's claim 'I cannot speak enough of this content,/It stops me here, it is too much of joy'; (II,i, 197-98) and Iago's cunningly malign comment on it reflected in, 'O, you are well-tun'd now,/But I'll set down the pegs that make this music', (II, i, 199-200)-implying his firm, unflinching and malicious resolve to replace the harmony of love by sheer discord-some kind of exclusiveness adheres to this relationship. Between the two of them there yawns 'the unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea' (Cf. Arnold's *To Marguerite*) of incommunicability which accounts for the sense of solitariness from which Othello continually suffers. He is so much engrossed and confused by the incisive logic-chopping of Iago and the endless chain of sophistries at his command and finds himself so much at bay that he is unable to enter into that kind of soul-dialogue with Desdemona without which any love-relationship is put on the rocks. It is not only impoverished but stands in danger of being totally wrecked once it is exposed to the contrarious winds blowing against it from all quarters. Inspite of Othello's blaze of rhetoric it looks like an etiolated and devitalized relationship, entirely one-sided and for ever haunted by the demon of doubt and suspicion and offers a sharp contrast to the one existing between Antony and Cleopatra from the first to the end of the fourth Act. Othello can engage himself in courtship with excessive warmth and exuberance, can apotheosize Desdemona as a goddess and can visualize his life as 'one entire and perfect chrysolite', and yet there is something essentially self-regarding about his emotions and he cannot bring himself to address her as a unique and distinct individual standing at par with him on the summit of love. Love, in the ultimate analysis, subsists on communication, and absence of communication is tantamount to the death of love. In his tortured musings Othello is a lonely man with hardly anything to sustain him; he is either puzzled and confused by Iago's

cynical insinuations or luxuriates, not unlike Richard II, in the glow of his own lapidary style of utterance (or what Wilson Knight distinguishes as 'Othello music') which has nonetheless something mawkish about it. When he is talked into and convinced by Iago's greasy and loquacious tongue about the alleged 'stol'n hours of lust' shared together by Desdemona and Cassio he is shaken to the very foundations of his being and reaches the nadir of his fortunes on which hovers the acute sense of aloneness in his little world of man. In this hour of gloom and disillusionment he is willing to renounce all that is most significant to him in terms of military glory and its paraphernalia and his opulent rhetorical gesture, with its facade of ostentation, is in effect a vain and lamentable effort 'to cheer himself up:'

> O farewell,
> Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
> The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife;
> The royal banner, and all quality,
> Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war!
> And, O ye mortal engines; whose wide throats
> The immortal Jove's great clamour counterfeit;
> Farewell, Othello's occupation's gone!
> III, iii, 356-63

His pose of transcendence and his inborn love of grandiloquence, so much made of by critics of varying persuasion, and the attitudinizing that is integral to it, are a mere cover for his bloated egotism—an inverted form of self-pity: two of his cardinal and deadly sins. Othello and Desdemona do not appear as participants in a mutually fructifying and creative relationship but very much belonging to the antipodes: it is the sense of alienation which is at the root of Othello's failure to love and is the groundswell of his tragedy. He remains an outsider till the very end.

Images of sex abound in *Othello* as they occur equally copiously in *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, too, because the action of the play is centred in the perverted sexuality, maliciously and causelessly attributed to Cassio, and which is largely responsible for undermining the very basis of Othello's faith in the

purity and chastity of Desdemona. In reply to Othello's insistence on having an ocular proof of the supposedly physical proximity and intimacy between Cassio and Desdemona Iago tries to wriggle out of this embarrassing situation by laying stress on both the impossibility and the futility of such a demonstration :

> It is impossible you should see this,
> Were they as prime as goats, as hot as monkeys,
> As salt as wolves, in pride; and fools as gross
> As ignorance made drunk : III, iii, 408-11

In a different context, while cursing his blighted 'marriage hearse' (Cf. Blake's *London*) Othello makes use of a discomforting animal image :

> O curse of marriage,
> That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
> And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad,
> And live upon the vapour in a dungeon,
> Than keep a corner in a thing I love,
> For others' uses : III, iii, 272-77

The passage as a whole is steeped in profound and searing pathos though the images of the 'toad' and 'vapour in a dungeon' are evocative of a sort of loathsomeness which is both irritating and unsavoury. Iago seems to be endowed with a sensual imagination—which is also rotten at the core—and he aims at arousing nausea and disgust in Othello's mind with a view to throwing him into maddening fury against Desdemona. An identical impression of queasiness is evoked when in reply to Desdemona's innocuous query : 'I hope my noble lord esteems me honest', Othello bursts forth indignantly and furiously and gets this outburst mediated in terms of a pungent olfactory sensation thus: 'O, ay, as summer's flies, are in the shambles, That quicken even with blowing:'(IV, ii, 67-68). Iago's unashamed and unconcealed nastiness is brought out in conjuring up before Othello's mind's eye scenes of abject and headlong indulgence in sex :

> Oth. An unauthoriz'd kiss.
> Iago. Or to be naked with her friend abed,
> An hour, or more, not meaning any harm ?

Oth. Naked abed, Iago, and not mean harm?
It is hypocrisy against the devil:
They that mean virtuously, and yet do so,
The devil their virtue tempts, and they tempt heaven.
IV. i, 2-8

Also Iago's obscene narration before Othello of Cassio's fake dream is aimed at stimulating his rage and indignation to the highest pitch of intensity, administering a dreadful shock to him by the evocation of images of physical proximity with Desdemona while fully realizing all the time that he was merely trying to impose on Othello :

And then, sir, would he gripe and wring
my hand,
Cry out 'Sweet creature !' and then kiss me hard,
As if he pluck'd up kisses by the roots,
That grew upon my lips, then laid his leg
Over my thigh, and sigh'd, and kiss'd, and then
Cried, 'Curs'd fate, that gave thee to the Moor !
III,iii,427-32.

Obscenity of this order, characteristic of the coarse-grained and brutish Iago alone, is likely to give Othello's pride a mortal wound and this pushes him to such an extremity of desperation that he feels urged upon to 'chop her into messes'. A natural corollary following it is that, in his outrageous fury, as if the lion had been put in the cage and were smarting under his wounds and tugging against the cage, he now gives a short shrift to that love by whose sacred radiance his life had been flooded over so far. Not unnaturally, perhaps, he now comes to be wedded, in a chain of intense reaction, to that 'tyrannous hate' in which his whole being is submerged:

All my fond love thus do I blow to heaven . . .
'Tis gone.
Arise black vengeance, from thy hollow cell,
Yield up, O love, thy crown, and hearted throne,
To tyrannous hate, swell, bosom,with thy fraught,
For 'tis of aspics' tongues!
III, iii, 452-57

'Topping' and 'tupping' are images by employing which Iago wishes to fill Othello's imagination with 'fire and brimstone' and maximize his agonizing pain. He continues dinning into his ears the fact of the loss of the handkerchief, for in the peculiar complex of his psychic obsession, the loss of it and belief in Desdemona's unchastity ('It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,/Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars': (V. ii, 1-2) become coalesced and Iago is very far from wishing this coalescence to break or fall apart. Figures of such despicable objects in the phenomenal world as apes, goats and monkeys-all notorious symbols of sensuality or lechery-are evoked in varying contexts in order to underline and enforce the fact that man is ultimately and inescapably subjugated by his sensual instincts and impulses which work havoc with all the established norms of decency and push him irresistibly on to the verge of absolute bestiality.

Emilia, deeply rooted in the elemental energies of life,-one who combines in herself downright earthiness with terrifying honesty-discusses the matter of lack of chastity in a naughty world in a mood of seeming frivolity and impishness when she says 'marry, I would not do such a thing for a joint-ring, or for measures of lawn, nor for gowns, or petticoats,nor caps, nor any such exhibition; but, for the whole world? ud's pity, who would not make her husband a cuckold, to make him a monarch? I should venture purgatory for it' (IV, iii, 71-76). Desdemona, who had earlier glanced at all this in her impregnated phrase 'the world's mass of vanity' now reacts to this piece of blasphemous witticism on Emilia's part in her own poised, detached and self-effacing manner thus : 'Beshrew me, if I would do such a wrong,/For the whole world' (IV, iii, 77-78). The little scene in which this lively exchange of shrewd comments occurs corresponds to and provides a minor variant of the great Temptation Scene (III, iii) and is sandwiched between the Willow song scene (in which Desdemona is impelled, as if intuiting her impending death, to sing a profoundly touching song) and the final scene of her

cold-blooded murder by Othello: 'Put out the light, and then put out the light': (V, ii, 7). It looks both before and after and all these three scenes have a close bearing on the crescendo of the hellish drama which is being enacted with incredibly increazing horror. Earlier, as if mesmerized by the accumulating impact of Iago's Machiavellian tactic, Othello visualizes the supposedly tainted and unwholesome love of Cassio and Desdemona in very concrete terms and it is downright horrifying: 'Lie with her, lie on her?—We say lie on her, when they belie her,—lie with her, zounds, that's fulsome ! . . . Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus. Pish ! Noses, ears and lips. Is't possible?—Confess?—Handkerchief? —O devil ! (IV. i, 35-43). Othello begins by speaking in disjointed phrases-this reflects upon his psychic incoherence and instability-and the gruesome image of Desdemona wallowing in the sty of sin with Cassio is something which is revolting and makes him cross the utmost limit of patience (if any remnant of that 'young and rose-lipp'd cherubin' was still left once he had started on the fearful voyage of hatred) so much so that from this point onwards he can only proceed to Desdemona's bed-chamber with the express and unbending determination of killing her by strangulation (though he eventually kills her by stabbing her with the sword—a point which the unwary reader is likely to slur over). But before this actually takes place we hear Othello's last heart-rending cry arising from the abysmal depths of his heart thus :

> But there, where I have garner'd up my heart;
> Where either I must live, or bear no life,
> The fountain, from the which my current runs,
> Or else dries up; to be discarded thence,
> Or keep it as a cistern; for foul toads
> To knot and gender in ! IV, ii, 58—63.

Here fountain-the source 'of pure, organic pleasure' and bubbling energy-is the metaphor for Desdemona; the only option for Othello is either to have it dried up (by killing her)

or else to have it turned into a cistern-symbol of deadness and stagnation—from which inferior persons like Cassio are falsely believed to derive their surfeit of pleasure. The sharp juxtaposition of the two symbols—fountain and cistern —helps one recall one of Blake's Proverbs of Hell: 'The cistern contains, the fountain overflows' (cf. *The Marriage* of *Heaven and Hell)* having an almost identical broad sweep of connotation. The intensity of pain and horror implicit in this deeply touching and corrosive utterance and prompted, as a proximate cause, by Iago's machinations and double knavery, can only be neutralized by the callous murder of one who had been the cynosure of Othello's eye. And all this is effected by the devillish ingenuity of one who is an embodiment of unbounded, destructive energy and the immeasurable, passionate hatred emanating from it.

The Othello world of illusion is not commensurate with the work-a-day world because the fictional world is invariably in the nature of an artifact: it has the status of a self-contained cosmos framed and enveloped within the realm of fact. A sort of ambivalence results from the juxtaposition of 'seeming' and 'being' and the law of causality does not seem to operate here with any degree of finality, decisiveness or rigour. The elements which constitute its fabric are brazenly non-naturalistic and, somehow, puzzlingly enough, facts remain unverified and uncorroborated and this generates both the sense of uncertainty and of percariousness. In this world Iago, whose cold revenge emanates from the union of intellect and hatred, demonstrates a dynamics of pragmatism. Though he does not have many or recognizable claims on human credibility (Leavis regards him as a clumsy dramatic device[8] employed for the purpose of exposing Othello's weaknesses), yet his feigned and consistently flaunted air of 'honesty' and his abrupt and unpredictable somersaults very well fit into this world of make-believe; they are infact integral to its very make-up. Here love is looked upon either as 'witchcraft' or 'lust of the blood or permission of the will', fidelity is indis-

tinguishable from fornication, and identity as that of Iago is slithery, difficult to hold on and define in all its inwoven intricacies and subterranean depths. Cassio—another embodiment of the finesse and fragility of the Venetian culture—is very much a denizen of this world of illusion and inspite of his quasi-religious invocation: 'and the grace of heaven,/Before, behind thee; and on every hand,/Enwheel thee round !' (II, i, 85—87) is maligned and bespotted by the arch-fiend, Iago, because there is all the likelihood of Desdemona—for whom the invocation is used—being fascinated by his stunningly masculine charm. On this brittle foundation Iago builds up a huge and imposing edifice of villification. He is all the time engaged in dangling false prospects of success before Roderigo, exploiting his crass stupidity, poisoning Othello's naive and corruptible mind, undermining his self-confidence and trying to have Cassio 'on the hip.' He is an adept at mutilation and distortion of facts or twisting them in accordance with his own well-formulated calculations, designs his strategic moves with considerable skill and audacity but his sensual imagination—unlike that of Macbeth—lacks both intensity and vividness. His unreserved self-dedication to intellect—and almost all Shakespearian villains like Aaron, Richard III and Edmund who achieve a kind of 'bad eminence' are rationalists—is allied with death and destruction. Goddard has very acutely pointed out : 'Whatever he begins by being, however human the motives that at first led him on, he ends by being an image of death revenging itself on life through destruction'.[9] He is more or less like a pyromaniac haunted continuously by the powers of darkness and is bent upon doing irreparable damage to individuals as well as to the human species. He treats Emilia as a pawn for striking bargain and his relationship with her is touchingly devoid of depth, inwardness and rapture; it is, on the contrary, shrewdly business-like and opportunistic. Without having even the ghost of an idea about his ulterior, sinister motives she lets

herself be played into his hands, becomes serviceable in picking up ('filching') with lightning speed the much-coveted handkerchief—symbol now and agent of his own dapravity as well—which Desdemona lets slip casually and, perhaps, in a fit of absent-mindedness and which is represented by him to Othello as proof positive of her playing false with the Moor. The arched flights of his wit, his cynical insights, his gusto and flair for practicality, his 'gambler's *sang--froid*', his pursuit of his objectives with unflagging zeal and dogged perseverance and his inflexibility of determination are facets of personality which render him emotionally and intellectually ambivalent. The cancerous growth of evil in him turns into a kind of perversity and he tends to develop contempt for all that is rational, normative and life-enhancing: his pure and unmixed evil, with the Blakean 'fearful symmetry' adhering to it, is raised in rivalry with flamboyant passion. He reduces both being and action to a kind of livid neutrality and one is at one's wits' end to explain how his peculiar variety of cynicism and depravity could have its genesis in the powers and forces of Nature. He executes his plans with unerring dexterity and an icy coldness which borders upon a sort of aboriginal wickedness. An aura of cosmic mystery hangs over it all along and becomes all the more distinct towards the very end when he vows to become altogether inarticulate and dumb. 'From this time forth I never will speak word' (V, ii, 305); he is, so to say, condemned now to primordial speechlessness. West makes the point admirably when he comments thus: 'He is a known abomination seen in an icy extreme that makes it unfamiliar and so throws the mystery of iniquity into high relief'.[10] Surprisingly lacking in the dimensions and minute particulars of a fully organized and well--integrated character as Leavis visualizes him Iago is wholly negative in his basic approaches and responses; he is yet a tatanic force, an engine of destruction, 'a disembodied intelligence' and a medium of that cerebral activity which is instrumental in bringing about not only the almost preordained discomfiture of the

protagonist but also leading him up to the threshold of total extinction: 'but yet the pity of it, Iago: O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!' (IV, i, 191-92):

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Melita Schaum

THE SOCIAL DYNAMIC: SEPARATION, LIMINALITY AND REAGGREGATION IN *KING LEAR*

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behaviour, we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars; as if we were villains on necessity, fools by heavenly compulsion, knaves, thieves, treachers by spherical predominance, drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enfor'd obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. An admirable evasion of whoremaster man, to lay his goatish disposition to the charge of a star !

I.ii.121-131[1]

King Lear is a play about responsibility—about man's responsibility to know himself, know his relation to others, understand and fulfil his role in an ordered society. It is a play about self and community, the mystery of man's identity within and outside of a structure of positions and relationships, the paradox of man's generic and equal human bond with other men and his necessary position in hierarchies of family and state. Lear's drama is both personal and social: it is the drama of one man's passage from irresponsibility and folly into human and social wisdom. Lear's ordeals become an initiation, a rite of passage into maturity and the understanding of an operative social dynamic.

And, in fact, the elements, stages, and symbols of Lear's development closely parallel initiation rituals studied and described by anthropologists, Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner in their research on rites of passage in primitive societies. In his book *The Forest of symbols*[2] Turner, elbborating on van Gennep's earlier work, traces the stages of rites of passage as they involve the initiate in : 1) separation and

'stripping' into statuslessness and ambiguity, 2) the state of 'liminality' or marginality in which the initiate resides in a state of paradoxical and ambiguous identity, a symbolic state of simultaneous death and gestation, and during which time he is instructed in the 'sacra' or mysteries of reality, human nature, and society, and 3) the initiate's reintegration into society in a new social role involving status and maturity. Of these three stages, the middle stage of liminality—its association with loss, death, chaos, the wilderness, and the ritual instruction which traditionally takes place in the form of riddles, ritual action, and the contemplation of monstrous or 'mad' visual images—presents the most striking parallel to Lear's own initiation on the heath and his instruction through the fool's riddles, Tom O'Bedlam's devils and sprites, and his own passage through madness.

Turner's account of the separation and 'stripping' of the initiate echoes that of Lear in Acts I and II. In primitive societies, the initiate is divested of social role, status, property, name, kinship bonds-in short, of all conventional identity. Finally, his physical removal from the community completes his transformation into truly naked, 'unaccommodated man'. Lear begins his own 'stripping' process, divesting himself of status, responsibility, and with his banishment of Cordelia and Kent, of the ties of kinship and loyalty. Regan and Goneril complete the process, relieving him of all authority, dignity, property, and inviting Lear's final outraged severing of paternal identity. Lear's exile to the heath marks his entry into the liminal space, from social identity to the 'wilderness' of anonymity and ambiguity : 'now,'says the Fool, 'thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art now; I am a Fool, thou art nothing.'(I, iv, 188-91)

Primitive symbols associated with this stage of passage attempt to concretize the essentially psychological process of loss of identity in preparation for its re-forming. The liminal state is characterized in simultaneous images of death, dissolution, annihilation and of gestation and growth. Common

metaphors are those of the wilderness, which unites destructive elemental anarchy with natural fecundity; of night, eclipses, or the moon and its connotations of waxing and waning, death and rebirth. Another frequent image is that of a hut or tunnel, symbolic of both womb and tomb, of decay and creation. Lear, too, enters a symbolic hovel in which the significant portion of his ritual instruction is to take place. His entry is, in fact, a most ritualistic event. He is enjoined three times to enter, in Kent's incantatory 'Good my lord, enter here' (III.iv, 1, 5, 23), and just before entering he seems to achieve a sudden insight and sensitivity to the common lot of man: '. . .take physic, Pomp;/Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel' (III,iv.33,4). Lear's instruction has begun.

The conveying of the sacred mysteries of man, nature, and society is achieved in primitive societies by means of verbal instructions, visual exhibitions, and ritual actions The verbal lessons take the form of obscure stories or riddles whose message the initiate must contemplate and interpret. In *King Lear* the fool plays the role of verbal teacher in his indefatigable riddles and rhymes which present to Lear the mirror of his self, his society, and basic principles of wisdom and folly, order and anarchy. The Fool repeatedly calls Lear's attention to his own irresponsibility as king and parent, making 'thy daughters thy mothers' (I. iv.170) and cleaving the crown (I. iv 158). He relates folk wisdoms and prophecies, from common sense saws, 'Have more than thou showest,/ Speak less than thou knowest,/Lend less than thou owest...' (I. iv.115-18) to riddling discourses on utopia (III. ii. 81-96) and satires on society's corruption. It is Lear's task to listen and to finally accept the Fool as the 'sapient sir' and learned teacher.

