OSMANIA JOURNAL OF ENGLISH STUDIES

A JOURNAL OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

1972

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
OSMANIA UNIVERSITY
HYDERABAD
INDIA

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY

HYDERABAD (INDIA)

1972-73

Osmania Journal of English Studies (*OJES*) is published by the Department of English, Osmania University, as an organ of the University English Forum. It is edited by S. K. Kumar, Professor and Chairman of the Department of English.

Articles (which may not exceed 4000 words), book-reviews (not more than 1000 words), and publications intended for review in this journal, should be sent to the editor. All contributions should conform to the conventions recommended in the 'Style Sheet' of the Modern Language Association of America. Any article unaccompanied by a stamped addressed envelope may not be returned.

Contributors will receive 15 offprints of articles, and 10 of reviews, free.

All business matters may be addressed to the Editor, *OJES* Department of English, Osmania University, Hyderabad-500007 (India).

PRICE Rs. 2.50 / 50 Cents / 4 Shillings

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Vol. 9 No. 1

1972

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

The Editors regret the delay in the publication of this issue of the *OJES* — a delay that will be made good by bringing out the next issue soon. They hope that this number of the *OJES* will prove as readable and stimulating as the previous numbers.

S. K. K.
V. A. S.
K. V. C.
M. S. K.

THE BEAR: THE INITIATION OF IKE McCASLIN

BY

ISAAC SEQUEIRA

The term "initiation" was probably used for the first time by anthropologists to denote the rites of passage from childhood or adolescence to maturity, that were practised by many primitive cultures and early civilizations. The rites consisted of trials by ordeal, feats of strength and courage to test the candidate's endurance and loyalty to the tribe or community. In some cases, initiation was simply a ceremony performed to facilitate the candidate's change in status upon the onset of puberty, or formal entry into a clan or society.

Joseph Campbell, who has made a thorough study of the hero-initiate of myth, religion and history, states:

> The so-called rites of passage, which occupy such a prominent place in the life of a primitive society (ceremonials of birth, naming, puberty, marriage, burial, etc.), are distinguished by formal, and usually very severe, exercises of severance, whereby the mind is radically cut away from the attitudes, attachments, and life patterns of the stage being left behind. Then follows an interval of more or less extended retirement, during which are enacted rituals designed to introduce the life adventure to the forms and proper feelings of his new estate, so that when, at last, the time has ripened for the return to the normal world, the initiate will be as good as reborn.[1]

In a whole chapter devoted to initiation, Campbell goes on to say that "The traditional idea of initiation combines an introduction of the candidate into the techniques, duties, and prerogatives of his vocation with a radical readjustment of his emotional relationship to the parental images. The mystagogue (father or father-substitute) is to entrust the symbols of office only to a son who has been effectually purged of all inappropriate infantile cathexes. . . . [The invested] one is the twice born."[2] The ritual of confirmation in Christianity, the thread ceremony (second birth of the twice-born) in

Hinduism, and the Jewish Bar mitzvah are similar to these initiation rites. Today, fraternities, sororities and secret societies have elaborate initiation ceremonies, which mark the entry of a candidate into their exclusive circles.

The "initiation" of fiction, however, bears only a peripheral or tangential relationship to his kind of initiation. Only in some cases, as in Faulkner's *The Bear*, is the initiation of the fictional heroes accompanied by ritual. Almost in no case is it a group or social activity since the protagonists achieve initiation on their own, after an intense and personal experience.

Ordinarily, the word "initiation" is used in connection with the process of maturation of adolescents. However, adolescence is not an easy term to define or limit. One can talk of physical, intellectual, social, emotional and moral adolescence, of which only physical adolescence, because of the obvious symptoms of puberty, can be dealt with, with some certitude. For instance, except for physical adolescence, it is difficult to discuss the other kinds of adolescence in terms of age. The age span for physical adolescence can be set between ten and twenty-four years of age. On the other hand, characters in fiction like people in real life have different age periods for the other kinds of adolescence. That means they achieve intellectual, social and moral maturity at different ages, sometimes well beyond the age of twenty-four. For instance, Francis Macomber of Hemingway's "The Short Happy life of Francis Macomber" achieves moral manhood in his thirties: Professor Moses Herzog of Saul Bellow's *Herzog* achieves emotional maturity when he is middle-aged.