It is through Edgar/Tom O'Bedlam that Lear is exposed to a type of visual instruction in distorted images of sprites, devils, monsters. Turner has analyzed the use of highly distorted or surreal images in native sacred and initiatory

artifacts as a vehicle, not for the confusion of reality, but for instruction in abstract or mataphoric thinking, and subsequently *greater* clarity in differentiating between levels of reality. Sculptures or pictures of human beings with greatly exaggerated anatomical parts, or of creatures combining human forms with animal or plant-like features are designed, in Turner's view, to startle the observer into contemplating relationships, objects and people, and into considering the abstract qualities of concrete objects. Turner explains,

> Put a man's head on a lion's body and you think about the human head in the abstract. Perhaps it becomes for you, as a member of a given culture and with the appropriate guidance, an emblem of chieftainship; or it may be explained as representing the soul as against the body; or intellect as contrasted with brute force, or innumerable other things...The man-lion monster also encourages the observer to think about lions, their habits, qualities, metaphorical properties, religious significance and so on. More important than these, the relation between man and lion, empirical and metaphorical, may be speculated upon, and new ideas developed on this topic.'

Lear achieves just such an ability to re-think relationships in the abstract, through the guidance of Tom O' Bedlam. Just as the Fool shows Lear his self through riddles, so Tom holds an imagistic, metaphoric glass up to Lear. Tom is the man whom, like Lear, 'the foul fiend hath led through fire and through flame, through ford and whirlpool,o'er bog and quagmire...' (III . iv: 51-53). Lear identifies with Tom and his hallucinatory devils, first in the particular, despite the literal-minded Kent :

> Lear : What! has his daughters brought him to this pass?...
> Kent : He hath no daughters, Sir.
> Lear : Death, traitor ! nothing could have subdu'd nature
> To such a lowness but his unkind daughters,
> III. iv. 62-70

and later identifying with Tom in the abstract, as metaphor and symbol of generic, suffering man :

...Is man no more than this? Consider him well. . .thou art the thing

itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.
III.iv.101-107

Tom's 'devils' represent the evils which plague all men. These are sprites from folklore, rich in native legend, recognizable by all : 'Flibbertigibbet... he gives the web and the pin Squinies the eye, and makes the hare-lip; mildews the white wheat, and hurts the poor creature of earth...Smulkin...the Prince of Darkness...Modo...and Mahu (III. iv. 114-142). His images become progressively more surreal and bizarre, a blend of cultural lore from chivalric ballad and nursery rhyme to the personification of fiends in nature and the anatomy, until Lear too experiences a hallucinatory purging which turns his daughters into dogs and begins to exorcize his torments through the distancing of imagery.

This significant visual event occurs at the end of a third type of instruction, ritual actions or play-acting such as those which primitive initiates participate in to prepare for the real actions associated with new social roles and responsibilities. Lear, the self-named 'false justicer,' erects a mock-tribunal in Act III, scene iv which rectifies his wrong judgment of his three daughters in Act I. In ritual formality, under the supervision of his learned counsellors of 'justice' and equity,' Tom and the Fool, Lear summons Goneril and Regan in order to indict them truly. At the height of emotion during this ritual psychodrama-'Stop her there! Arms,arms, sword, fire! Corruption in the place!' (III. vi, 53, 4)...Lear lapses into vision:' The little dogs and all,/Tray, Blanch, and Sweetheart,' (Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia) 'see, they bark at me.'(III. vi, 61,2) Tom O, Bedlam, Lear's guide through this powerful, surreal, subconscious world, exorcizes Lear's demons in a chanting, ritual spell :

Be thy mouth or black or white,
Tooth that poisons if it bite;
Mastiff, greyhound, mongrel grim,
Hound or spaniel, brach or lym;
Or bobtail tike or trundle-tail;

Tom will make him weep and wail;
For, with throwing thus my head,
Dogs leap'd the hatch, and all are fled.
III. vi. 64-72

Immediately, Lear is able to remove himself from his torments, to think about his daughters and their nature in a new, more penetrating, almost scientific way : 'Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that make these hard hearts?' (III. vi. 75-77). And after this final ordeal of Act III, Lear sleeps.

Act IV begings the process of reintegration with society and the expression of Lear's new identity. Lear feels himself emphatically' every inch a king' when he meets with Gloucester in Act IV, scene vi, and though his language is still the riddling language of the Fool, there is 'matter and impertinency mix'd' in his words, 'Reason in madness' (IV vi. 173-4). Lear exhibits new insights into life and the complexity and responsibility both of justice and of mercy :

A man may see how this world goes with no eyes. Look with thine ears: see how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark, in thine ear: change places, and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? IV. vi, 149-154

Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
For which thou whipp'st her.
IV. vi. 160-163

A new sense of authority and equality, of sovereignty and mortality, informs Lear's new state.

After his final healing sleep and return under Cordelia's care in Act IV, Lear symbolically awakens, is taken 'out o' th' grave,' rebron to his role as father and man: 'Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?...as I am a man, I think this lady/To be my child Cordelia ' (IV. vii, 53-72). With the imprisonment of father and daughter in Act V, scene iii Lear further expresses the rightness of the parent/ child bond : 'He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,/And fire us

hence like foxes' (V. iii. 22-3). Just as Lear recognizes his true role as father, so society acknowledges his position as king, in Albany's declaration, '...we will resign,/During the life of this old Majesty/To him our absolute power' (V.iii. 303-5). Although the play ends in the inevitable tragedy of mortality, Lear's reaggregation has been complete, his initiation into the understanding of man and community and his subsequent fulfilment of self has been sucessful.

The movement of *King Lear* as a rite of initiation, the acting out of a ritual social process involving separation, liminality and instruction, and reaggregation, sheds light on an aspect of this intense psychological and social drama. *King Lear* makes concrete the primitive concept that man is made fully human through an awareness of the mysteries of self and society, the paradox of equality and hierarchy, the responsibility of identity and role. Lear's passage exhibits the ongoing dynamics of society ritual, and their influence on human development.

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P. Ramamoorthy

KING LEAR AND THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY AS THEATRE OF CRUELTY

I attempt a tentative interpretation of *King Lear* and Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* in the light of Antonin Artaud's concept of the 'Theatre of Cruelty'. I am aware of the limitations of my approach: applying modern concepts to Jacobean plays and interpreting two writers by a theory which they were not conscious of. Yet the temptation to read into the plays certain modern concepts is so strong, I, like Oscar Wilde, yield to rather than resist the temptation.

Cruelty, according to Artaud, is not mere sadism. It is the impersonal, mindless and ineluctable cruelty to which all men are subject. There are malignant forces, very often incomprehensible, working against the very dignity and independence of man. The Theatre of Cruelty, then, is an assertion of man's protest against these cosmic powers that govern him. George E. Wellwarth's interpretation of Artaud's theatre is interesting to observe :

> The universe with its violent natural forces was cruel in Artaud's eyes, and this cruelty, he felt, was the one single most important fact of which man must be made aware. This cruelty is seen to some extent as viciousness between human beings. But such scenes must be presented in a manner calculated to purge the spectator of the corresponding emotions in him rather than to rouse in him the desire to imitate. At the same time, the spectator must be made aware of the violence dormant within himself and the omnipotence of the forces outside himself: each theatrical performance must shatter the foundations of the spectator's existence. It must show the spectator his own helplessness in the presence of the awesome and ineluctable forces that control the world.[1]

Peter Brook's production of *King Lear* and Trevor Nunn's

The Revenger's Tragedy are excellent examples of the theatre of cruelty. Brook's *Lear* is concerned with

'. . .sclerosis opposing the flows of existence, of cataracts that dissolve, of rigid attitudes that yield, while at the same time obsessions form and positions harden. Of course the whole play is about sight and blindness, what sight amounts to, what blindness means–how the two eyes of Lear ignore what the instinct of the Fool apprehends, how the two eyes of Gloucester miss what his blindness knows.'[2]

Gloucester's cry: 'As flies to wanton boys, are we to th' Gods;/ They kill us for their sport.'[3] (IV. i. 36-37) is often quoted but what we fail to observe is that Gloucester also comes to understand, 'I stumbled when I saw' (IV. i. 19) and that man is a 'worm' (IV. i. l. 32). The malignant cruelty is comprehensible and what every production must aim at is to create an awareness in the spectator of his helplessness against such malignant forces and his lot is to maintain his dignity under pressure from such mindless forces.

King Lear realises amidst the violence of the natural forces and the cruelty of his daughters that he is old and foolish and even a king has to smell mortality. What agonises Lear is : 'Why should a dog, a horse, a rat have life' and Cordelia be deprived of it. Lear's recognition that 'A dog's obey'd in office' (IV. vi, 161) strips him of all artificialities that civilisation has imposed upon human nature. The essence of human nature, its basic elemental quality, becomes obscured when Lear wears the mask of a king and a father. The formal rituals of the court, custom and tradition inhibit Lear from realising the omnipotence of the cosmic powers and his own helplessness. Peter Brook's presentation also leads one to believe that *King Lear* has leanings towards absurd theatre. The play seems to be 'a vast, complex, coherent poem designed to study the power and the emptiness of nothing—the positive and negative aspects latent in the zero.'[4]

In most modern productions of *King Lear* scenes of blind cruelty are not omitted and Nahum Tate's version of *King Lear* has no relevance to us today as we believe that the core of the play is the cruelty of the savage forces and the

realisation that to be sane is as difficult as to be indifferent to the cruel forces.

David Addenbrooke cites the reasons for Trevour Nunn's interest in *The Revenger's Tragedy* which sprang out of Nunn's fascination with the theme of the play and its contemporary relevance :

> It seemed to me a play that was extraordinarily about aspects of our own world. . .where the relationship between sex, violence and money was becoming increasingly popular, and expressed through all sorts of things—spy novels—James Bond. The 'good life'–the life of extraordinary opulence and comfort–was also connected with something fundamentally immoral.[6]

David Addenbrooke also refers to the fact that most productions of RSC during the year 1964 were influenced by the idea of cruelty. It was a 'year of productions which virtually compelled audiences to leave the theatre with their senses and intelligence jolted and disturbed as never before.' The malignant forces are concretised in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the characters become symbols of Evil. Lussurioso, the Duchess, the younger son of the Duchess and Gratiana are the symbols of the cruel malignant forces. In Tourneur's play elemental forces are not given much play but the ineluctable cosmic forces are seen in operation. When Vindice swears revenge the thunder echoes him. The whole dukedom is villainous. *The Revenger's Tragedy* also brings the spectator to realise 'Tis time to die when we are ourselves our foes'.[7] The world of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is thoroughly Jacobean as it exposes 'themes corresponding to the agitation and unrest characteristic'[8] of that epoch. Like *King Lear, the Revenger's Tragedy* is also concerned with Justice. Justice is being bought by Gold: That baneful metal buys honesty and chastity, too. Vindice tells Hippolyto: 'For to be honest is not to be i' the world/Brother I'll be that strange composed fellow.' (I, i, 94-5)

Castiza, his sister, also echoes the same note:

> Maids and their honours are like poor beginners :
> Were not sin rich there would be fewer sinners

Why had not virtue a revenue? Well,
I know the cause : 'twould have impoverished hell.

II. i. 5-8

Though Gratiana protests that the riches of the world cannot make a mother a procuress she is seduced by gold and goes to the extent of saying: 'If she (Castiza) be still chaste I'll never call her mine' (II.i.I.133). In *The Revenger's Tragedy* cruelty is seen in the barbarism of the court. There is a powerful appeal to irrational emotion which years of urbane and civilised behaviour have nurtured and which prohibit the courtiers from acquiring a knowledge of self. This is one major difference between *King Lear* and *The Revenger's Tragedy*; in the former the process of redemption is made explicit in the self-realisation of Lear and Gloucester. The characters of Tourneur do not grow to acquire that knowledge.

To Artaud, theatre is a ritual and theatre must be theatrical. In Artaud's theatre speech is non-theatrical and it is only a literary element. The Theatre of Cruelty depends on 'spectacle before everything else'.[9] Artaud maintains that a production should focus on only those aspects of the drama that are purely theatrical. Music, dance, pantomime, vocal mimicry, lighting and plastic art combine to produce what he calls the 'poetry of space'. Speech can be used but not for the communication of ideas. Speech is not an end by itself. Artaud believes in conveying to the spectators a general impression of the state of mind rather than the communication of facts. *The Revenger's Tragedy* has high theatrical potentiality. Una Ellis Fermor highlights the significance of the dumb show:

> . . . this automatically moving body of evil spirits that gives to the play its unique atmosphere of compact and irrefragable evil. Like corpses animated by Voodoo magic they move about their tasks, horrible simply because, but for this one trait of inhuman consistency, they are so nearly human.[10]

Tourneur depends a great deal on visual effects. D. A. N.

Jones, the designer for the Trevor Nunn production, wrote in 1969:

> The glittering, silvery courtiers of the Duke's household surge forward from a deep black box, brandishing masks and torches: as they swish in patterns about the stage, like brilliants juggled on black velvet, we get a clue about who's being raped, who's in charge, who's paying court to whom.[11]

The masked dances are full of gestures and movements. With the backdrop of thunder, the closing scene of four murders is committed. The third scene of Act V begins with the appearance of a blazing star. There is a dumb show; there is the sounding music and then Lussurioso is captured. Similarly, the first meeting between the disguised Vindice and Lussurioso is set in a fencing school. There are two lines of fencers, all masked. Vindice's way of swearing to be true is revealed in his kissing Lussurioso's sword. The bedroom scene is another successful scene where speech is totally devalued. When Lussurioso leaps on to the bed and tears down the curtains the Duchess is revealed in a compromising position with the Duke. The amazement is not for Lussurioso alone.

King Lear is also full of theatrical emblems, tableaus and pictorial realisation of abstract themes. Right from the opening scene, Shakespeare works on the pattern of a spectacle that conveys to the mind a general state of Lear and his world. It is a world corrupted by ceremonies and rituals. In Jack O' Brien's production, when Lear is displeased with Cordelia's reply, he grabs the remaining section of the map and smashes it on the floor. Albany, Goneril and Cornwall scramble to pick up the pieces. Edmund too picks up a piece and reluctantly hands it over to Cornwall.[12] The blinding of Gloucester has raised eyebrows. It is revolting and shocking. In the RSC production, 1982, the blinding took place under a naked light. Regan gave Cornwall one of her huge hairpins from her hair to put out Gloucester's eyes after which both laughed hysterically.

The most emblematic scene is Act IV.Sc.i. It is a short

scene of 75 lines where Gloucester meets Edgar in disguise. Visual symbols convey a great deal to the spectator in this scene. Here is a son accepting the responsibilities of his father. Filial piety is revealed by genuine gestures of compassion. There is hardly any verbal communication. In fact the text separates them. Gloucester thinks that he is speaking to a mad fool, not capable of rational thinking. Edgar, because of his disguise, cannot speak of his love and affection. The dramatic effect of the scene is seen in Gloucester longing to see Edgar by touch. When Gloucester hands over his purse, distribution is done to undo excess. It is visual and here speech is relegated to a secondary place. Gloucester holding Edgar's arms and walking towards Dover is one of the memorable spectacles of the stage.

There is also a directness of visual focus in the storm scene. Peter Brook presents Lear striding and defying the cosmic elements with sustained strength and the 'Blow Winds' speech is a visual emblem of Man crouching and huddling against the storm. True it is a scene full of rich poetry but poetry comes alive only when presented in coexistence with concrete symbols. The humbled Lear is seen wearing a night shirt in the Jack O' Brien produdtion mentioned earlier. Here is the spectacle of the transformation that is taking place and that is suggested through costumes.

Though critics like Charles Lamb, A.C. Bradley and J.C. Trevin have argued about the actability of *King Lear*, this generation has witnessed excellent productions of *King Lear*, like Brook's. It is no longer believed that *King Lear* is 'too huge for stage.'[13]

We understand that Trevor Nunn used Gamini Salgado edition of 1965 for his production of *The Revenger's Tragedy*. But he adapted it to his purpose. Many lines were omitted; several episodes were rearranged. Most important of all, seven substantial passages written by John Barton were added. Here one could accuse Nunn of infidelity to Tourneur. But Artaud would approve of such changes. Artaud believed

that the text as written has absolutely no authority and his *metteur en scene* is responsible and perfectly at liberty to alter it at will. His job is to transmute the text into a set of animated hieroglyphs that will crush and hypnotize the onlooker's sense. We also know of productions of *King Lear* where certain scenes and lines have been omitted and yet they were powerful on the stage.

If I have suggested, through this paper, that both *King Lear* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* had been written to the specifications of Artaud then my reading is at fault. What I believe is that both these plays could be played in the 'Theatre of Cruelty' without much damage to the original intentions of Shakespeare and Tourneur. Like Shakespeare, Artaud believes that theatre is an action in the sense of a physical cause. I do not suggest that Shakespeare disregarded words as Artaud does, but much of Shakespeare's works depend more on spectacle than on words. And that is one of the reasons why *King Lear* could be a successful ballet or opera as much as a successful play. I merely suggest that there are the seeds of Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty in Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*.

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K. G. Srivastava

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE : A FRESH INTERPRETATION

The present study of the poem has been provoked by two considerations. First is the loss of prestige that it has suffered at the expense of another ode by Keats—'To Autumn'. At the beginning of the present century, the 'Ode to a Nightingale' was hailed by Hearn[1] as the greatest of the odes.

That view prevailed until 1956 when Leonard Unger[2] bewailed the utter neglect accorded to 'To Autumn'. Since then the 'peculiarly neglected'[3] poem has, to the disadvantage of the previously celebrated one, come into special prominence, enjoying lavish praise from critics and writers such as Bush[4], James,[5] Walsh,[6] and Gillie[7]. Although no attempt will be made in the following pages at a comparison of the two poems—that will require a separate article—I shall at least try to restore this ode to its rightful place by demonstrating that its perfect structure sufficiently entitles it to the highest praise of the connoisseur. The fame of the Autumn-ode rests primarily on a perfect structure. So if it could be shown that the Nightingale-ode, too, has a complex and at the same time perfect structure, then its claim to poetic greatness will be fully vindicated.

Closely allied to the first consideration that prompted the present undertaking is the fact that many artistic blemishes—major as well as minor—in almost all of the eight stanzas have been detected by the critics. Katharine M. Wilson calls some of them, with good reason, I think, 'silly.'[8] Bridges[9] and Garrod,[10] as is well-known, found fault with the perplexing expression 'immortal Bird' of 1.61. Garrod found a factual mistake in the description of the nightingale at the

close of the poem. He observes exultingly in his essay entitled 'The Nightingale in Poetry':

'Of Keats's great ode I have spoken elsewhere. But I have not said, what I had not then noticed—my attention was called to it by Lord Grey of Fallodon—that in the final stanza of his ode Keats forgets that the Nightingale sings always in her domain.'

Forman[11] and Blackstone[12] find the opening lines unconvincing and unjustified. To Bridges[13] the characterization of the song of the nightingale at 1.75 as 'plaintive anthem' is wholly unreasonable and unwarranted. Tate finds the whole of the third stanza poetically inapt; he asserts quite judiciously[14] :

Looked at from any point of view, this stanza is bad: the best that one ought to say of it perhaps is that there are worse things in Shelley and Wordsworth and in Keats himself.'