However, with the advent of Freud and Jung, and the study of the human psyche, a new emphasis was placed on the awareness of sub-conscious motives, on the conflicts between reality and pleasure principles, especially in the adolescent. Freudian psychology taught that the conflicts the child felt would invariably be heightened during adolescence. It made the novelists aware of the importance of the process of initiation, and provided them with scientific or near-scientific material to work with. The Jungians helped to clarify the use of myths and archetypes in literature. They offered the theory that archetypes recur to writers and readers because they embody ancient and primordial experiences of the race

which survive in the collective unconscious. The important archetypes that the fiction of adolescence uses are: the descent of the protagonist into Hades or Hell, the "Night Journey," the search for a father or father-figure, the quest, the cycle of death and rebirth, the process of initiation. One of Jung's significant contributions to the literature of initiation is his theory of the "individuation process." "Individuation" is a psychological "growing up," the process of discovering those aspects of one's self that make one an individual apart from others. It is a process of recognition, of self awareness, the understanding of one's weaknesses and strengths, that takes place as one matures. "The meaning and purpose of the process is the realization, in all its aspects, of the personality originally hidden away in the embryonic germplasm: the production and unfolding of the original potential wholeness."[3]

Definition of Initiation

After considering the various definitions of initiation set forth by prominent critics like Leslie Fiedler,[4] Ihab Hassan[5] Cleanth Brooks and Penn Warren,[6] Mordecai Marcus[7] and others, I have formulated the following definition: Initiation is an existential encounter or a series of existential encounters in life, almost always painful, with experience, during which the adolescent protagonist gains valuable knowledge about himself, the nature of evil, and the world. The knowledge is accompanied by a sense of the loss of innocence and a sense of isolation, and if it is to have any permanent effect at all, must result in a change in character and behavior: for if knowledge does not change an individual's thinking and behavior, no learning—no acquisition of knowledge *per se*—has taken place. The change, in almost every case, leads towards an adjustable integration into the adult world.

Initiation is classified into three kinds; (1) Decisive, (2) Uncompleted, and (3) Tentative. The first is the highest order of initiation. The decisive initiate goes through the whole painful process successfully—gains valuable knowledge about himself, his identity, the nature of evil, and the world. He experiences an initiatory loss of innocence and a sense of isolation, and finally accepts adult society in spite of his disillusionment with it. The second category defines initiates who cross the threshold of initiation but are still confused as to the direction in which they should proceed. The third deals with initiates who go through the process of

initiation up to a point. They experience pain and disillusionment and come to the threshold of initiation but are not able to cross it. The three categories are discussed in relation to three kinds of modern fictional heroes, (1) the *pharmakos* (scape-goat or victim), (2) the *eiron* (ironic protagonist), and (3) the *alazon* (braggart-rebel).

THE UNCOMPLETED INITIATION OF IKE McCASLIN

William Faulkner's *The Bear* is one of the most significant initiation stories written in the twentieth century. It is a gripping tale about the physical, mental and spiritual growth of Ike McCaslin during his myth-adventure with and ritual-chase of the legendary bear, Old Ben, who becomes an important part of Ike's initiation rites. Faulkner himself calls the semi-annual hunt to kill the huge predatory Old Ben a "pageant rite," and the chief participants in the hunt conduct themselves in a ceremonious manner.

The story is divided into five sections, the first three dealing with Ike's acquistion of hunting skills and forest lore, and the last two with his initiation. Ike is indeed the "tyro" and Sam Fathers the "tutor" from the time Ike goes on his first deer-bear hunt at the age of ten until he is sixteen, by which time he is an accomplished hunter. Sam Fathers, the son of a Negro and a Chickasaw chieftain, is his real spiritual father who also helps initiate him into the world of nature. Sam teaches him the code of nature and unwittingly encourages the individuation process in Ike which brings him to an understanding of self, his sources in nature and even the forces of his unconscious.

Just being present in the forest with the hunters, surrounded by the forest and the animals of the wilderness is something of an education for Ike. He learns that the land

> ....was of the men, not white nor black nor red but men, hunters, with the will and hardihood to endure and the humility and skill to survive, and the dogs and the bear and deer juxtaposed and reliefed against it, ordered and compelled by and within the wilderness in the ancient and unremitting contest according to the ancient and immitigable rules which voided all regrets and brooked no quarter.[8]

It is this lesson that teaches him to see through the dual racial standards of his family and of all white society in the South.

It is this realization that helps him later on when he is twenty-one (section IV of the story) to bring about his " moment of truth " which results in his repudiating his tainted patrimony.

The bear hunt assumes a special signficance for Ike, on the practical as well as the ritual level: it becomes the means by which he acquires his education and maturation; he learns about the annual rites and actively participates in them. The wilderness and the bear also assume important roles:

> If Sam Fathers had been his mentor and the backyard rabbits and squirrels his kindergarten, then the wilderness the old bear ran was his college and the old male bear itself, so long unwifed and childless as to become its own ungendered progenitor, was his alma mater (203)

Ike encounters the bear eight times, each encounter a kind of " epiphany " through which he learns something. At the age of ten he is taken to the Big Bottom in the wilderness on his first hunt. The experience has a profound impact on him. Faulkner explains it in initiation terms. Initiation, viewed in anthropological and in some cases even in fictional terms, is seen as the ritual of the twice born. Ike's first experience with the wilderness is described thus:

" It seemed to him that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth. It was not even strange to him. He had experienced it all before, and not merely in dreams " (189-190). Ike is getting closer to his own sources in nature and the proximity has a healthy humbling effect. He feels

> ....an eagerness, passive: an abjectness, a sense of his own fragility and impotence against the timeless woods, yet without doubt or dread: a flavor like brass in the sudden run of saliva in his mouth, a hard sharp constriction in either his brain or his stomach.... he knew only that for the first time he realised that the bear which had run in his listening and loomed in his dreams since before he could remember.....was mortal animal.....(194)

The following year Ike joins the hunt and goes into the forest alone. He sees Old Ben for the first time, not, however, without an elaborate ritual wherein he gets rid of the trappings of civilization—his gun, watch and compass. He cannot

help feeling that initiation into the secrets of the woods and of nature demands this. For a moment he stands, " a child, alien and lost in the green and soaring gloom of the markless wilderness " (201). Then he remembers Sam's coaching, how to find his way in the wilderness, how to approach his task in a calm, courageous and collected manner. He makes his way into the woods and finally sees the great bear. The meeting is very brief and then Old Ben disappears into the encircling gloom.

November of that year finds Ike killing his first buck. Sam Fathers is there in his dual role of teacher and high priest of the rite. He marks Ike's face with the hot blood of the buck in a ceremony that obviously resembles baptism and initiation. The following year Ike kills his first bear, and he is firmly launched into his career as expert woodsman and hunter:

> By now he was a better woodsman than most grown men with more [experience]. There was no territory within twenty five miles of the camp that he did not know—bayou, ridge, landmark trees and path: he could have led anyone direct to any spot in it and brought him back. He knew game trails that even Sam Fathers had never seen: (203)

Ike and Sam regularly encounter Old Ben every year after that but neither can bring himself to kill the bear. Something seems to prevent action at the crucial moment. Once when Ike is able to corner the bear with the help of a fearless little fyce, he has a very good opportunity to shoot at the bear at very close quarters but he doesn't. He feels that the time hasn't quite arrived. He tells Sam, " It won't be until the last day. When even he don't want it to last any longer " (205).

When Ike is fourteen years old Sam captures a wild mongrel Airedale which he trains and names " Lion ". It is with this absolutely fearless and incredibly strong dog, a bigger and stronger version of the plucky little fyce, that the old bear is finally brought to bay and killed two years later when Ike is sixteen. Led by Lion the hunters close in on Old Ben. The time has arrived. Lion attacks the bear and is almost torn to pieces by the fierce animal. To save his beloved dog Boon Hogganbeck, one of the retainers, enters the fray completely oblivious of his own safety, and stabs the

the bear to death. Lion dies of his wound and Sam Fathers just " quits " and fades from life.

Ike has been an ardent, empathetic observer of this drama. He learns all that can be learned about courage, animal and human, and how even people like the shiftless Boon, for instance, can rise to heights of bravery and selflessness in an emergency.

Under the tutelage of Sam and the influence of the wilderness Ike has learned the virtues of the archetypal ideal man, pity, humility, courage, pride and the will to endure.

With the death of Sam Fathers, Ike's education in the school of nature comes to an end. He is completely initiated into the world of nature. It is a pity that this initiation, so noble in many respects, should later stand in the way of Ike's initiation into human society which is at once the acid test and the ultimate aim of decisive initiation.