Even Colvin,[15] whose admiration of Keats is usually over-enthusiastic, restrains himself when he comes to this stanza. Fogle[16] regards the second stanza as a false start. Even that superb stanza no.7, beginning with 'Thou wast not born for death' could not escape censure. Tate condemns it on technical grounds :

'It is the only stanza, as some critic has remarked, which contains a statement contrary to our sense of common reality—it seems to me that the ambivalence of the nightingale symbol contains the whole substance of the poem: the bird, as bird, shares the mortality of the world; as symbol, it purports to transcend it. And I feel that the pictorial technique has not been quite dramatic enough to give the transcendence of the symbol life in some visibly presented experience.'[17]

One naturally wonders where the claim of the poem to excellence essentially lies when each of its stanzas suffers from some defect or the other. The answer is that the defect lies, not in the poem itself, but rather in the interpretations of critics whose visions have been blurred by their prejudiced and preconceived notions about the poem. The greatest proof of this assertion is that in the interpretation of the poem

presented in this paper, the so-called defects disappear, or more appropriately, prove to be significant artistic virtues. And this interpretation, let it be noted, is based on a close reading of the text and emerges naturally from the structure of the words used in the poem. It is neither arbitrary nor preconceived.

Whatever their differences on the meaning of the details of it, the critics of the 'Ode to a Nightingale' achieve a surprising degree of unanimity of opinion in regard to the identity of its theme. Almost all of them agree that the 'Ode' is about the contrast between life and art. Herford's seems to be the representative view. He observes quite confidently :

> 'The two great odes; 'To a Nightingale' and 'On a Grecian Urn' have as their common starting-point a mood of despondent contemplation of life in which beauty perishes and passion cloys; whence the one finds refuge in the magic of Romance, and the other in the ideal eternity of Art.'[18]

The commonly-held view of the matter could be presented more lucidly in the following words of Douglas Bush :

> Keats's theme in the 'Ode to a Nightingale'...is the belief that whereas the momentary experience of beauty is fleeting, the ideal embodiment of that moment in art, in song, or in marble, is an imperishable source of joy.[19]

But such a view of the poem seems to be superficial. As I shall show presently, the 'Ode to a Nightingale' is not about the gulf between life and art but rather about two different attitudes to art–one, congenial to spirit and the other inimical to it. The first attitude may fairly be called one of imagination and child-like vision, characterized by faith and innocence. The second attitude may in like manner be described as scientific-philosophical, augmented by critical, utilitarian and analytical logic. The poem, I maintain, demonstrates, dramatically enough, that it is through imagination and unquestioning and unflinching faith that we get at the true spirit of art. It also brings home to us the fact—of course, by dramatizing it—that in order to derive the fullest enjoyment out of it we

must be one with the spirit of art through the negation of our own personality. But the moment we try to analyse it critically and objectively in the spirit of science or philosophy, we become alienated and far removed from it because the spirit of art is never at ease with such a temper of mind: it hates and defies all philosophizing and 'palpable designs'[20] upon itself. 'Do not all charms fly/At the touch of cold philosophy?' Keats asks in 'Lamia', and to me he seems to be vindicating it through the fate of the speaker of the 'Ode to a Nightingale'. We find the speaker at 1.55 at the summit of his joy in the state of identification with the nightingale which he has been able to effect by means of imagination and sympathy and faith. But when he begins to 'look before and after' at 1.59, the unfortunate result is that he gradually alienates himself from the singer of summer who soon deserts him and flies from him, out of sheer disgust. That is because, as Keats said elsewhere:

> It is a flaw
> In happiness to see beyond our bourn,—
> It forces us in summer skies to mourn,
> It spoils the singing of the nightingale.[21]

Let us now see how far this reading of the poem is borne out by the text itself and also what benefits accrue from it. In order to justify the veracity of this reading of the 'Ode', I shall try to explicate the mutual relationship of its stanzas. But before I undertake that task, let us pose to ourselves these simple but significant questions. These questions are very pertinent and, I hope, the correct answers to them will enable us to expound the poem as a whole. At 1.7 the speaker calls the nightingale 'light-winged Dryad of the trees' and at 1.33 he decides to reach the singer of summer 'on the viewless wings of Poesy'. What is the significance of these seemingly similar expressions? Is there any correlation suggested between the two? Again, the speaker has said at 1.19 that he would 'leave the world unseen'. Has that anything to do with his decision to fly to the nightingale' on the 'viewless wings

of Poesy'? Why should the speaker, after all, abandon the idea of flying to the 'light-winged Dryad of the trees' 'on the chariot' of Bacchus and his pards' at 1.32? Are these expressions mere trappings and purple patches or do they have some significant shape? What is the real force of the word 'Poesy,? Does it play its true part in what follows 1.33? What is the import of the sixth stanza? Does 'easeful Death' of 1.52 imply physical death of common experience? Is it the same phenomenon as alluded to at 1.26 and 1.61? And above all, why does the 'light-winged Dryad of the trees' and 'singer of summer' desert the speaker, to his utter dismay, in the midst of his apparently eulogistic dithyramb of the seventh stanza? We submit that a careful consideration of these questions will itself suggest the conclusion we briefly stated earlier. This will certainly become crystal clear when we analyse the poem as a whole, stanza by stanza.

The first stanza describes the traumatic experience[22] of the speaker on his being confronted, all of a sudden, by the rapturous song of the nightingale, singing 'of summer in full-throated ease'. The meaning of this stanza will not be fully grasped unless we reach the third stanza. The strange experience of the speaker will remain a puzzlement until we realize the fact that he is a creature of the harsh world of stanza no. 3 'where but to think is to be full of sorrow/And leaden-eyed despair.' Such an ecstatic song as that of the nightingale is really unimaginable in the world of the speaker, full of disappointments, disease, old age and the miseries, associated with it, young death and short-lived beauty and, inconstant love. It is very natural for a denizen of such a world to be pleasantly shocked by the joyous song of the nightingale, evincing no symptom of' the weariness, the fever and the fret' which characterize the speaker's own world. The song of the nightingale is indeed so intense and the shock of the speaker so profound that his heart' aches' (1.1) and his faculty of perception becomes numb and inert. He cannot believe that he is still in his own world of sadness and gri-

efs. He feels as if he had been transported to some other world. This is, I think, the implication of the expression 'and Lethe-wards had sunk' (1.4). The traumatic experience of the speaker as described in 11.1-4 can be compared to Dante's shock on hearing a shudder in Limbo :

> And all at once the dreadful land
> Gave such a trembling shudder that the fear
> Still shakes my mind with its remembered shock.
> The fissured earth split wide and gave forth wind
> And such a flash of crimson lightning flared
> That my stunned senses were all overwhelmed
> And down I dropped like one whom sleep has seized.[23]

I think that the only difference between the two descriptions is that whereas Dante's shock has been caused by a dreadful shudder, that of the speaker of the 'Ode' by the rapturous song of the nightingale. In either case it is the intensity and the overwhelming nature of the shock that has been highlighted. What I want to emphasize is the point that the song of the nightingale is so overwhelming and so marvellous that the speaker has been rendered incapable of enjoying it. Not that he has any malice against the nightingale; he is, in fact, overjoyed at the possibility of such an extraordinary song. But his difficulty is that his perception has been stunned and made numb. The total effect of the song on his mind has been one of a hemlock-drink or of a very full dose of an opiate 'to the brains'. He definitely needs the enlivening of his spirits before he could enjoy the song, sung 'in full-throated ease.' This prepares us for the second stanza.

Quite naturally, the thought of 'vintage' occurs to the mind of the speaker as a means to reclaim him from the state of torpor into which he has sunk and also as a means to enable him to enjoy the rapture of the song. This stanza is very rich in imagery. However, the discussion of the significance of the images employed here will have to wait upon a later reference. Here we should only note that if the speaker wants to enjoy the song of the nightingale in full,

then what he must do first of all is that he should imbibe the spirit of the nightingale and if possible become one with him. That is precisely what 11.19-20 suggest :

> That I might drink and leave the world unseen,
> And with *thee* fade away into the forest dim.

The speaker, to be sure, must forget his self and his existence by fading 'away into the forest dim' from where the nightingale is 'pouring forth' his soul abroad in utmost ecstasy (11.57-78). This fact has been forcefully brought home to us in the third stanza, the implication of which is that the speaker cannot share the rapture of the song so long as he is conscious of the hard realities of his world. In order to realize the beauty of the nightingale's world, he must become part of it by totally forgetting his local habitation and name. The reason is that the percipient of beauty must, of necessity, be able to look at it with the vision of its creator: he must, in other words, achieve identification with it. In the present case, the nightingale is the artist and the greenery of summer and its song together form his art-work. The speaker is the percipient, longing for the true perception of the nightingale's song, expressing the vernal richness of the sylvan world. Now the nightingale is a 'light-winged Dryad of the trees' (1.7), singing' of summer in full-throated ease' (1.10) 'in some melodious plot/Of beechen green and shadows numberless' (1.8-9). It follows that the speaker, too, should be something like a 'light-winged Dryad' to see the real beauty of the 'melodious plot' from where the nightingale is singing. Here arises the question of how far the 'draught of vintage' can help him realize his goal. He bids good-bye to it at 1.31, evidently because he is doubtful of its efficacy. At this point we can consider the significance of the rich imagery of stanza no.2. The images, employed to give a graphic description of the Provencal wine and its associated ideas, undoubtedly discharge their function: they bring before our mental eye vistas of the harvesting of vine, country-dance and the

consequent jollity and merry-making of Provence along with those of the claret-beaker, full of bubbles, with its mouth reddened with the red wine that it contains. But the images are remarkable also for their symbolic connotations I think that Keats has used the word 'vintage' as a symbol of culture and refinement, which are regarded as essential for the proper aesthetic apprehension of art. But our speaker rejects the aid of 'Bacchus and his pards' at 1.32 and that means, to all intents and purposes, that he rejects the aid of vintage' as a means of transport to the world of the nightingale. Clearly, 'vintage' 'and' Bacchus and his pards 'are to be equated. And this is quite understandable, for Bacchus is the god of wine and can therefore be used as a symbol of 'vintage' without creating any confusion. However, to me the addition of 'pards' to Bacchus seems to be a little alarming: this makes me believe that something more than wine is intended by the Bacchus symbol here. It is true that Bacchus is the god of wine; but he is also the god of culture and refinement. He is said to have driven his chariot, yoked to tigers, up to India with a view to spreading civilization in the form of wine. In this connection I would like to refer to the following observation of Sir Paul Harvey :

> He (i. e. Dionysus or Bacchus) made an expedition to Eastern lands, teaching mankind the elements of civilization and the use of wine, In this connexion he is frequently represented drawn in a chariot by tigers, and accompanied by a rout of votaries, male and female (Satyrs, Sileni . . .).[4]

The allusion to 'pards', I maintain, is a pointer to the fact that here by the expression 'Bacchus and his pards' Keats did not mean to suggest wine merely but the elements of civilized life. And when our speaker rejects the aid of 'Bacchus and his pards', he rejects' vintage, and all that it stands for. If 'vintage' is, as I suggested earlier, a symbol of culture and refinement, then the details of 'vintage', given in the second stanza, should be interpreted as different elements of culture. We can grasp the import of this description better by putting

to ourselves these questions: Is it necessary to be highly cultured and refined in order to realize the beauty of the nightingale's song ? Is the long experience of the country's flora and fauna essential for the apprehension of the singing of summer ? Does one really need to be acquainted with the technique of song and dance to perceive the rapture of the light-winged Dryad of the trees ? Is our speaker required to know the etiquette of when to blush and where to blush before he could hope to reach the nightingale ? The answers to all these questions are in the negative: these paraphernalia of refinement and sophistication are not necessary at all for the perception of the nightingale's ecstatic outburst. These elements of civilization may have their own utility: they might have the properties of Hippocrene whose water can inspire its drinker to compose (and by implication appreciate) love-poems in the style of the troubadours of Provence of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, famous for their poems of courtly love, in elaborate ornate style. But our speaker is afraid they may not be efficient enough to enable him to get at the spirit of the nightingale's song which is too subtle for them. He therefore gives up the idea of having recourse to 'vintage' as a means of transport to the world of the nightingale. When he abandons the thought of being 'charioted by Bacchus and his pards' at 1.32, he rejects the importance of being 'cooled a long age in the deep-delved earth', of the taste of 'Flora and the country green', of the knowledge of dance and song, and of the prudery of being blushful and of the outward display of piety ('beads').

The speaker rejects 'vintage, in favour of 'the viewless wings of Poesy 'at 1.33. The reason is not far to seek. We know that the nightingale is a 'light-winged Dryad of the trees'. The word 'light' suggests at once delicacy, tenderness and fastidiousness of the 'Dryad'. It is obvious that the rattling and noisy chariot of 'Bacchus and his pards' is very likely to frighten the nightingale who is by his very nature 'light'. Conversely, the 'light-winged Dryad' would surely welcome a visitor who rides a vehicle as subtle as his (nightingale's)

own wings. Hence the speaker's judicious selection of a very subtle carriage—'viewless wings of Poesy', corresponding to the light wings of the nightingale. Another reason why the speaker decides to go to the nightingale on 'the viewless wings of Poesy' and not in the chariot of 'Bacchus and his pards' is the fact that at 1.19 he had thought it wise to 'leave the world unseen'. Now, if he chooses to fly in the chariot of the wine-god, he is in every danger of being caught by the world he seeks to flee. But he can reach the nightingale undetected on 'the viewless wings of Poesy': he can reach his destination unnoticed by virtue of the viewlessness of his vehicle. All this symbolically implies that the refined and sophisticated sensibility can be of some help in the understanding of such art-works as the courtly love-poems of the Provencal troubadours but it cannot be of any significant use for the apprehension of the rapturous song of the nightingale celebrating the beauties of his sylvan world of organic growth which requires of its percipient an almost mystic state of self-forgetfulness and identification with itself for the realization of its true nature. It is only by means of imagination, characterized by faith, innocence and creativity, that the art-works of the nature of the nightingale's song can be truly apprehended.

Our speaker sagaciously decides to go to the nightingale 'on the viewless wings of Poesy'. For, through them he would be on par with the nightingale and, as we hinted earlier, oneness with the nightingale is the most desired modality of the delectation of his rapturous song. The word 'Poesy' has been used in its original Greek sense of making or creating. So on the wings of the creative faculty called 'Poesy', the speaker can easily flee his own world unnoticed 'on account of the viewlessness of those wings), achieve likemindedness with the nightingale (who is lightwinged and would welcome the speaker for the latter's implied affinity with him), and what is most important, like Shakespeare's lover, can see 'Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt'[25] It really needs utmost

sympathy and faith to perceive the real beauty of art and 'viewless wings of Poesy' presuppose them, for imaginative making is impossible without sympathy and faith. And they give a good account of themselves when once they come to the speaker; they take practically no time to take the speaker to the nightingale. 'Already with thee'—the speaker declares at 1.35 and what follows it is the demonstration of what 'the viewless wings of Poesy' can do. The significance of this demonstration can be realized by comparing the surroundings of the nightingale of 11.18-19, seen presumably with unimaginative eyes, to the world of the singer of summer, suggested at 11.35-50 and seen with the imaginative eyes of sympathy and faith. Riding 'the viewless wings of Poesy', the speaker visualizes the Queen moon on her throne, Clustered around by all her starry Fays:' and he feels all around this world the tenderness of the night. At 11.18-19 he had seen only 'shadows numberless' and 'some melodious plot/Of beechen green' but now he finds a very strange environment, a world without light despite the moon and the accompanying stars. The world of the nightingale is a dark world. 'But here there is no light' says the speaker at 1.38 with a certain amount of surprise but he need not be surprised at all. For, the light, the physical light of common experience, is quite useless for the realm of art: it is the divine light of faith and imagination 'what *from heaven* is with the breezes blown' (1.39) which alone can illuminate it in the real sense of the term and not the light of knowledge and reason. It is true that in the creation of art intellect and reason (Queen-moon and her starry Fays) play a major part but its beauty and glory can be realized only by means of faith and imagination. To the eyes of common-sense and reason, the world of art might seem to be disorderly and drab and dreary; but one who has got imagination and faith and sympathy can see immense significance in its seeming disorderliness. That is how the 'verdurous glooms and winding mossy ways' of the nightingale's dark covert appear to the speaker,' on 'the

viewless wings of Poesy,' to be the source of illumination; he finds them performing a very significant duty: they are an indispensable part of the sylvan world. Indeed, equipped with the vision of imagination, the speaker perceives the rich beauty of the apparently dark and gloomy world of the nightingale. The fifth stanza is a clear proof of this.

The speaker cannot 'see' the glory of the nightingale-world (with his naked eye of common sense and intelligence) but he can very well 'guess'—mystically apprehend and feel—the luxuriance of it with the help of the heavenly light of faith and sympathy. And it is feeling that matters in the realm of art and not accurate verification. Filled with faith and devotion, the speaker takes it for granted that, it being summer, the 'seasonable month' must have endowed 'the grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild' with hawthorn, eglantine, violets and musk-rose; without caring for their identities, he feels the perfume of them all in the totality of their effect—'in enbalmed darkness'. The suggestion is that the true, the full power of art can be realized only in its total impression, achieved by the percipient through imagination and faith. This is clear from the expression 'in enbalmed darkness'. Literally, the expression means perfumed darkness—darkness which has been enriched by the sweetness and fragrance of different kinds of flowers of the forest. But if we take the nightingale to be an artist and his song to be the art-work, depicting the fertile richness of summer, then the expression will certainly suggest the total impression of this art-world to the making of which each incense and each flower has contributed significantly. The speaker does not bother about verifying them because he knows that such efforts would be futile and wide of the mark. He is contented and wisely so, with the totality of their effect where their individual contribution, he is sure, has been fairly and securely preserved—'enbalmed'.

One note-worthy feature of the description of the flowers in this stanza is that some of the epithets used for flowers

suggestively characterize the nature of the speaker who is perceiving the beauty of the sylvan world of the nightingale in the spirit of faith and sympathy. The epithet 'white', used for hawthorn, for example, signifies the innocence and untainted faith of the speaker who takes everything about this world of the nightingale in good faith, without bothering about its critical examination. Similarly, the adjective 'pastoral', used for eglantine, is suggestive of his natural simplicity and unsophisticated sensibility.

In the fifth stanza the speaker, as we have seen, appreciates the beauty of the nightingale-world with utmost faith and innocence. But that is not enough: he can realize its true worth and power only by immersing himself into it, by becoming a part of it himself. We remember he had wished to 'fade away into the forest dim' (1.20) and to 'Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget . . . The weariness, the fever, and the fret' (1.21 and 23) and he was perfectly right. Unless he forgets himself and his world totally, he cannot hope to 'understand' the full import of the dark world of the nightingale. But this state of self-forgetfulness means the negation of personality and that implies a certain kind of death. Indeed through that death alone can the speaker enjoy the rapture of the nightingale in full. The sixth stanza makes this quite clear. It begins with the expression 'Darkling I listen.' Literally, the expression no doubt means that the speaker is hearing the song of the nigntingale in the darkness of the forest. But 'dark' suggests death as well and thus the expression purports to exhort the speaker to 'die' in order to realize the meaning of the nightingale. That this is the intended meaning here is clear from attention to the connexion of the expression with the remaining line, describing the speaker's death-wish. The speaker says in what follows that he has often invoked 'easeful Death' to 'take into the air my quiet breath' but he feels that if Death is to be accepted at all, it should be embraced at the present moment, for this Death would be no ordinary death of 1.26, nor will it simply be an 'easeful Death' he used to invoke

previously; it would rather be a very special kind of Death, a 'rich' Death—a Death which will make the speaker experience an abundantly rich life of exuberance, exhilaration and ecstasy. Indeed it does not look nice, thinks the speaker, that he should remain a mere spectator. However imaginatively he might be relishing the outward glory of the nightingale-world, he is far from grasping its true significance. And that can be grasped only by achieving a state of identification with the nightingale. The speaker finds that the nightingale is able to sing of summer 'in full-throated ease' only because he is able to 'pour forth his soul abroad' and that presupposes a virtual Death. It follows that one who wants to experience this ecstatic song in full, should first attain to the state in which the singer produced it. It is indeed a challenge and the speaker accepts it when he decides to 'cease upon the midnight with no pain'. In case the speaker is able to achieve this state, he would be on par with the nightingale and thereby would be in a position to feel the latter's 'ecstasy'. But at this crucial moment, by a stroke of irony, as it were, the speaker's 'dull brain' asserts itself. He had a premonition of its evil designs at 1.34 and that has come true. When he is on the verge of the consummation of his aesthetic experience, his 'dull brain' comes to perplex and retard and even frustrate it. Under its impact, the speaker becomes rational and starts viewing the whole phenomenon of the wished-for Death quite critically. He forgets or rather ignores its true aesthetic significance and concerns himself with its prose, literal and businesslike sense alone. He thinks that by dying, he is not going to gain anything because he would be reduced to the state of a mere 'sod', a turf—a very insignificant thing. And what about the nightingale? He would go on singing ceaselessly unconcerned with whatever happens to the speaker. The practical 'dull brain' cannot find any aesthetic quality in the song of the nightingale: at best, it would be a 'high requiem, a Mass (for the dead speaker). Here it is pertinent to consider the sense in which the speaker

had expressed his wish for Death at 1.55-6. It is a superficial reading indeed that takes the expression 'seems it rich to die/To cease upon the midnight with no pain' as meaning physical death of common experience. Keats is here talking of aesthetic death involving the negation of personality and self-abandonment, equivalent to the state of mystic trance. It is that state which Wordsworth called 'blessed' and described it in the following words:

> that serene and blessed mood
> In which the affections gently lead us on
> Until the breath of this corporeal frame
> And even the motion of our human blood
> Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
> In body, and become a living soul:[2d]

The speaker wants to 'die' in the same sense as the nightingale is dying in terms of pouring forth his soul abroad. The nightingale is able to sing so rapturously only because he has merged himself with his sylvan world: he has, to use the speaker's word at 1.20, 'faded away into the forest dim'. It is imperative therefore for the speaker, too, to be immersed into that 'dark' world if he wishes to perceive its true meaning. Thus when he wishes 'to die', what he actually wants is to get lost in the world of the nightingale by forgetting himself and his own harsh world of the third stanza. He himself had said at the beginning of that stanza that in order to reach the nightingale (i.e. to realize the rapture of his song) what was necessary for him was to 'Fade far away, dissolve, and quite forget/What thou among the leaves hast never known,'. I think this statement of the speaker should be taken as a gloss over his allusion to death at 1.55-56. But he cannot 'dissolve' himself into the forest dim precisely because he has a 'dull brain 'which can never allow him to forget what the nightingale has never known. The speaker wanted identification with the nightingale and his world but his 'dull brain' serves only to bring about his alienation from the latter. This process starts at 1.59 and culminates at 1.70. The seventh stanza develops and brings to fruition this process of estrangement. Let us see how it works.

The process that began at 1.59 in the sixth stanza makes much headway at 1.61 where the speaker addresses the nightingale as 'Bird' although he calls him 'immortal'. The address is very significant because it highlights the analytical and critical attitude that has overtaken the speaker, under the influence of his 'dull brain', replacing the faith, innocence, and sympathy characterizing his earlier attitude. It is remarkable that what was 'light-winged Dryad of the trees' has been relegated to the status of a mere 'Bird'. In the next line (i.e. 62) the speaker assesses his position as well as that of the nightingale. He reflects and finds that his life is full of competition and rivalry which are conspicuous by their absence in the life of the singer of summer. He finds that he and the nightingale are products of two different worlds: whereas his own world is divided and disintegrated the world of the nightingale is organic and harmonized. This is what the line 'no hungry generations tread thee down' really implies. And this meaning explains why the nightingale has been called 'immortal Bird: the nightingale is immune from death because he does not know what death is; he takes it as a natural process of his organic world and is never haunted by the fear of death, thus rendering it harmless and insignificant. This line of thought makes the speaker believe that the nightingale's song is permanent and that it has been consoling the distressed heart of humanity since times immemorial, ceaselessly, and without any discrimination of class, creed or sex. In ancient times its voice was heard alike by emperor and clown (who must have derived consolation and solace from it in distressful circumstances). It (the voice of the nightingale) did not fail to soothe the afflicted heart of Ruth of the country of Moab, the symbol of frustrated human individuality, when she found herself in an alien land husbandless, and without any hope of support. Also, it undoubtedly brought hope of deliverance not once but quite often to princesses kept in enchanted castles whose casements opened on the boundless, impassable and dreadful seas in hopeless fairy-lands, far from the vicinity of human beings.

It is evident from the above outline of the stanza that the speaker does not consider the song of the nightingale here *qua* song but rather as a very useful thing that enables humanity to endure its sorrows and sufferings with courage and fortitude: he concerns himself with the theme of the permanence of the song and sets aside the question of its rapture, its ecstasy, which was his primary concern. He becomes philosophical, critical, utilitarian, and analytical in his approach to the nightingale and his song; considerations other than aesthetic weigh with him because he is now in the full grip of his 'dull brain'. But all this serves only to aggravate his alienation from the nightingale who apparently hates 'palpable designs' upon himself because he is a symbol of pure poetry that requires of its percipient total immersion in itself for its fullest realization The unfortunate result is that all the praise that the speaker lavishes on the nightingale,ironically enough, displeases the 'light-winged Dryad of the trees' so much so that he flies from him out of sheer disgust for his unaesthetic utterenaces. Although the speaker refers to the flight of the nightingale a bit late at 1.75, we have to assume that it started much earlier, say, at the close of the seventh stanza Several factors are responsible for the displeasure of the nightingale. We have already referred to the critical and utilitarian approach of the speaker to the nightingale's song exemplified in the last two lines of the sixth stanza and in the seventh stanza as a whole. In the second line of the seventh stanza, the speaker recalled unconsciously his own harsh world of stanza no.3 which he was trying to forget in order to be with the nightingale. If that was not enough to offend the fastidious 'Dryad' the list of such unpleasant words as 'sad' 'sick', 'in tears', 'alien', 'perilous' and above all, 'forlorn' must have unmistakably offended the feelings of the summer: the nightingale must have inferred from the speaker's profuse use of these unhappy words that he was not fit for his company and that he was off 'the viewless wings of Poesy' that had enabled him to reach him (the nightingale). As a result, he

shuns his company lest his own song should be spoiled.

But the speaker hardly realizes that he has brought his fall from the rich and glorious world of the nightingale through the contrivance of his own 'dull brain' which made him unduly self-conscious and thereby weaned him away from the singer of summer. He is right when he says that the very word 'forlorn' (of the seventh stanza) has brought him back to his own sole self (because the process of his alienation from the nightingale, to be sure, was brought to fulfilment in it). But he is certainly wrong in ascribing his desertion by the nightingale to 'the viewless wings of Poesy' which he now disparagingly calls 'Fancy'. This clearly shows the change in his attitude to the nightingale: instead of faith, innocence, and imagination, he has now scepticism, criticism and utilitarianism. But this also denotes the utter desperation that has seized him: the fruit of knowledge has cost him his paradise which was the company of the nightingale and he is perplexed, confused and distraught. This becomes more remarkable when he calls his imagination 'deceiving elf'; this is calumnious and reflects the speaker's despair. The irony of the situation is that not even once does he accuse his 'dull brain' which has wrought his tragedy. He could not realize his goal; what appeared to be 'high requiem' at 1.60 becomes 'plaintive anthem' at 1.75. Not realizing that the nightingale has shunned his company and is flying from him out of sheer disgust for his changed attitude, the speaker deludes himself by the thought that his (nightingale's) song is 'buried deep/In the next valley glades'. He has lost his moment of supreme bliss and is naturally confused beyond measure. He is in a fix and does not know whether to call his experience with the nightingale's sylvan world 'a vision' or just a day-dream (waking dream'). Also, he needs to know whether he is awake or asleep. That is to say that he wants to know whether truth is on the side of the nightingale's world that he apprehended mystically in the fourth, fifth and sixth stanzas or it is on the side

of his present state of 'sole self' which he had presumably condemned in stanza no.3.

What emerges clearly from the above analysis of the 'ode' is that it is the dramatically articulated story of a percipient of art who ultimately fails to capture its true spirit inspite of his initial success. The percipient does reach the spirit of art by means of sympathy, imagination and faith. He was going to realize its true glory through an identification with it (implying death in an aesthetic sense) but suddenly his 'dull brain' swooped upon him and distracted him from his cherished goal by making him sceptical, critical, and philosophical. As a result of his changed attitude, the spirit of art parted company from him because it feels uncomfortable in the company of the critical, the sceptical, the utilitarian, and the philosphical. It welcomed the percipient at first because he was then imaginative, unquestioning, and full of faith. So long as the percipient remained in possession of sympathetic imagination, the spirit of art yielded pleasure to him. But when it became convinced of his changed attitude it flew from him, rendering him miserable and confused. Like the knignt-at-arms in that lovely poem—'La Belle Dame Sans Merci', the speaker of the 'Ode to a Nightingale' is left in the lurch 'on the cold hill's side' to learn whether he is awake or asleep. He was awake in the real sense of the term when he was going to embrace death but now when to all apperances he is awake, the fact is that he is actually asleep.

The 'Ode to a Nightingale' is thus a poem of demonstration and not of statement. Its hallmark is its dramatic quality. Leonard Unger rightly calls it 'the most clearly dramatic of poems'[27]. Indeed, we incline to regard it as a short lyrical tragedy, exhibiting the (unsuccessful) action of its speaker to capture the spirit of art. The purpose of the protagonist of this drama is frustrated by his tragic flaw—'dull brain'. Read in this light, the poem proves to be a perfect structure with a beautiful beginning, a middle and an end in the truly Aristotelian sense of the words. The first three stanzas of the poem can be treated as the beginning of its

action, the fourth, fifth and sixth as the middle and the last two as its end. Thus all its eight stanzas are mutually integrated, forming a beautiful pattern to the making of which each one of them has contributed significantly.

Let us note briefly the benefits of this fresh reading of the 'Ode'. Our analysis has revealed that all the words used in it are skilfully employed and have a bearing upon one another. They are not mere trappings but are functional: they have been assigned significant roles which they perform wonderfully well. Expressions like 'immortal Bird', 'high requiem', 'deceiving elf' and plaintive anthem' have dramatic functions in their proper places and their real significance can be realized only by a grasp of their inter-relation. Of course the meaning of the poem as a whole emerges from the structure of the words used in it. In other words 'form' and 'meaning' have become identical here in the sense of Professor Kitto[28]. Our reading of the poem clarifies the relation between 'light-winged Dryad of the trees' and 'viewless wings of Poesy', between 'dies' of 1.26 and 'to die' of 1.55; between 'viewless wings of Poesy' and 'fancy', between 'high requiem' and 'plaintive anthem', and between 'light-winged Dryad of the trees' and 'immortal Bird'. It brings into limelight the kinship that exists between the first, the third and the seventh stanzas. It explains how the second stanza leads to the fourth and how the fourth progresses into the fifth and the sixth. It proves that the word 'forlorn' of 1.71 is not so sudden as is generally supposed but is the culmination of the process of estrangement between the speaker and the nightingale. Also this renders it quite clear why Keats makes the nightingale sing even outside his domain although as a minute observer of nature he knew full well that the physical real nightingale sings always in his domain and in no case outside. Keats uses the nightingale as a symbol of pure art and at the close of the poem he is dramatizing the flight of the spirit of pure art at the sight of the utilitarian analyst. To take the nightingale as a real bird

is to misunderstand the whole poem.

To sum up, the 'Ode to a Nightingale' is a perfect structure whose true nature and meaning, to use the words of Wilson Knight, 'can only be apprehended by attention to its mutual, and spatial interaction'.[29]

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G. Singh

THE ACHIEVEMENT OF Q. D. LEAVIS

I

As a critic of the novel Q. D. Leavis occupies the same place as F. R. Leavis, and there are not many critics to put alongside them. Some of her comments and value-judgments on the art of the novel as well as on individual novels and novelists are comparable for their acumen with those of a practitioner of the novel like Henry James on Balzac or on the French novel in general; or like D. H. Lawrence on Hardy or the American novelists; or with those of Pound on Joyce. Moreover, in pinpointing what she considered to be the business of the novel—an open-minded exploration of human reality and, implicitly, the criticism of life as well as of the ethos of a given epoch or society—Q.D. Leavis frequently attained the same insight as Jane Austen or George Eliot in their pronouncements on the art of the novel.

To this is to be added the pioneering nature of Q. D. Leavis's approach to the novel—an approach that she chose to call anthropological; for, in so far as the novel, while being a work of creative and imaginative art, is also a product of social, cultural and economic factors and circumstances, she set out to investigate how the reading public was formed as well as the way cultural and social (or sociological) factors determined the writing of a particular novel. Such an attitude to the study of the novel originated from Q. D. Leavis's post-graduate research at Cambridge under the supervision of I.A. Richards—research that was to be published as the well-known epoch-making book entitled *Fiction and the Reading Public* in 1932. One decisive factor that determined the nature of her research was the investigation into the way a popular best-seller not only provides 'wish-fulfilment' or

'compensation for life' in various forms, but stands in the way of people appreciating a serious 'high-brow' novel, (as for instance the novels of Jane Austen, Emily and Charlotte Bronte, Dickens, George Eliot, Henry James, Conrad and D.H. Lawrence). For Q. D. Leavis the fundamental difference between a popular novel and a serious novel is that in the latter the characters 'do not obey the literary agent's rule ('The principal characters must be likeable. They must be human.')'; nor do they 'lend themselves to fantasising but cause disturbing repercussions in their reader's emotional make-up.'

However, Q. D. Leavis's concern with the serious or 'high-brow' novelist did not prevent her from writing about lesser or minor novelists (who were, in their own way, equally serious or high-brow'). Thus, for instance, she wrote as interestedly and convincingly about Mrs Oliphant as about Dickens, about Charlotte Young as about George Eliot, about Edith Wharton as about Henry James. In this respect she differed notably from her husband, while at the same time sharing fully with him such fundamental criteria and convictions as, for instance, that a critic cannot discuss a work of art in 'an aesthetic vacuum' any more than an artist can create in one.

Thus Q. D. Leavis's awareness of 'the environment of literature' or 'the climate of opinion' as well as her insatiably inquistive regard as to the factors that determined it, account for the fact that she was quick to recognise the importance of the Puritan and Protestant conscience in English literary history—a recognition that is crucial to her thinking on the English novel with its 'essentially and profoundly moral (I do not mean moralistic) framework and intention.' Hence Q. D. Leavis could claim, as she did in the last public lecture she gave a few months before her death (the Cheltenham Festival Lecture), that the English novel owed its peculiarly moral, psychological and realistic character 'more than anything else to the fact that it had traditionally been the product of an essentially Protestant culture.'

The lecture—'The Englishness of the English Novel', now included in the first of three volumes of Q. D. Leavis's *Collected Essays*—sums up a lifelong interest and critical involvement in the growth, development and quality of the novel, based on a wide and comprehensive reading, particularly of the English novel, with its incomparably rich and impressive tradition vis-a-vis other traditions—the French, the Russian, the American and the Italian. Her analytically argued exposition of what constitutes the uniqueness as well as the moral maturity and complexity of the English tradition exemplifies the criteria operative in her treatment of the novel—criteria that in this lecture led to an evaluative comparison not only between the English tradition and the various European traditions of the novel, but also between the real greatness the English novel had achieved in the past and the merely commercial success of its contemporary counterpart.

The lecture may be regarded as a resume of Q.D. Leavis's critical credo and the principles that governed her dealings with the novel all her life. Here are some of her key pronouncements. The novel, especially the English novel, she tells us,

1. is the art most influenced by national life in all its minute particulars. It has also been the art most influential upon English national life . . .
2. England is the country that pioneered the novel and long held the supremacy in this form of literature, so that our novels were in the eighteenth century extremely admired and imitated by the Western European countries and in the nineteenth century were decisively formative for the classical Russian novelists.

For it is through the form of the novel that, as F. R. Leavis too attested, major creative energy has flown in the last two hundred years. As to the peculiar features of the English novel—features which distinguish it from the novel in other countries—this is what Q. D. Leavis has to say :

1. For eighteenth century and many subsequent English novelists, Shakespeare was inescapable as a direct force . . . Richardson shows that he was helped by this natural possession of Shakespeare to make prose realism significant . . . (but English novelists

were not going to be content merely to hold a mirror up to the life of the streets, which Stendhal considered the function of the novelist . . . so that a novelist (like Richardson) moves from surface realism to uncover the inner life of characters who embody the psychological drives, and the actual, not theoretical morality . . .

2. ...English novelists didn't reduce life in the interest of an aesthetic concept of the novel . . . the mind's eye with—say, powers, and a profound sense of obligation to humanity—was present in the English novel from Richardson's onwards. . .(all our best novelists) first explore to find' the true facts of this world' and then face them to enable the reader to draw the necessary conclusions.
3. Surely it is the positive moral life and sense of personal responsibility that gives significance and interest to the histories of the heroines of the English novels, and is something we miss in classical French novels and in all Italian novels, where we feel that the absence of a true moral responsibility is a disability.

Another essay where Q. D. Leavis implicity and explicitly formulates those principles and criteria that determined her attitude to the novel is an account she wrote sometime in 1965 for an American research student who wanted to know about her career and the work she had done. This account was never published in her lifetime and is now included in *Collected Essays* (Vol. 1: *The Engishness of the English Novel*) under the title 'A Glance Backward, 1965').

She started, Q. D. Leavis tells us, 'as a research student knowing exactly what I wanted to work at'—namely, 'to find out what part the reading public had played in determining the form and quality of English imaginative writing'. This entailed, among other things, a wide reading—reading even of those books which, though of no permanent literary merit, 'provide evidence as to the quality of living and enable us to ask pertinent questions about the nature of a community or society.' It is her knowledge of such books which partly accounts for what Q. D. Leavis calls her 'anthropological attitude' to the novel and her concept of literature as *a product of the interplay* between writer and reader, a collaboration between them'. In this approach she was influenced

by Leslie Stephen who, as she remarks, made 'the study of the dullest and deadest works of prose have a revelance and significance.' As to the method of criticism both Q.D. Leavis and her husband together with other *Scrutiny* writers practised, it was 'to secure the maximum general evaluation by starting with something demonstrable—the surface of the work—and through practical criticism to proceed inwards to a deeper and wider kind of criticism commanding assent (or giving an opening for disagreement and discussion) at every step.' Another characteristic of the *Scrutiny* approach—so impressively exemplified both by Q.D. Leavis and her husband—was that it pressed for value-judgments which 'the more insecure *cannot* make and the belletrist critic does not *want* to have to make'.

As is well-known, in all Q.D. Leavis's criticism—as in that of her husband—value-judgments occupy a central place. For whatever cultural, social and anthropological analysis and documentation she provides in the course of her critical examination of an author or a novel is strictly subservient to it. The first—and in many respects the most substantial and original—piece of close critical inquiry she undertook was her classical essay in 4 parts on 'A critical Theory of Jane Austen's writings'—a critique which is as original and pioneering as it is representative of her critical principles, methodology and approach. It may be regarded as a cogent exemplification of what she herself called the *Scrutiny* approach. While discarding the common notion of Jane Austen's novels as a miracle, Q.D. Leavis set out to show that the business of literary criticism was 'surely not to say 'Inspiration' and fall down and worship', and that in Jane Austen literary criticism had 'a uniquely documented case of the origin and development of artistic expression,' so that 'an inquiry into the nature of her genius and the process by which it developed could go very far indeed on sure ground. This is precisely what Q.D. Leavis set out to do in her seminal critique.

Jane Austen is seen as 'a steady professional novelist who

had to put in many years of thought and labour to achieve each novel', and her novels (which she herself took 'very seriously') as 'palimpsests through whose surface portions of earlier versions, or of other and earlier compositions quite unrelated, constantly protrude, so that we read from place to place at different levels.' Q.D. Leavis engaged herself in this scholarly task with a criticel eye—the task of collating the various versions and integrating what is 'quite unrelated' in order to evaluate the process through which Jane Austen achieved a more or less accomplished form in each of her novels. Part of Q.D, Leavis's task was to examine the principal link between Jane Austen's *Letters* and her novels, where she not only found much that later went into her novels—numerous examples of what she calls 'this sobering knowledge of life'—but where she also saw 'the material in a preliminary stage, halfway between life and art'. Hence Q.D. Leavis could say that 'without the letter-writing one of the conditions essential to the production of the novels would not have existed: the letter-writing, like the draft of story into novel at different stages of composition, was part of the process that made possible the unique Austen novels.' In these novels, instead of giving vent, as other women novelists do, to what is personal and reminiscent of their lives, Jane Austen restricts her work to and concentrates on 'what seemed to her most worth writing about'.

Q.D. Leavis analyses incidents in Jane Austen's novels and how they recur, co-relate or transform themselves elsewhere only to demonstrate not the working of inspiration but the maturity of artistic purpose that gives significant direction to a casual piece of social behaviour and co-ordinates it with a complex series of events and shapes of character.' For it is by examining how Jane Austen worked that we can, Q.D. Leavis points out' 'determine what kind of a novelist she was, by looking to see how she wrote a novel we can discover what her object was in writing it'.

In the section of the critique entitled 'Lady Susan into

Mansfield Park', Q.D. Leavis studies the three stages through which *Mansfield Park* came to be written and the process of its evolution. One central principle operating behind this evolution is the way Jane Austen changed her treatment of the material in hand 'so that from being outside, in a relation of satiric superiority to her characters and their involvements, she is to be found inside'. Comments such as these, where critical acumen and perception and psychological insight go hand in hand, form the back-bone of Q. D. Leavis's evaluation of Jane Austen's art and craft and give it an edge and an authority which are both challenging and illuminating. And the same applies to her comments on the various characters, bringing out their moral and psychologicel complexity both in itself and in relation to its artistic effect and relevance.

Take, for instance, the comparison between Lady Susan—'the unblenching Lady Susan, exhibiting cold-blooded malignity and Mary Crawford, with her'complex character always trembling in the balance'. And the comment on Mary Crawford: 'The censure Mary Crawford comes in for is so much heavier than there is any occasion for as matters stand in *Mansfield Park*. She stands in Fanny's way chiefly, and the author has identified her interest with Fanny's, but she stands there innocently'.

Q.D. Leavis shows the same analytical understanding of what Jane Austen herself thought of the characters she created. For instance, commenting on Mary's speeches to Henry and Fanny about Henry's courtship—something so alien to the feeling and sentiment of Jane Austen's world—Q.D. Leavis observes;

> This style of talking, reasonable as it is and based as it is on knowledge of one order of life, is distasteful to our novelist; we are made to feel that she considers it offensive and revealing a shallow nature. She loathes the society where such wisdom is current, but she is not content to make it seem odious, she must claim moral sanctions for her instinctive distaste. She must prove it to be wicked as well as

cheap. We are instructed to regard the world of the Crawfords with horror, not merely dislike.

Similarly, while probing into the effect Jane Austen wanted her characters in a given context or circumstance to produce and the effect they *do* produce, Q.D. Leavis shows herself to be in full command of the material in hand—moral and psychological as well as literary material—and the ensuing criticism turns out to be at bottom a criticism of life and society as well as of the novel under scrutiny. It is this comprehensive grasp of what satisfies the principle of verisimilitude and what doesn't—in other words what is in conformity with the general norm and pattern of human nature and behaviour—that enables Q. D. Leavis, with all her admiring awareness of Jane Austen's powers as a natural genius and as 'the acute observer of human nature, the shrewd analyst of motive', to find some flaws in her handling of certain characters, plots and situations. Thus, for instance, after pointing out how Jane Austen sometimes takes a holiday 'from trying to persuade herself that she feels as she believes she ought to feel', and how she is sometimes led into inconsistencies of character—such as Henry Crawford falling in love with Fanny because 'that, however improbably, is necessary to balance the Mary-Edmund affair and to complicate Fanny's sufferings', Q.D. Leavis then goes on to show how Jane Austen sacrificed a moral advantage and how her hands in *Mansfield Park* are tied where in *Lady Susan* they were free, so that in this respect the earlier theory is more lively than the later novel. For, we are told, 'in spite of Jane Austen's determination to sponsor the conventional moral outlook and wisdom, the report of experince will not be smothered: it breaks out in ways calculated to defeat her intentions'. Nevertheless for Q. D. Leavis *Mansfield Park* is the fore-runner of a new technique, and presents 'a real, difficult fidelity to experience'. It marks the turning-point in Jane Austen's career and makes possible 'the wonderful achievment that *Emma* is'—*Emma* where 'its author, entirely on her

own and without the benefit of theory or of the practice of others, is seen to have somehow discovered the technique of Henry James'. Thus far from being a failure, *Mansfield Park* constitutes an achievement in terms of the development from her simple technique of *Lady Susan* to something 'final complicated, laboriously achieved'.

In her introduction to *Mansfield Park* Q. D. Leavis elaborates on the nature of this achievement, pointing out how, in this novel, Jane Austen rose, as an artist, 'out of the class of the Fanny Burneys, Maria Edgeworths and Mrs. Inchbolds of the age she grew up in.' Thus in technique, theme and prose style as well as 'in its thoughtful inquiries into human relationships', *Mansfield Park* 'looks forward to George Eliot and Henry James and hence is therefore the first modern novel in England.

Another novel Q. D. Leavis wrote a critical introduction to is *Sense and Sensibility* 'the first novel in English' (she quotes George Moore with approval as saying) 'to be shaped like a vase instead of a wash-tub', and adds : 'Not unrelated to its formality of plot, which has the symmetry of a formal garden, is the weighty structure of the sentences' by virtue of which it is the 'most Johnsonian of the Austen novels in style'. As to the characters they too are described and commented on by Q. D Leavis with characteristic pointedness and delicacy. For instance, while talking about Elinor's virtue of prudence—'the grand female virtue of the pre-Romantic system'—she shows how Elinor is 'not 'prudent' from any meanness of nature—her brother is there to show the soul eaten away by prudence—she is on the contrary a fine, superior creature whose intelligent insight into the motives and ideas of her acquaintances has driven her to adopt something like the disillusioned attitude of a Chesterfield'. Thus for Elinor 'prudence' turns out to be a means of discovering a *modus vivendi* by which the sensitive and superior can protect themselves from society'. Marianne, on the other hand, is not only not 'prudent'; she is not even candid. And according to the Austen code to be

candid 'is to be not only sincere but charitably so'.

Such comments presuppose in the critic a firm hold on the sociological framework of the novel which is implicitly regarded as both a work of art and a critical portraiture of the age in which it was written. Thus, for instance, we are told that Elinor 'is concerned to maintain a civilized form of social intercourse and thinks it can be done without sacrificing integrity. Ought one to fit in ? What is the price of not deferring to society ? What is the minimum or necessary degree of social conformity ? Posing and answering such questions in the concrete terms of everyday living as she knew it, Jane Austen created in *Sense and Sensibility* a novel that must always have value for us'. Hence it is not so much because the novel holds a mirror to the society in which it was written—its customs, manners, prejudices and conventions—that it has a moral and artistic relevance, but because it implicitly paints the picture of an ideal society—a society in which

> Elinor and Marianne and their husbands are content to leave social and material success to Fanny, John, Lucy, Robert and Willoughby. The scrupulous couple, Edward and Elinor, do not even get their rights, a point Miss Austen stresses. This is not a comforting conclusion, but it is the truth of life, and we must not expect comfort from Miss Austen. We go to her to be alerted and braced.

'We go to her to be alerted and braced'—this is in sum the ethos of Jane Austen's novels; and at the same time it reflects the spirit behind Q.D. Leavis's own exploration and criticism of life as reflected in Jane Austen's novels, imbued as they are with 'this feeling for formal pattern and order in the moral universe' which seems to have been 'so early a feature of Jane Austen's work that it must have been radical; it is what made her find Dr. Johnson's work so congenial'.

But acting and interacting upon this feeling was Jane Austen's awareness of the social change she lived through and recorded in her novels. In a public lecture that Q.D. Leavis gave at Queen's University, Belfast, just afew months before her death, 'Jane Austen : Novelist of a Changing Society', she not only brought out the sort of person Jane Austen was as

revealed by her novels and the values that emerge from the changing themes and attitudes and characters of the novels, but she also interpreted Jane Austen's own changing attitude to the theory of society current in her youth and to the radical social changes that came in her own lifetime. Indeed for Q.D. Leavis Jane Austen's novels received their principal stimulus from such changes and from the ideas concerning them that were widely circulated and discussed. In this lecture Q. D. Leavis in fact looks at Jane Austen's work from the social (or sociological) and historical angle as well as from the literary and the creative. She not only examines the eighteenth century attitudes and social conventions that formed Jane Austen, but also the social changes brought about by the Regency period. The changes concerned not merely dress, furniture and architecture—'the externals of social life' —but also the very idea of a society and of the individual's relation to it; changes, Q.D. Leavis observes, 'that at the time were so evident and so widely discussed that the novelist could assume a knowledge of them in her readers, though the average educated twentieth century reader is hardly aware of these references and ideas'. One salient feature of Q.D. Leavis's lecture 'Jane Austen : Novelist of a changing society' is that it relates those changes to the various aspects of Jane Austen's novels which, among other things, embody the social history and social criticism of Augustan, Georgian and Regency periods and the way Jane Austen responded to them. Commenting upon why Jane Austen felt that the Regency Improver *was* improving on the past and on her dissatisfaction with 'the Georgian actuality of her youth', Q.D. Leavis notices that Jane Austen was 'too intelligent to endorse unconditionally *all* departures from the old pattern of conduct, and she had misgivings about the new forms of Regency man and woman, who appear in *Mansfield Park* as the Crawford brother and sister and are played off against both the older generation, and two examples of the old-fashioned younger generation (Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price)'. It is Jane Austen's crea-

tively sensitive awareness of and critical response to such changes and the 'delicate and responsible work of scrutiny and dramatized discussion' that went into registering them that puts her in the same class of novelists as George Eliot, Dickens, Stendhal and Henry James.

Such scrutiny and discussion is the very basis of the social history that Jane Austen's novels embody and that is, according to Q. D. Leavis, beyond the grasp of the historians. For in Jane Austen's hands a social detail, 'always thoroughly well-informed' as it is, becomes 'an index of the inward changes that are a more radical part of human history, and shows how they came about'. Thanks to her culture and education, Jane Austen had in her possession 'objective forms to symbolize and incarnate convincingly her preoccupation with the psychological changes she observed, and indeed registers as in part her own'. Q.D. Leavis's own comments too interpret the social changes in terms of the psychological changes, and *vice versa* as convincingly as do Jane Austen's novels. For example, while considering *Mansfield Park* as 'the turning point in the Austen enquiry into the value of the movement of social life in her own lifetime', she refers to Jane Austen's rejection of the out-moded life-style, represented by Sotherton and its insufferable Rushworth family, and then goes on to analyse the social change and its implications as follows :

> The house is shown as merely a stifling museum where spontaneous life has died and to which the Regency Improver is quite rightly called, to modernize and open a prospect. The novelist conveys all the horror of an atrophied way of life—the disused chapel, the now meaningless family portraits, the rooms without a view, innumerable, empty and oppressively grand with the bare 'shining' floors and heavy furniture 'in the taste of fifty years back', the only view out being on to 'tall iron pallisades and gates.

Such interpretation of a social detail is of a piece with Q. D. Leavis's 'anthropological' and sociological approach to the novel and to the very business of criticism, complementing, as it does, what is purely literary history, as for instance in the following passage :

It is interesting to observe that this evolution made in the Austen novels from eighteenth to nineteenth century has nothing to do with the Romantic Movement except in so far as the new recognition of children as children is concerned. The work of the Romantic poets and novelists is something that Jane Austen shows she knew of but was unimpressed by; she by-passed it. She was not influenced by the Romantics' extension of language and subject-matter and for her the proper study of mankind is still man, and then only in the form of the gentleman and lady, for her the legitimate writers for respect and even enthusiasm are still those of the eighteenth century, not Scott or Byron, and the congenial mode of writing, as with the Augustans, is one developed out of satire and irony.

By virtue of her adherence to the truth of life as she observed it around her in the class and setting to which she herself belonged, as well as by virtue of her own critical ability to co-relate this with the more literary and creative aspects of her writings, Jane Austen's use of words acquires a particular meaning. It is, in Q.D. Leavis's words, 'thoroughly that of the eighteenth century, without vibrations and overtones', for however moving and pathetic the subject-matter might be, Jane Austen invariably deals with it

with characteristic un-Romantic realism...In these things Jane Austen did not move with her age, and the strength of her resistance to the Zeitgeist in these respects, showing such a radical identification with the culture and literature of her youth, demonstrates the more strikingly, I think, her intelligence in sponsoring, even advancing beyond, the emancipation of the early nineteenth century in domestic and social life from its now uncongenial inheritance.

II

After Jane Austen the other major English novelists Q. D. Leavis wrote on are Charlotte Bronte, Emily Bronte, Dickens and George Eliot, and what she has written is characterized by the same critical perception, the same range and variety of relevant erudition and knowledgeableness, and the same degree of psychological acumen and inquisitiveness. All these qualities are conspicuously operative in her well-known introductions to *Jane Eyre*, *Villette* and *Silas Marner* as well as in

her essay 'A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*',—qualities which render these introductions as something more than introductions—critiques that are at once evaluative, informative and exegetical. And tied up with her criticism of nineteenth century women novelists is Q. D. Leavis's attitude towards women writers and the handicaps they suffered from in Victorian England. For what she says about Charlotte Bronte may be regarded as applicable to other women writers as well. 'It was', she points out, 'such Victorian attitudes about women—attitudes exemplified by Kingsley's tribute to Mrs Gaskell at the expense of Charlotte Bronte : 'well have you done your work, and given us the picture of a valiant woman made perfect by suffering'—and the unavoidable assumption about the improving effects of filial duty, unhappiness and deprivation, that made Charlotte write her novels which all spring from 'the passionate need to demonstrate that a good life for a woman, no less than for a man, is a satisfied one'.

Thus while analysing what constitutes Charlotte's individuality as an artist, Q. D. Leavis deals with her social and cultural milieu in order to establish her position as a major novelist. She quotes Charlotte as saying what Jane Austen had to teach her, and that indirectly throws light on Charlotte's own originality and independence of mind. For Charlotte, Jane Austen's work was 'only shrewd and observant', 'sensible, real (more *real* than *true*)', and she did not think her to be great. In fact she regarded Jane Austen's work as 'a highly cultivated garden but no open country', and she found it 'without poetry', asking 'Can there be a great artist without poetry?' Q.D. Leavis brings out the relevance of such comments to Charlotte's own work and to what she wanted to achieve, thereby pinpointing the salient features of *Jane Eyre*, which, in Thackeray's words, is 'the masterwork of a great genius'.

If both Charlotte and Emily Bronte arrived at what Q. D. Leavis calls 'a revolutionary theory of what a novel should be and could do', and thus enlarged the idea of the function of

the novelist, it was at least partly the result of their experience of the poetry of the Romantics and Shakespearian tragedy, and partly their determination to 'voice the tragic experience of life, be true to the experience of the whole woman, and convey a sense of life's springs and undercurrents'. And Q.D. Leavis is convinced that to have envisaged such a possibility for the novel was at that date 'a critical achievement of the first order; to succeed, however unequally, in carrying it out was surely proof of great creative genius'. All this accounts for the fact that the novel became the major art form of the nineteenth century, and why Q.D. Leavis's approach to *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* is different from that of other critics who while considering them as powerful and impressive, did not regard them as works of art. For example, whereas Lord David Cecil regarded them as 'loose, baggy monsters', for Q.D. Leavis *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* are 'strikingly coherent' and, with afew exceptions 'thoroughly controlled in the interest of the theme' which, in the case of *Jane Eyre*, she defines to be 'an urgently felt personal one, an exploration of how a woman comes to maturity in the world of the writer's youth'. As to Henry James's charge that *Jane Eyre* was without composition—'that principle of health and safety'—Q.D. Leavis rebuts it by arguing how, like *Wuthering Heights* and *Anna Karenina,* it 'is quite as deliberately composed as any novel in existence, but like them is a unique organic structure and therefore does not qualify for (or invite the use of) James's term of praise for the art of his own novels—'triumphantly scientific'.

Q.D. Leavis's critically spirited defence of *Jane Eyre* and the kind of art it represents is tied up with her diagnostic survey of the social and moral assumptions of the Victorian age regarding women, the relations between the sexes as well as between the young and those in authority, and the social and religious conventions and attitudes in general. Thus the two strains in her criticism—the literary and the sociological—combine to achieve that rare kind of reading

of the novel which is at once evaluative, exegetical and analytical. 'A moral-psychological investigation', rather than 'an education sentimentale like *David Copperfield*', the structural complexity of *Jane Eyre*, Q.D. Leavis argues, as well as 'a good deal of the effect of the book' depends 'on the reader's making out associations, and his realizing that 'the parts are not mechanically linked by a plot as in most previous fictions but organically united (as in Shakespeare) by imagery and symbolism which pervade the novel and are as much part of the narrative as the action'.

Such a method, successfully carried out, accounts for a new kind of achievement in fiction compared with which Dickens's method, until his last petiod, is 'curiously old-fashioned and his tempo slack'. But the very novelty of method and technique is dictated, at least partly, by certain attitudes expounded by Charlotte which are for the most part characteristically un-Victorian-attitudes to do with 'the new reality founded on respect for individuality'. She saw, we are told, the relation between man and woman as one of mutual need in which 'the woman is not idealized but is recognized as an active contributor—fearless, unashamed of passionate feeling and, while needing to serve, still determined to have her rights acknowledged.'

And the new reality Charlotte Bronte incarnated in her novels called out for an equally new approach on the critic's part which is what Q.D. Leavis inaugurates, attending not only to technical, stylistic and structural aspects of the novel, but also to the ethos and the social and religious customs, conventions and attitudes embodied in the novel. Courtship, love relations, ideals of masculine strength and tenderness, for instance, had all undergone a radical change in Charlotte's time, which affected the very process of literary creation. And in interpreting that change Q. D. Leavis shows a more comprehensive and more penetrating grasp than professional or academic critics usually do. For with an inquisitive and analytical eye on the social detail, she has an equally alert eye on the suggestive use of the language which accounts

for 'the magical quality' of Charlotte Bronte's writings as well as of her treatment of characters, their relationships and the web of motives and circumstances in which they are caught. For instance, the symbolism of the majestic iron-garthed chestnut-tree, split by storms, which represents the relation between Jane and Mr Rochester, is commented on by Q. D. Leavis as follows:

> In the 'Eden-like orchard' by moonlight, free from the restraints of everyday life and speaking a language heightened above that of everyday intercourse, Jane finds a lover, someone with whom, as she says, she can live 'a full and delightful life'. But even as she contemplates 'the paradise of union', darkness falls, the wind roars, the giant chestnuttree which is 'circled at the base by a seat' (lives united by marriage)groans as the storm breaks and the newly declared lovers are drenched with rain. In the morning the tree is found to have been struck by lightning and half of it split away. So Mr. Rochester's state is forecast when after the fire he was struck blind and maimed. When Jane meets him then he says: 'I am no better than the old lightning-struck chestnut-tree in Thornfield orchard:

Thus in the evaluation of what she calls the 'wonderful poetic sequence of ominous and pregnant experiences' justice is done by Q. D. Leavis to the 'sense of life's springs and undercurrents' conveyed through new prose techniques which at the same time bring out the social dimension of the novel. Hence we are shown how Charlotte Bronte was absolutely hostile to the unwholesome Victorian conventions (for example the idealization of the innocent brother-sister relation which really resulted in a morbid preference, as in Charlotte Young's novels, for a relation between brother and sister that precludes marriage of either), being not only 'free from such a taint herself but also setting out to combat it with the spirit of D.H. Lawrence'.

There is another Victorian prejudice or perversity that Q.D. Leavis finds Charlotte combating—that of the opposition between dogmatic religion and instinctive goodness. Charlotte, we are told,

> seems to have disliked about equally Catholicism, Evangelicalism,

High Churchmen, and non-conformists; Emily went further and said that what her religion was was nobody's business but her own. Charlotte's friend Mary Taylor wrote that Charlotte 'had a larger religious toleration than a person would have had who had never questioned, and the manner of recommending religion was always that of offering comfort, not fiercely enforcing a duty'.

Hence both on the plane of art, expression and technique—and the pioneering advances made through them—and on the plane of the moral, social and psychological criticism through which she interpreted both her own personal experiences and the spirit of the age, Charlotte Bronte, according to Q.D. Leavis, was, no less than her sister, 'a splendidly original artist', so that whatever she wrote is permeated by a sense of 'something personal and morally impressive which integrates the mixture of styles'.

These qualities are equally evident in *Villette*, and in her introduction to this novel Q. D. Leavis quotes George Eliot (for her 'the greatest of the Victorian novelists') who thought *Villette* 'a still more wonderful book than *Jane Eyre*. As to Matthew Arnold's being 'repelled by Villette,' Q. D. Leavis takes it as a tribute since Arnold was 'a uniformly bad judge of novels (what he really seems to have enjoyed were Bulwer Lytton's).' For Q. D. Leavis herself *Villette* embodies 'the final expression of the impulses which made her (Charlotte) a novelist' and in order to appreciate that, one must place the novel in relation to Charlotte's previous writings as well as in relation to *Wuthering Heights*. For apart from the personal experiences of a boarding school at Brussels, what bound the two sisters was their being, like Shakespeare, 'masters of the art of Telling the Truth,' so that their novels are 'both great art and exceptional truth-telling'. But although they were both very English and Protestant—and for Q. D. Leavis, Yorkshire represented 'in many ways the essence of that kind of Englishness, with its boasted outspokenness, a deliberate rejection of politeness and civility'—they reacted differently to the shock encountering the 'unimaginable culture' of a Catholic boarding school. In analysing the

difference in their reaction Q. D. Leavis touches the core of the religious controversy in the Victorian age and goes on to analyze such typically Victorian phenomena as the ambivalence towards Catholicism, the pull Catholicism exercised 'against all reason', and the clash between the Catholic and the Protestant cultures so dramatically enacted in *Villette*. No other Victorian novelist, Q.D. Leavis points out, 'registers such insights into the undercurrents and anomalies of human feelings, the unpredictable and irrational human needs, until D. H. Lawrence' as does Charlotte Bronte with her insights and 'the intuitive understanding of the problems of the major practitioners of the novel'.

Though they partly derive from her personal experiences, these insights are not altogether dependent on them, for Charlotte wanted her use of real life in fiction to be both measured and discriminatory: 'We only suffer reality', she said, 'to *suggest*, never to *dictate*', and 'I hold that a work of fiction ought to be a work of creation'. However, both in *Villette* and in *Jane Eyre* Charlotte did at times succumb to the temptation of a more directly personal autobiography. In fact it is difficult to see how, but for the austerity her personal experiences and observations conferred on them, she would have been able to contrast so convincingly as she did the English and the French culture, the Protestant and the Catholic ethos, the 'English probity (and) . . . Catholic intrigue, the English system of trust (and) . . . The French system of *'surveillance'*, English delicacy of feeling (and) Latin coarseness and 'realism', Lucy's external coldness but inner intense sensibility (and) . . . Mme Beck's appearance of *'bonte'* that covers only callous self-interest; and the moral obliquity or absence of any sense of conscience among the pupils (and) the self-respect of the English girls'. Thus Charlotte Bronte's novels are a form of self-expression—'not confessions (like Constant's *Adolphe* or Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata*), but communications'.

As to Charlotte Bronte's prose style, it is, in spite of the occasional lapses, a fine specimen of what Henry James

called 'the scared fluid of fiction', and Q. D. Leavis analytically pinpoints its specific features as follows:

> Her ear was for the sounds and meanings of wind and water, as well as for speech which records character and impulse, her eye for landscapes and interiors that convey emotional associations; her perception of personality and character and certain states which no other novelist had ever before noted, and for the agonies of moral and emotional isolation which no one, not even Conrad, has since investigated more impressively, all these characteristics are of the first order ... Her best work—most of *Jane Eyre* and a great deal of *Villette*—is written in an economical and incisive prose which somehow has power to suggest to the imagination what only poets had before attempted, writing which is not 'fine', not even Romantic prose, and yet is essentially poetic.

Such a comment takes into account not only what Charlotte actually wrote, but also what she intended to write. If she rejected the novel of the Georgians and the Age of Reason, it was in conformity with certain principles and criteria of her own which Charlotte Bronte expounds thus:

> When aufhors write best, or, at least, when they write most fluently, an influence seems to waken in them which becomes their master—which will have its own way—putting out of view all behests but its own, dictating certain words, and insisting on their being used, whether vehement or measured in their nature; new-moulding characters, giving unthought-of turns to incidents, rejecting carefully elaborated old ideas, and suddenly creating and adopting new ones. Is it not so? And should we try to counteract this influence? Can we indeed counteract it?

It is because Charlotte Bronte possessed this 'strength and importance of an overmastering influence' that Q. D. Leavis puts her alongside D. H. Lawrence who owed a great deal to her as well as to Emily Bronte and Jane Austen. As to the argument often advanced that Jane Austen was better balanced, Q.D. Leavis rebuts it by asking

> what kind of balance is in question and whether one kind can be compared with another-there is the balance of a canoe on the surface of the water and the balance of the iceberg of which four-fifths is out of sight. The former is more economical and direct in movement, but

the latter has irresistible strength, force and appeal to the imagination, and incomparable beauty.

III

The two lectures Q. D. Leavis gave on Emily Bronte in America were merged by her into one long essay entitled 'A Fresh Approach to *Wuthering Heights*' which appeared in *Lectures in America*. In her presatory note she explains her aim which was' to put into circulation grounds for a responsible and sensitive approach to *Wuthering Heights* in its context (both literary and historical) as well as to provide a fresh assessment, which should also be corrective of its merits absolutely as a literary creation.' This aim she achieves admirably. After recalling the novel's initial adverse reception ('too odiously and abominably pagan to be palatable to the most vitiated class of English reader'—*The Quarterly Review)* and its 'subsequent installation as a major English novel (of such mystic significance that while its meaning transcends criticism, adverse comment on any concrete features would be in the worst taste'), she goes on to show how *Wuthering Heights* seems to be coming under attack from a new generation. Q. D. Leavis examines the various grounds on which the novel has been criticized—its melodramatic character, the factitious or sadistic character of the violence in it, lack of coherent intention, disjointed intentions at different levels of seriousness etc.—and then goes on to show how the novel operates on different levels at different times by analyzing the meaning and relevance of the various episodes in it in relation to the theme which is 'the corruption of the child's native goodness by society'. Parallel to this theme, which is firmly rooted in time and place and richly documented, is another theme—'the pervasive and carefully maintained sociological theme'—which gives the novel its specific sociological content. The inspiration for this theme comes from a conflict between the 'wholesome primitive and natural unit of a healthy society and its very opposite, felt to be an unwholesome refinement

of the parasitic 'educated'—a conflict Bronte came to know about both from observation and from Walter Scott's novels and poetry which she and Charlotte admired immensely. Thus with Walter Scott's example in mind of dealing with the old-style Border Farmers' 'natural' or socially primitive way of life, Emily Bronte set out to enquire into the nature of the social change that had taken place in her native Yorkshire moors and 'to give meaning and purpose to her feelings about what was happening or had happened recently to the world she lived in'. But far from being a self-indulgent storytelling, *Wuthering Heights* became, in Q. D. Leavis's words, 'a responsible piece of work, and the writer thought herself into the positions, outlooks, sufferings and tragedies of the actors in these typical events as an *artist*.'

But for Q. D. Leavis the sociological novel is not the real novel, and the Heathcliff-Catherine-Edgar relationship or the corresponding Cathy-Linton-Hareton one is something more than 'ex-centric dramatic episodes'. In fact, it is these relationships and their working out that give meaning to all the rest, so that what the novel offers is something more than sociology or social history, it is something timeless. While dealing with the two aspects of the novel—the perennial (i.e. the psychological, the emotional and the moral) and the sociological and the historical—and the way they interact, Q. D. Leavis interprets the nature, character and behaviour of its protagonists which constitute its 'real moral centre'.

As to what is original about the novel, Q. D. Leavis brings it out by comparing it with a modern novel, *Jules et Jim* by Henri-Pierre Roche—a comparison which shows up certain weaknesses of *Wuthering Heights* while at the same time emphasising its superior strength and originality. For one thing, Q. D. Leavis has not much use for the 'metaphysical' parts of the novel—Emily Bronte's prose explanations of her own genuine insights and of the 'delicate notation of them in action and dialogue'—and regrets that they should have been overrated and 'universally seized on as a short cut to the

meaning, the significance of the novel (to the virtual exclusion of the real novel enacted so richly for us to grasp in all its complexity)'. On the other hand, *Jules et Jim*, a psychological drama, is written 'with an almost clinical detachment', although the author was personally an actor in his drama, whereas Emily Bronte 'had no such first-hand facilities'; that is why there is 'less felt anguish in her novel than in his . . . but more useful insight'. Nevertheless—and this is the critical upshot of the comparison—*Wuthering Heights*, in spite of its intensely painful scenes, 'always repays reading . . . what only disturbs in *Jules et Jim* moves us profoundly in the other novel, because instead of a clinical presentation we get a delicate annotation of behaviour that convinces us that it is not perverse but natural, human and inevitable'. This quality Emily Bronte achieves through her 'careful integrity of observation' and her 'finer, more informed insight'—for example, into the differences between the farm-house culture of *Wuthering Heights* and the polite world of Thrushcross Grange, differences in terms of 'social attitudes, instinctive behaviour, physical appearance and health, style of speech, way of living, dress, deportment, emotional habits —the whole idiom of life'.

On the moral plane too—and, according to Q. D. Leavis, *Wuthering Heights* attests to 'an important moral vein in the English tradition'—the significance of the novel resides in the fact that, though 'concerned to replace moralistic judgment by compassionate understanding, it has a very firm moral effect'. And it is in assessing this effect that Q. D. Leavis herself shows a subtle perceptiveness of critical and psychological response as exemplified by the following observations: 'It is Edgar's genuine inability to understand why she rejoices in Heathcliff's return that shocks Catherine into awareness of a gulf between her husband and herself and which undercuts their happily consummated physical love'; 'The admirable resistance the thoroughly masculine Hareton puts up to her (Cathy's) inherited impulses (she also is a Catherine) to

torment and manipulate him as soon as she sees he loves her, helps her on the way to maturity'. Such observations elicit and elucidate what Q.D. Leavis calls 'the human core of the novel', its 'truly human centrality', by virtue of which it deserves to be placed in the same category as *Women in Love*, *Anna Karenina* and *Great Expectations*.

On George Eliot the only full-length essay Q. D. Leavis published in her lifetime was her preface to *Silas Marner* where, as well as in her various unpublished notes and comments, she records her estimation of her as the greatest Victorian novelist—one who found *Origin of Species* 'not impressive, from want of luminous and orderly presentation', but who, on re-reading *Pilgrim's Progress*, was 'profoundly struck with the true genius manifested in the simple, vigorous, rhythmic style' of Bunyan, who wrote to Lady Ponsonby to beg her to 'consider what the human mind *en masse* would have been if there had been no combination of elements in it as had produced poets', and who added: 'All the philosophers and *savants* would not have sufficed to supply that deficiency. And how can the life of nations be understood without the inward life of poetry—that is, of emotion blending with thought?'

With such remarks giving us an indication of George Eliot's moral sensibility and intellectual stature in her eyes, let us examine Q. D. Leavis's introduction to *Silas Marner*, the spirit of which she quotes George Eliot herself as explaining as follows:

> In this world there are so many of these common coarse people (like those painted in Dutch pictures of 'homely existence'), who have no picturesque sentimental wretchedness! Therefore let Art always remind us of them . . . Your common labourer, who *gets his own bread*, and eats it vulgarly but *creditably* with his own pocket-knife . . . (people who have) *done the rough work of the world*.

What Q. D. Leavis italicises serves to emphasize the way in which George Eliot was 'more Radical than even Wordsworth's grounds for choosing humble life as the

subject matter for true poetry'. This Radicalism is a crucial element in *Silas Marner.*

The story of the protagonist—a linen weaver—is based on George Eliot's childhood recollections of 'a man with a stoop and expression of face that led her to think that he was an alien from his fellows', and it provided her with the framework she needed—a framework within which 'she could present the problems that pressed on her, that life had shown her must be solved or managed, and which were more than merely personal'. In dealing with these problems, Q.D. Leavis points out, George Eliot was helped by 'her art of concentration that uses always the minimum—the loaded word and the uniquely representative act—an art which puts *Marner* with Shakespeare and Bunyan rather than with other Victorian novels'. In evaluating the representative character of the novel—representative of the conditions of 'a poor nineteenth century Christian whose burden is not Original Sin but loss of faith and community'—Q. D. Leavis refers to the traditions of the countryside, pointing out that it was 'the village life in which the English civilized themselves.' Silas therefore is not merely a protagonist of his own vicissitudes; he is also a centre of focus through which George Eliot registered and interpreted the changes that had taken place and were taking place in the village life—and in the life of England in general —in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. For instance, while commenting on what she calls 'a multiple typicality about the case of Silas Marner', Q. D. Leavis shows how

> Silas's solitary working round could find compensation only in an inward spiritual life and 'incorporation in a narrow religious sect.' But the religious life available to him was not beneficial, taking as guidance a pathetically inner light ('Lantern Yard') which has proved delusive when tested. Moreover, it has deprived him of his cultural inheritance (represented by a stroke of genius by the medicinal herbs) without providing anything in the way of education in living instead.

Q. D. Leavis's way of analysing George Eliot's thought and interweaving with it her own is of a kind in which literary criticism comes to grips with what the critic herself believes

profoundly, without however its ceasing to be criticism and becoming a declaration of faith instead. Her ranking, for instance, George Eliot as the greatest of the Victorian novelists has to do, to a considerable extent, with her sharing George Eliot's interpretation as well as criticism of the Victorian ethos, and of the 'dire effects' both of the Industrial Revolution and of the current form of religion, 'a Christian fundamentalism (which) has finished the effects of denaturing him by disinheriting him'. The moral and intellectual sympathy as well as psychological acumen with which Q. D. Leavis examines the novel itself and George Eliot's attitude to certain aspects of Victorianism is indicative of her own implicit but by no means uncritical identification with the moral values and criteria George Eliot herself upheld and artistically conveyed through action and dialogue in her novels. Such identification can be exemplified by quoting some of the things Q. D. Leavis says about the 'acceptance of the hard realities, the risks which must be taken of things turning out ill, as well as the certainty of old age and failing strength, which can never be forgotten'. George Eliot conveys the sense of what is inevitable and Q. D. Leavis comments on it in such a way that it leaves us in no doubt as to where the moral sympathies and priorities of both lay, and what called out the best in their thought and sensibility. Thus Q. D. Leavis's criticism of the novel as well as her criticism of the *Zeitgeist* the novel represents, is based on considerations of an ultimately moral order as, for instance, the one relating to the folk tradition—'a little store of inherited wisdom' which is neither improbable nor sentimental. And underlying these considerations about the meaning and significance of *Silas Marner* and its 'wonderfully complex organisation and the unobtrusive structure of symbol and theme' is that moral maturity and perceptive humaneness which informs Q. D. Leavis's criticism and which brings it in line with her husband's since both shared the conviction that the English literary tradition has been at heart a moral or puritanical

tradition. It is thanks to that tradition that the English novel in general and George Eliot in particular is, for Q. D. Leavis, 'thoroughly equipped to feel . . . all the strains and anomalies of the contemporary social and religious system', to analyse 'moral stupidity'—one of George Eliot's favourite subjects—and, through the 'constant play of ironical social criticism', to enforce social and psychological truths; such as, for example, that 'insulation by class destroys the force of imaginative sympathy in everyone'. Thus through her social criticism—and, for Q.D. Leavis, social criticism in *Marner* is 'inseparable from spiritual values'—George Eliot, 'the anthropoligizing critic', added a new category, almost a new dimension to the English novel—so that it became a realistic novel as well as symbolic history.

With her close involvement in the history, growth and achievment of the English novel and how it influenced the genesis and development of the American novel, it was inevitable that Q. D. Leavis should have taken a critical interest in the latter as well, examining in particular the work of Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James and Edith Wharton, on whom she wrote pioneering essays that display the same critical acumen and insight as her essays on the English novelists. Her American essays are now included in the second volume of her *Collected Essays* which is going to appear in early 1985 under the title *The American Novel and Reflections on the European Novel* (ed. by G. Singh, Cambridge University Press).

Q. D. Leavis links the growth and development of the American novel with two conditions; the emancipation of a former colony from the mother country; and the naive Utopian theory on which the settlement of the new continent was originally based. This leads her to discuss and evaluate what the American novelists owed to the English novel, and how they reacted to it or moulded what it had to teach to their own particular scope and method. If Fenimore Cooper makes creative use of his conflicting sympathies, at once

English and American, Hawthorne deals with what constitutes the principal theme of his novels—viz. the significance of the American past and present in the light of the conflict between the Puritans who became New England and thus America, and the non-Puritans who were for Hawthorne 'merely the English in America and whom he partly with triumph but partly also with anguish sees as being cast out'. It is, Q. D. Leavis points out, 'his profound concern with the history of his local civilization and its importance for himself' that distinguishes Hawthorne among American novelists. Both James and Melville had something to learn from him—James found in him 'a pattern of the novelist as social critic of New England and the mother country' and Melville saw in him 'the archetypal American poet . . . one of 'the masters of the great Art of Telling the Truth'. In comparing James with Hawthorne —'James took Hawthorne's drama indoors, or if not always into the drawing-room then onto the lawn or terrace of the country-house'—Q. D. Leavis makes an important observation, namely that 'James's symbols belong to a later stage of civilization, but greater sophistication is not necessarily a proof of superiority in literature'. Hence Hawthorne's importance lies not merely in the fact that he served successive American novelists as 'a trail-blazer, an infector and literary ancestor', but also, and above all, in the small but significant body of his achieved work. 'It is slight', says Q. D. Leavis, 'only in being tense, sensitive, elegant as a mathematical proof, sinewy, concentrated as a poem and incorruptibly relevant'.

In Melville, on the one hand,—especially in his novel of philosophical speculation, *The Confidence Man* which she puts in the same category as *Rasselas, Candide, Gulliver's Travels, A Tale of A Tub* and Peacock's novels—Q. D. Leavis finds sociological ideas and social criticism on the one hand, and moral concepts and moral irony on the other, exploited creatively. Master of 'convincing detail, 'sensitive complexity' and 'involved technical devices', Melville, in his

novels and tales, gives us 'a series of moral and intellectual shocks' as well as a play of ideas which is 'so stimulating as to make a 'plot' unnecessary'. As to Melville's masterly use of moral irony, Q. D. Leavis finds it by no means 'self-protective like that of the Bloomsbury School', for it is rooted in an art at once 'profound and courageous', so that Melville is closer to Conrad than to Swift or Samuel Butler.

But it is on Henry James that Q. D. Leavis wrote at greater length than on any other American novelist, and the second volume of her *Collected Essays* contains six essays on him—essays in which, while discussing the various aspects of James's work (for instance, James's treatment of the American-English confrontation theme, the disabilities of the American novelist in the nineteenth century, James's literary indebtedness to Dickens and George Eliot) Q. D. Leavis comes to grips with what was original in the classical achievement of the American novel and what it owed to the English novel. As to the latter, Q. D. Leavis aptly points out: 'We may not want to accept James's dictum to Howells that 'it takes an old civilization to set a novelist in motion', but the fact is that the novel is an art form that does not appear except in a sophisticated society. The American novelist's deprivations that James and Hawthorne had listed were what led James to wander in Europe seeking a fruitful habitat for his art, finally settling in England for life'. But even in England James was, as he feared he might have been, had he settled in Paris, 'an eternal outsider.' For what he saw in England was what literature and art had taught him to look for and expect. Thus, says Q. D. Leavis, 'either he saw only what he was looking for and seeing that as he had been trained by his reading to do, or else he was resentful when pronounced divergences from the cherished patterns forced themselves upon him'. Hence James, as an American novelist, was 'peculiarly dependent on Old World novelists for techniques, themes and patterns, and one sees why, for he was not original in the sense that Hawthorne and Melville

were and much more a sufferer from Colonialism'. And yet in his best work—for instance *The Tragic Muse*—Q. D. Leavis finds 'brilliantly witty writing . . . that reminds us that real wit depends on the possession in the writer of serious standards deeply felt'.

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THE SELF-COMMENTING DRAMA OF OUR TIMES

This is an attempt to examine the presence of criticism in creative work: the self-referring comments within contemporary dramas. In the 60's the Critics of Consciousness sponsored a criticism which claimed parity with literature by becoming 'literature about literature'[1]. I submit that practising literary artists forestalled the critics of consciousness by putting down the barriers first, mixing literature and criticism, creating literature which was both itself and about itself. We find self-comment and criticism in poems, as when Yeats says

> A line will take us hours maybe
> Yet if it does not seem a moment's thought,
> Our stitching and unstitching has been nought.[2]

Or, when Wallace Stevens says, in a poem on poetry, that the modern poem is 'The poem of the mind in the act of finding/What will suffice,'[3] he gives clear expression to his self-consciousness. Such authorial intrusion in his work may also be acceptable in fiction, as when John Fowles pauses in his narrative, to explain his views and techniques:

> These characters I create never existed outside my mind. If I have pretended until now to know my characters' minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in . . . a conzention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist is next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes; if this is a novel, it cannot be a novel in the modern sense of the word. . . . Fiction is woven into all . . . we are all in flight from reality.[4]

We live in an age whose self-consciousness is such that self-comment becomes a characteristic mode of expression.

However, authorial comment is least expeceted in a form like drama. The impression of mimetic presentation is shattered if the writer offers comments and suggestions. In one of his few comments on his art, Shakespeare refers to 'the purpose of playing, whose endeavour is, as 'twere, to hold the mirror up to nature.'[5] The purpose of much contemporary drama seems to be to hold the mirror not so much to an external reality as to itself, its technique and problems. Much contemporary drama is self-commenting drama or metatheatre. Here our attention is directed to the structuring of the play as much as to what it presents. Plays whose central concern is play-making may shock our expectation of objective presentation of a story. Lionel Abel points out that the concept of metatheatre rests on two postulates: (1) the world is a stage; and, (2) life is a dream.[6] He suggests that metatheatre confuses reality and illusion so that the one cannot be distinguished from the other. What happens In metatheatre is far more subtle and complex than is suggested by Abel's assumption. The interplay of the real and the theatrical creates not confusion but a deeper awareness of the problematic relationship between reality and illusion. In real life we have to constantly struggle to separate the real and the fictional. Metatheatre dramatizes this struggle by presenting it both as a technical and a metaphysical problem.

In the past, writers like Ibsen, Strindberg and Shaw tried hard to make the audience feel that reality was presented before them. Terms like realism, naturalism and problem-play all point to this effort. Such drama usually presented a social problem in which the audience were expected to get involved. Metatheatre, on the other hand, presents a technical problem in such a convincing manner that the audience is stimulated to re-think about what is real and what is illusion. In fact, metatheatre steps into reality when the bubble of theatrical illusion that playwrights of the past tried so hard to sustain, is pricked and the play unabashedly annnunces that it is just a play.

Self-comment was not unknown to drama of the past, but its self-consciousness and use as a deliberate technique are modern. Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author* is an early example of metatheatre. One of the characters, the Father, asks, when he intrudes upon a rehearsal of a drama by some actors, 'to make seem true that which isn't true . . . isn't that your true mission, gentlemen?' That is also a challenge to the audience who accept the illusion. Whatever of stage-play there is makes us wonder where dramatic illusion stops, and where reality begins. The actors who have to abandon their play on the intrusion of the 'characters', resent the latter's attempts to teach them their craft. The characters consider their 'acting' more authentic. The audience, who can put actors and characters together, perceive more than both. For instance, they observe that the Father is a tragic character when he acts, and a comic character when he comments on acting. Again, the audience, participating in the theatrical illusion of the play, get involved in the thought processes of a playwright engaged in the creative work of drama.

The audience participation that *Six Characters* or some contemporary plays call for is something quite different from the participation in which, as in Genet's plays or some of the American plays of the Sixties, the distinction between actors and audience is completely lost. In metatheatre, there is an ironic relationship between the actions of the characters on stage and our present participation. In the plays of Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard, actor/characters and audience do not meet and mingle. or interchange parts. Instead, the participation of reader/spectator becomes articulate as a kind of parallel role-playing. This reaction is difficult to describe. The characters, uncertain about their own status, do not claim to present reality, but instead engage themselves in role-playing. They also invite us to become a bog, a spotlight, or actors, and play a role, limited though it might be, in the 'action'. Much contemporary drama sets up an ambivalent attitude in the audience, who find the plays both funny and

disturbing, strange and familiar. Laughter takes on an edge of anxiety. This mixing of attitudes, of tragedy and comedy, has been regarded by critics as characteristic of contemporary drama. This aspect of contemporary drama has been much written about.

For all this, there is no gainsaying the deeper involvement of the dramatist in the problem of reality. In a Beckett play, the focus is often on the technical and metaphysical concern for the problem, 'What is Reality?' In *Waiting for Godot*, despite all the clowning of the chacacters, we experience the ambivalence of Reality. The play's obvious emphasis on the word *nothing* can be regarded as directional; nothing is more real than nothingness. It is difficult to write anything about a play like *Waiting*, which has worn out thread-bare in the hands of critics. Vladimir and Estragon are both clowns and suffering humanity; in the course of their play-acting, they peer into 'the depths of the night without end of the abysmal depths'[7] and find only the void. 'How do I know' and 'I don't know' are the favourite expressions of Vladimir, yet he knows, 'There is no lack of void.'[8] The play tries to convey to us the existential loneliness and anguish of facing nothingness. Vladimir says, 'In an instant all will vanish and we'll be alone once more, in the midst of nothingness.'[9] But this nothingness does not result in nothing happening. 'Will you not play?' says Vladimir, and Estragon, in reply, asks. 'Play at what?'[10] Once again, we are made aware of role-playing, and of the irony that they have to play at nothingness. As Macfarlane says,

> two clownish intellectuals in their down-at heel togs play histrionically to the gallery as they fill in the empty time waiting for Godot. The tone is ambiguous. Estragon's situation is desperate, but the manner in which it is presented is sufficient to make it risible:[11]

Nothingness is both fearful and farcical because it is both true and untrue, reality and illusion. Vladimir and Estragon repeatedly remind themselves and us that they are *waiting;* and we watch them waiting. Because Godot does not appear in the play, nothing seems to happen. But, as I have already

mentioned, the actors are working hard on the stage, and something is happening. The characters/actors are working hard to create the illusion of nothing happening. In the later part of the play, nothingness is discovered to be everything, chaos or being. Thus Beckett, as Dr. Ruby Cohn has pointed out, 'says no to nothingness.'[12] The boy who comes as a messenger of Godot and the tree which sprouts leaves ('couverts de feuills' in the original French version) take us beyond nothingness to a sense of the reality of the actual world outside the play.

Pinter too has such a problem of reality before him. It is said that his plays communicate a sense of menace; it is the menace of nothingness. The menace makes itself felt even in a play with a domestic setting like *The Room*. Pinter himself has told us the story of the origin of this play. Looking at two people in a room, a room with a door, he was suddenly struck by the idea that the very existence of that door contained a menace. . . . We are separated from the unknown, the vast darkness of the universe and its mystery, from death, by the thinnest and flimsiest of partitions.[13]

By realistic standards, the actions and dialogue of characters in plays like Pinter's *The Dumb Waiter* or Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, seem meaningless. What they are doing is passing the time; that is the technique that both Pinter and Beckett use to reveal the terror of nothingness. Vladimir points to this technique when he says, 'It'll pass the time.' He comments on the action of the play, when he says,

> What are we doing here, that is the question. And we are blessed in this, that we happen to know the answer. . . . One thing is clear. . . . We are waiting for Godot.[14]

Similarly, in *The Dumb Waiter*, the action is that of waiting, as the following dialogue shows :

> BEN. You'll have to wait.
> GUS. What for?
> BEN. For Wilson.
> GUS. He might not come. He might just send a message. He doesn't always come.[15]

Wilson never comes, nor is there any hope of his coming.

Tea is never made, and all the activity of the two characters results in nothing. Other plays, too, reveal or comment on their technique. Both the title, *Endgame*, and Hamm's repeated phrase, 'Me—to play,' point to the analogy of the play's technique to a game of chess. *Happy Days* is even more clearly a play about theatre. Winnie's reference to the question, 'What does it mean? ...What is it meant to mean?' is clearly a comment on Beckett who makes it difficult to get at the meaning of a play. Winnie's role in the play is primarily that of a professional actress acting out her part, or rehearsing it. (The bell is a ringing is a professional call to duty). Similarly in *The Dumb Waiter*, Ben and Gus are both characters and actors. Their quarrel over the terminology of the tea-kettle is only a 'cover' for control of their relationship. Ben has managerial competence which makes Gus fall into a subservient role. Challenges are offered to their role-playing propensities by the dumb-waiter. Role-playing helps them to pass the time and to face the menace of nothingness (which may possibly take the form of murder). In Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* the technique is one of self-comment; professionals (or amateurs) acting out their roles. So, those playing the title roles in the play ask, 'Give us this day our daily masks.' The liturgical tone of this request underlines their professionalism.

The characters of metatheatre not only comment on techniques but on themselves. Vladimir, dreaming of Pozzo, had the feeling of being observed, 'It seemed to me he saw me.' Or, was it someone else who saw him and his actions, in the same way as he looks at others. He says, 'At me too someone is looking. Of me too someone is saying . . . he knows nothing.' This may be the character's awareness of attaining form in the author's mind. John Fowles, in his novel, *Daniel Martin*, refers to such awareness on the part of the protagonist, who felt "as if he . . . was an idea in someone else's mind, not his own.' In Act I of *Happy Days*, Winnie has a strange feeling :

Srtange fceling that someone is looking at me. I am clear, then dim, then gone, then dim again, then clear again, and so on, back and forth, in and out of someone's eye.[18]

This may refer to her existence in the author's mind, or it may be her awareness of being on display before an audience, both as character and actress. Act II begins with the ringing of a bell; Winnie opens her eyes, greets the day, ironically with the Miltonic apostrophe, 'Hail, holy light', she then closes her eyes. The bell rings again; she opens her eyes light.' She then closes her eyes. The bell rings again; she opens her eyes, smiles, and says,

Someone is looking at me still. (Pause.) Caring for me still. (Pause.) That is what I find so wonderful. (Pause.) Eyes on my eyes.'[19]

Such self-referring characters may become their own playwrights, trying to shape themselves into plays, or to project their own designs on the surrounding darkness, or at least, to pass the time.

Self-awareness in Pinter's characters has been compared by Martin Esslin to 'a small pool of light surrounded by a vast outer darkness.'[20] The characters try hard to remain in the pool of light, but the void calls to them and will not let them be. The call of the void is presented allegorically in most of Pinters's plays, as for instance, the negro in *The Room* who calls on Rose, the old woman, to take her 'home'; or Goldberg and McCann in *The Birthday Party*, who try to take away Stanley. But the ultimate in the mode of presenting consciousness of consciousness, is offered by Stoppard in *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead*. The non-characters of this play cannot be certain about their own names; that in itself is an ironic comment on the business of acting. In the play, the actors presentlng Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are trying to create the impression that these characters are real people. That is the purpose of the play. But they know, and we know, that the characters have their existence in another play, *Hamlet*. It means that what they are trying to present as reality is nothing but a fiction. Stoppard's characters, as the title testifies, are dead; and so the play requires not their

presence but their absence. Thus resigned to their condition of non-existence, they digress into self-parody, of acting, tossing coins, spinning theories, and 'playing' lengthy sets of questions. And, *The Murder of Gonzago* here contains their doubles, and once again enacts their death. The Elizabethan convention of the play-within-the-play has become the infinite regression of plays-that-enclose the play. Theatrical illusion thus comments on itself. The spotlight, which does not focus on the actors/characters as in Beckett's *Play*, but as ruthlessly effaces the actor, makes him pronounce his end: 'It's the absence of presence, nothing more.[21]' This conclusion is comparable to Hamm's; 'Absent always. It all happened without me.[22]' Whether attendant lords like Rosecrantz and Guildenstern, or a Professor of (Moral) Philosophy like George in *Jumpers*, Stoppard's characters are outside the swirl of events: lost, uncomprehending, and irrelevant as individual charatcters. That is, life in the world of the theatre is a fiction, the mask of an incredible death, an ironic comment on Hamlet's question, 'To be or not to be.'

When Clov asks Hamm what keeps him on the stage, he replies, 'The dialogue'. What he does is 'babble, babble, words, (like) the solitary child who turns himself into children, two, three, so as to be together, and whisper together, in the dark.'[23] Beckett literally makes dialogue the evidence of be(ing) or existence. The Cartesian proposition 'I am because I think' is modified by Beckett to 'I am because I speak.' His argument seems to be: 'I may well exist whilst asleep, but I do not know it, and cannot prove it to anyone. So only when one is involved in some kind of mental activity is one sure of one's existence.[24]' Hence the continual babbling of Beckett's characters and their fear of silence. Such self-consciousness of consciousness makes Beckett's drama unmistakable metatheatre.

Silence, the absence of articulation, has been put to new uses in metatheatre. Silence was used by dramatists of the past, as in the following scene (from *Macbeth*), immediately

after the murder of Duncan:

MACBETH. I have done the deed. Didst thou not hear a noise?
LADY MACBETH. . . . Did not you speak?
MACBETH. When?
LADY MACBETH. Now.
MACBETH. As I descended?
LADY MACBETH. Aye.

The implied silences here are part of the play, supporting the dramatic structure, suggesting the secrecy, and communicating the terror both of the deed and the discovery. But the silences in metatheatre reflect upon the play, and comment on it. Pinter is known for his use of pauses and silences. He has explained:

> There are two silences. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. . . . The speech we hear is an indication of the speech we don't hear.[25]

This is how silence, 'the speech we don't hear' can become a presence in the play. The first type of silence, 'when no word is spoken' can take the form of a character's refusal to speak or answer a question, or an answer which evades the question. When Gus, in *The Dumb Waiter*, asks Ben why he stopped the car earlier in the day, Ben gives a vague answer, 'We were too early.' Also Ben refuses to respond to comments on the lack of contacts; he refuses to answer questions about the gas and the matches; he refuses to answer the questions about the people upstairs. Ben's silences or evasions may be due to his sense of superiority. Or, these silences may owe something to Chekhov's notion of the near impossibility of meaningful dialogue. As Susan Sontag says, 'one is always aware of things that cannot be said, of the contradiction between expression and the presence of the inexpressible.' The silence thus becomes a comment on what a play tries to do, and cannot do.

Silence becomes a presence in Beckett's plays, and even a reader can experience it because of the repeated stage-direction: silence:

ESTRAGON. You wanted to speak to me? (Silence. . .) You had something to say to me? (Silence. . .) Didi . . .

VLADIMIR. I've nothing to say to you.

ESTRAGON (step forward). You're angry? (Silence. Step forward.) Forgive me. (Silence. Step forward) Come. Didi. (Silence.) Give me your hand. (Vladimir half turns.) Embrace me! (Vladimir stiffens.) Don't be stubborn! (Vladimir softens. They embrace. Estragon recoils.) You stink of garlic.[28]

The silences that embellish this dialogue are an ironic comment on Estragon's blithe proposal, 'let's try and converse calmly.'

The use of silences, authorial intrusion into his work, the mixture of the real and the illusory, all can be regarded as techniques which take drama towards a new goal. If the actor simultaneously sustains two identities, as a person and as a character, so does the dramatist who becomes both creator and critic. I think that this adds a new dimension to contemporary drama. Apart from breaking the cult of impersonality in its greatest stronghold, self-commenting drama seems to present reality in the only manner that is convincing to a modern audience. Dramatists like Ibsen and Shaw wanted an audience which would think; to-day's audience testifies to a success in this direction beyond their expectations. The artist takes the thinking audience into confidence, and shows them how he thinks and works. This may perhaps be regarded as a new sort of realism. The artist is no longer a superior being who holds himself apart, but one who works in cooperation with the audience to make an exploration of the meaning of reality.

I suggest that there is another viable way of looking at contemporary drama like that of Beckett, Pinter and Stoppard than to regard it as *absurd*—a blanket term that has been used rather too freely to designate such writing. Though at first sight much contemporary drama gives the impression of fantasy or absurdity, it is painstakingly and unmistakeably earnest in its attempts to come to terms with reality. The self-

commenting drama of our times aims at a fresh approach to reality which is very different from realism. Polonius, suspicious of his son's morals in a foreign land and determined to find out the truth, advised Reynolds, 'By indirections find directions out.' Here Polonius unconsciously defines Hamlet's own technique as well as that of contemporary self-commenting drama. Hamlet used indirections most of the time in the play *Hamlet*, because to his contemplative mind reality is not fixed, categorical or definite. Contemporary man experiences Hamlet's uncertainty in the face of reality. The supreme example of Hamlet's indirection is the use of illusion to find out reality, the play within the play, which results in clear psychological 'proof' of Claudius's guilt. Through the indirect techniques of contemporary dramatists is revealed their deep commitment to reality. In the self-commenting drama of our times reality is enacted as its problematic nature is explored. Realizing the futility of representing reality directly this drama adopts the indirect way of the interplay of reality and illusion, of author and work, of actor and audience, to arrive at something more convincing and appealing to us to-day, something that is closer to experience. The difference between realistic drama and this drama, for the audience, is the difference between seeing and discovering.

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BOOK REVIEWS

The Leavises : Impressions and Recollections By DENYS THOMPSON, Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 203.

The Leavises (F. R. Leavis and Q. D. Leavis) dominated the literary scene in the English-speaking world for decades, and it was therefore a most fitting gesture to help acquaint the common reader with some of the intriguing details of their personal lives—help him peer into the unknown recesses of their being—through reminiscences lovingly and assiduou- recorded by friends, colleagues and students of both. Among colleagues and collaborators contributing to the present volume of essays are such illustrious figures as L. C. Knights, Raymond Williams, John Harvey, D.W. Harding and the Editor, Denys Thompson himself, and among Leavis's earliest students no less a notable scholar than Professor M. C. Bradbrook. But the volume, consisting of as many as eighteen essays, is not of biographical interest exclusively; it seeks to highlight the whole intellectual ethos of contemporary Cambridge—the necessary perspective for evaluation—and many acute insights into their achievements emerge from the book. Appraisals, assessments and sensitive discrimnations, untainted with prejudice or partiality, have been offered regarding both though. naturally enough, the balance tilts in favour of F. R. Leavis rather than his no less celebrated associate and life-long partner.

Q. D. Leavis made her debut on the literary horizon of post First-World War England with her *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) and much later collaborated with her husband in two of his major enterprises : *Lectures in America* (1969) and *Dickens, the Novelist* (1970). Though a ponder-

able and well-assured critic in her own right she, of course, could not and did not make the phenomenal impact which Leavis made. Later her work on Jane Austen probably deserves more attention than her highly exaggerated and rather undeserved adulation of such minor Victorians as Mrs. Gaskell. Without mincing words many of the intimate and therefore knowledgeable friends and admirers have pinpointed the vitriolic quality of her temper, a kind of cussedness which one often found it difficult to swallow. In spite of her fitful cordiality and social accommodation she had in her a good deal of combative energy, a dogged refusal to forgive and compromise, a degree of nauseating aggressiveness and a firm conviction of her own infallibitity which she perhaps owed to her Jewish heritage and thought consistent with the need to survive in a hostile world. These were however counterbalanced by an indomitable courage, a tenacious will, an unbounded resourcefulness, infinite industry and a penchant for having things done according to her own quirks and proclivities. In the earlier years she used to exhibit, so we are told, some amount of decorum and passionate care for the elegances and refinements of civilized living. The mere passage of time nevertheless coarsened whatever brittle fibre of charitableness and compassion she had been invested with.

F. R. Leavis, in spite of his notoriety as a cantankerous ogre and a permanently negative force had, perhaps, a touch of feminine shyness and self-protective wariness about him. Early his life he underwent more than one traumatic experence of which the scars were left behind and his pugnacity and seeming intolerance and built-in rigidity may have been derived in no small measure from his sense of deprivation. While reading as an under-graduate in Oxford I could never muster enough courage to go and meet Leavis in Cambridge but later I had the temerity of sending him a copy of my book on William Blake, *Arrows of Intellect* (India 1965; rept. U.S.A. 1970). It was subjected to pretty

harsh criticism on many counts and yet he was generous enough to praise it in his own qualified way (unlike Northrop Frye who was most exuberant in his commedation of it) and in his characteristically nervy, involuted, coiling but highly energetic style. This makes me think that behind the forbidding exterior of ruggedness and inflexibility was occasionally betrayed a glimmer of very real warmth and sympathy if something caught his eye : he could, in a genial and relaxed mood, offer both encouragement and stimulus to budding authors. In the course of our brief exchange of correspondence I could not help discovering that he made no secret of his animosity towards and sheer contempt for the Cambridge dons in general, and scholars like Basil Willey, in particular. Leavis was able, as is attested by more than one contributor, to mesmerize large audiences owing to his outstanding gifts as teacher and orator and the overwhelming force of his intellectual toughness and the irrefragable logic with which he could marshal his vigorous arguments and the textual evidence on which they largely rested. He had the uncanny instinct of demolishing his adversary with a ruthlessness which was both awe-inspiring and breath-taking, leaving him hardly any elbow-room, though it might be added in hot haste that this ruthlessness was in no way eqquivalent to what Dryden designates as the 'slovenly butchering of a man', but aided by subtle and incontes table logic it amounted to 'the fineness of a stroke that separates the head from the body, and leaves it standing in its place': all of his controversial writings were marked more often than not by a kind of ironic courtesy. The finest demonstration of this skill in polemics is the pungent and biting sarcasm with which he reduced C. P. Snow's Rede lecture *The Two Cultures* to dust and ashes and damned the author to nothingness with the savage and withering *indignatio* of a Swift. His crossing of swords with F. W. Bateson, *apropos* of the latter's *English* Poetry and the *English Language* (1935) again stresses the fact that he was always armed to the teeth with dialectics. Each of them—combatants of proven mettle

as they were—did staunch and invincible advocacy of his own view-point and stuck to his guns: Leavis was more lethal and destructive in attack as well as defence and more disconcerting, too. Their respective positions may be summed up thus: whereas Bateson sees an absolute disjunction between literary history and literary criticism, Leavis upholds that the latter is anyway involved in the former. In a bid for compromise and also with the intention of looking plausible Bateson passionately and persuasively pleads for an interaction so as to bridge the gulf that yawns between scholarship and criticism. But Leavis counters this by saying that the very act of composing any authentic literary history is prompted by an instinctive sense of critical discrimination and judgment. Bateson places emphasis, as Leavis lays to his charge with insistent urgency, on 'word' and 'language' in a rather naive and simplistic way, being concerned merely with categories like denotation and connotation and believes that all changes in literary modes of communication depend ultimately on the maturity and precision or otherwise which language is posses sed of at a specific stage of its development. Literary artifacts, in other words, not only reflect the state of language at a particular moment of time but are moulded by it. Leavis will have none of this, for acceptance of this thesis is likeley to reduce a complex and intricate phenomenon to some kind of mechanism.

Somewhat controvertible though some of his formulations and pronouncements may sound there is no denying the fact that Leavis is the finest inquiring intelligence produced by this century. His critical writings constitute a 'body of collected thoughtfulness' embodied in discursive prose of wry vivacity and torrential force and aimed at distancing of emotions which are in need of keen and critical articulation. He is always given to focusing minute, alert and sustained attention on the printed word—*explication de texte*—and subjecting the local texture to dense and acute analysis thus eschewing all vague and mystifying and monotenous generalities with a view

to clarifying what Eliot designates in *East Coker* as 'the general mess of imprecision of feeling' in critical discourse and making the latter centrally and creatively significant. He also coined his own critical vocabulary which is, perhaps, no less seminal than that of Coleridge or Eliot. Leavis did undoubtedly feel embittered and resentful, as was disclosed to tho present reviewer by E. M. Forster as far back as 1958, because he was wholly convinced that he had been shabbily treated by the University 'establishment' over the years ; how mightily outrageous it was that he was conceded Readership barely three years before his retirement from Cambridge. He obviously had in him a thin streak of the paranoid feeling, was desperately involved in tensions, and always had the sense of living in a beleaguered citadel under constant threat from without and suffered from the strain of 'morose injury' very much in the manner of a Coriolanus : 'his whole cast of mind', as Raymond Williams accurately points out, was that of 'the heroic isolated individual'. He started the prestigious journal *Scrutiny* in 1932 and ended up with it in 1951 and in the course of these twenty odd years published a most impressive and formidable body of literary criticism which is likely to remain valid for long. There is some point in Bateson's frank and forthright avowal that if *Scrutiny* had not preceded, Essays in *Criticism* could not emerge as a vital generative and critical force as it did. But it is difficult to support one of the contributors to this volume, Boris Ford, in his self-complacent and utterly fallacious contention that the *Pelican Guide* series as launched by him represented continuity with the tradition so arduously built by the *Scrutiny* editors though some of the contributors were common to both the ventures. It was therefore not an 'unworthy act of pride' (as erroneously alleged by Boris Ford) but the sense of dubiety about the proposed corporate enterprise and the fear of falsifying what he had already done with such meticulous care and sense of dedication which perhaps prevented Leavis from joining it.

F. R. Levis's contribution to literary criticism, in view of its incisiveness, subtlety and finesse, is epoch-making, indeed; he has written with greater penetrating insight and iconoclastic lucidity than any one among his predecessors or contemporaries. He concentrated equally on poetry and fiction and alittle less on drama, and he was opposed to diluting the English Tripos paper on fiction by inclusion of continental novelists, and this despite his deep and fervent admiration for such masters as Conrad, Henry James and Tolstoy. He stood, not unlike Q. D. Leavis, for the Englishness of the English novel and more or less insisted on maintaining the direct line of descent. Suprisingly enough, he didn't write very much on Shakespeare, except his three celebrated essays on *Measure for Measure*, *Othello* and the late plays which are uniquely insightful to a remarkable degree.

Leavis was always preoccupied with literature—its 'felt' life—as a serious and purposeful discipline with unremitting devotion and regarded it essentially as a quest for meaning. He was very much more than a literary critic : he was deeply engaged with the problems of culture and education—the feel of life as a whole and the uroma of a particular civilization—for which the explication of literary texts served as an effective mode of grasp, and language for him was an 'organic human achievement' and was a manifestation of continuous and creatively collaborative activity. For him what matters in literary criticism is 'sensitivity of response' and 'responsibility of judgment' and it is incumbent upon the critic to take into account not only the coherence and inclusiveness of the artistic structure but also the 'value' or 'significance' which has been structured through it. The malaise of the present age, according to him, was reflected in the loss of the medieval organic community. and the ever-increasing pressure of urban development and the emergence of mass culture. What is really menacing is the prolieration of the technologico-Benthamite trends and the resultant coarsening of the centres of consciousness in the contemporary world.

C. P. Snow, the apostle of scientism, waxing eloquent about the hiatus between the two cultures (the scientific and the humanistic) is himself a crude symptom of this malaise. The wholeness of the personal identity has to be restored and preserved and this had better be done by a sober commitment to literature as an ideal discipline which is to be pursued with Arnoldian disinterestedness. Placing legitimate emphasis on the linguistic vitality of a literary artifact Leavis also upholds consistently that since literature is ultimately bound up with life at all levels and in all their intricate mutualities it cannot be dissociated from the complex of values which are mediated through it and hence its explication leads us 'outwards' from its own deftly organized nucleus. That is, without being overtly and obtrusively moralistic, such an artifact ought not to be judged in terms of its own inherent and indwelling logic alone but be correlated with the vital, organic integuments of experience. 'I don't believe in any 'literary values', and you won't find me talking about them : the judgments the literary critic is concerned with are judgments about life'. (Luddites? or There Is Only One Culture, in *Lectures in America,* 1969, p. 23). Such an unequivocal utterance reflects the intensity of concern and the unswerving concentration so characteristic of him in these and related matters.

Though Leavis, along with Q. D. Leavis, fought hard and relentlessly for the re-ordering of human consciousness yet his belief in the sources of his hope was enfeebled imperceptibly as time went by. He was exasperatingly critical of the Cartesian universe, based as it is on a kind of reductivism and on the idea of matter which is for ever in motion, operating according to the law of chance and necessity. Leavis came ultimately to perceive the potential of resilience in Blake, Dickens and D.H. Lawrence and he recognized, among the philosophers, the relevance of Wittgenstein alone. Blake and Lawrence, in particular, upheld the notion of the integrated 'being' of man as against the quantitative and functional concept of him, and Blake, revolting against Newtonianism and

the model of man constructed by it, evolved his own 'visionary physics'. Hence the perennial fascination of Blake for Leavis and a host of other modern thinkers and creative artists. Though he came gradually to adopt an 'anti-philosopher' stance as critic, yet his own literary criticism at its best, paradoxically enough, was butteressed by some kind of amatuerish home-made phenomenology like the 'home-made furniture' Eliot glimpsed in the context of the inchoate, shadowy and stupendous configurations of Blake as these are weighted with intimations from a supersensory world. At the deepest core of his being, despite his professed dislike of Christianity, Leavis was religious by temperament. But in the absence of any viable Christian myth which could command his allegiance and offer him scope for the exercise of choice his religiosity came to be anchored to some kind of ethical concern and some sort of anthrporology.

This book contains some very perceptive and provocative value-judgments made on the Leavises by critics of varying persuasions and these have a bearing on the personal idiosyncrasies and intellectual achievements of both. Leavis proved indeed to be a great liberating and fructifying force in the fossilized atmosphere of Cambridge which was earlier controlled by such hoary and estimable names as Sir Arthur Quiller Couch. Unconsciously stimulated and inspired by such seminal minds as I.A. Richards and William Empson Leavis initiated radical rethinking on matters of critical evaluation and cultural synthesis and this was to be accomplished by the revitalized University education. This collection of essays by diverse hands constitutes a worthy salute to a man of tremendous genius in our century and his no less able, unyielding and self-righteous life-long collaborator, Mrs Q.D. Leavis.

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Robert Bridges: A Critical Study, By IQBAL HASAN, Printwell Publications, Aligarh, India, 1983, pp. 172.

Having originated as a doctoral thesis, the book under review is both a labour of love and a fruit of well-meaning erudition. Its aim is to correct the imbalance between Bridges's shorter lyrics most people who at all read him care about' and his plays and masques that fare, at best, merely as 'academic excercises'. Another aspect of Bridges's work Dr. Hasan lays emphasis on and devotes a whole chapter to is Bridges as prosodist—Bridges, we are told, was 'one of the great experimenters in art and one who has been deeply interested in the metrics of English poetry'. And as an inspired devotee of the cult of beauty, but in a rather different and somewhat less full-bodied sense than D. G. Rossetti, Bridges is placed at the centre of the revolt against 'the ugliness of the Victorian England'.

The book is divided into three parts—one dealing with non-dramatic verse: another with dramatic works, and the last with philosophical poetry and metrical experiments. In dealing with each of these aspects of Bridges's work Dr.Hasan shows intimate familiarity and appreciative sympathy.But while trying to evaluate Bridges as belonging to the early twentieth century, Dr. Hasan does not touch upon, still less deal explicitly with, the reasons why and the ways in which almost everything Bridges's art embodied and everything his critical and poetical ideas stood for was to be mercilessly jettisoned by the artefacts of modern poetry—poetry that made *Testament of Beauty* dated almost before it appeared. In other words the sum and essence of Bridges's poetics—'art which nowadays neglects either of these ('Greek attainment' and 'Christian ideal') is imperfect; that is, it will not command our highest love, nor satisfy our best intelligence', Bridges's mistaking absence of ornament, as in the case of Emily Bronte, with 'indifference to artistic beauty, together with what he calls 'the wholesome laws of plain philosophy' runs

diametrically counter to the ethos imposed on their age not only by poets like Pound and Eliot but also by a peculiarly modern-cum-traditional poet like Hardy. The touching simplicity of Bridges's vision of happiness as well as his view of what constituted joy, love, beauty and truth comes out through his belief that 'man's wisdom ultimately leads him to happiness' and that 'man suffers in this world only for the lack of a little wisdom', no less than through his inability to appreciate Hopkins's art and idiom.

It is such assumptions and attitudes as much as Bridges's experiments in prosody and his poetic-cum-philosophic quest for beauty, that stand as an unbreachable wall between him and what one now understands by modern poetry and modern civilization. Togore's philosophy, Pound complained, 'hasn't much in it for a man who has felt the pangs' or been pestered with Western civilization'. One could say the same—and with greater cogency—of Bridges. Pound has some important things to say on Bridges which Dr. Hasan doesn't quote or doesn't seem to be familiar with; another lacuna in his bibliography being John Sparrow's British Council pamphlet on Bridges. Himself a master of meter and prosody and the arch-creator of modern rhythm, Pound's comments on Bridges have a particular validity. Pound was aware, as early as 1911, of how Bridges, together with Maurice Hewlett and Frederick Manning, was seriously concerned with overhauling the metric, in testing the language and its adaptibility to certain modes'. Impressed by Bridges's prosodic experiments Pound got two poems of Bridges published in *Poetry* (vol. VII, I, October 1915) and said about them: 'I think the two poems are quite good, yes very good, especially the short one. And the cadence of the other is exquisite. I suppose I shall have to wait till he dies before I can do an appreciative character sketch' This sketch Pound never did, even after Bridges's death, but there are comments scattered here and there in his letters that indicate the drift such a sketch, involving inevitably a frank critical evaluation of Bridges's poetry, would have taken. For

instance, in a letter to Felix E. Schelling (Pound's teacher at the universtly of Pennsylvania), Pound relates an anecdote which throws light on a crucial factor in Bridges's concept and use of the language of poetry that is so foreign to modern poetic idiom: 'Years ago when I was just trying to find and use modern speech, old Bridges carefully went through *Personae* and *Exultations* and commended every archaism (to my horror) exclaiming 'We' ll get 'em *all* back; Eheu fugaces!'

But when it came to the field of metre and prosody, Pound rated Bridges very highly, and in a letter to Laurence Binyan, the translator of Dante, while referring to the latter's translation of Dante's *Inferno*, he observed: 'I have gone through the book, I shd. think, syllable by syllable. And as Bridges and Leaf are no longer on the scene, the number of readers possessed by any criteria (however heretical) for the writing of English verse and at the same time knowing the difference between Dante and Dunhill is limited'. However, when in 1936 Eliot asked Pound to write a note on Bridges for *The Criterion*, the latter replied: 'If the luminous reason of one's criticism iz that one shd. focus attention on what deserves it, a note by E. P. on Bridges wd. be a falsification of values...I can't think Britsches has enough influence to be worth attacking'. These last sentences seem to sum up, almost like an epitaph, what value and relèvance Bridges had for modern poetry.

It is to Dr.Hasan's credit that he evaluates Bridges's poetry in a more favourable light and adduces academically convincing arguments in support of his interpretation. But both the interpretation and the evaluation is done in terms of Bridges's own poetics. The very fact that he compares Bridges with Keats and Shelley, that he emphasises Keats's influence on Bridges, refers to Bridges's 'experiments with Neo-Miltonic syllabics, accentual measures and also with Stone's quantitative prosody', shows that Bridges's link with the past was of too constrictive a nature to permit him to explore creatively

new ground or to have any sympathy with or any real understanding of what was modern in poetry written in his own time. All this is even more true of Bridges's plays and masques that Dr. Hasan analyses in great appreciative and scholarly detail. However, in a book that claims to be a critical study I would have liked to see a more *critical* evaluation of Bridges's poetry as a whole and of *The Testament of Beauty* in particular as a philosophical poem; what we have instead is a sympathetic account, at times bordering on panegyric, of what Bridges set out to achieve, his aims and methods and what he actually *did* achieve within the framework of his own creative principles and criteria.

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