A few days after the killing of the bear Ike sets out on another hunt, a more important one, a " journey " into the history of his family. This time his quarry is the injustice and tyranny over the Negroes that his grandfather, the patriarch of the McCaslins, Lucius Quintus Carothers McCaslin, is guilty of. He soon runs his quarry to earth in the old ledgers in the commissary. He finds unmistakable evidence of his grandfather's sins of incest, miscegenation, and, what is worst of all, repudiation of his black progeny. He is horrified to learn that old Carothers had fathered Tomasina by his slave, Eunice, and when Tomasina was old enough had fathered Tomey's Turl by her, his own daughter. He also learns that Eunice, on discovering her daughter pregnant by her own lover, had committed suicide by drowning herself in a creek. What shocks Ike even more is the fact that his own father (Uncle Buck in the story) and his Uncle Buddy deny any humanity and human feeling to the Negroes, as indicated by the entry in the ledger, " who in hell ever heard of a nigger drowning himself ". (257)

Old Carothers McCaslin, oblivious of or callous about the gravity of the crime, leaves a sum of money to be paid as compensation to the children of Tomasina, as if money could wipe out the memory of sin. It is this cavalier, heartless, *I-It* attitude of the whites in his family to their Negro kinsmen that shocks Ike and initiates the notion in his mind to repudiate

his tainted patrimony, at the age of twenty-one. Ike does a great deal of soulsearching at this stage. He is charting the "heart of darkness" of his family's life, and in the process, going ahead with his own individuation process. He comes face to face with the "curse of the McCaslins" which, later, with almost the force of hereditary determinism, makes Zack Edmonds repudiate Lucas Beauchamp, his Negro kinsman, and still later, Roth Edmonds his good friend and playmate, Henry Beauchamp.

Ike makes many attempts to trace the children of Tomey's Turl and Tennie Beauchamp to give each one of them the $1,000 that is coming to them. He only finds Fonsiba, married to an Arkansas Negro, and deposits the money in a bank for her. The black legacy of his family continues to haunt him until finally, at the age of twenty-one, he gives up his soiled patrimony. He relinquishes title to the McCaslin properties to his cousin, McCaslin Edmonds. His training under Sam Fathers has taught him that he cannot have anything to do with the tainted legacy of his family.

Turning to the legacy from the maternal side of his family he finds that though it is not evil it is an empty promise. He opens his Uncle Herbert's "legacy" only to find a tin coffee pot stuffed with coppers and I.O.U. 's instead of gold coins. The tin coffeepot provides an apt symbol for the decadence and empty promise of Southern society. Earlier, talking to Fonsiba's husband in Arkansa, Ike had said.

> Don't you see? This whole land, the whole South, is cursed, and all of us who derive from it, whom it ever suckled, white and black both, lie under the curse? Granted that my people brought the curse into the land: may be for that reason their descendents alone can—not resist, not combat it—may be just endure and outlast it until the curse is lifted. (267)

Ike, however, doesn't make any plans to endure or outlast the course; he repudiates not only his family but the whole of society. He goes to Jefferson and works as a carpenter in "emulation of the Nazarene." No doubt the gesture sounds like one of noble rage and humble expiation but in reality it is an escape, and hence interferes with Ike's decisive initiation since the ultimate aim of initiation is integration in society. He lives on the periphery, so to say, of society, and his existence becomes arid and unproductive,

unlike that of the Nazarene. He marries a girl who lived on the farm where he worked but the marriage soon goes on the rocks because his wife wants him to reclaim the McCaslin farms and he will have nothing to do with them. He finds that there is neither peace nor freedom in repudiation.

> 1874 the boy: 1888 the man, requdiated denied and free: 1895 and husband but no father, unwidowered but without a wife, and found long since that no man is ever free and probably could nor bear it if he were (270).

He finds himself " an Isaac born into a later life than Abraham's and repudiating immolation; fatherless and therefore safe declining the altar because may be this time the exasperated Hand might not supply the kid— " (271-272). Unlike the Isaac of old he finds himself uncle to half the country but father to none. The " tutor " of the wilderness, Sam Fathers, has succeeded too well, whereas the " tutor " of society, Cass Edmonds, has failed miserably. Ike withdraws, if not exactly to the woods, to the fringe of society. He becomes an alienated and lonely *eiron* figure. He has no doubt attained individual maturity but fails to become the Social man. He realizes that his rejection of his patrimony and his sacrifice have been made in vain. He hasn't altered society one bit. He has found no freedom in renunciation nor peace of mind in repudiation. Worst of all, he has irreparably damaged his chances of decisive initiation.

That his initiation is incomplete is more than proved by his action in the story, "Delta Autumn," when he is an old man. He leads a vegetable existence and revives only once a year when he goes again into the woods to hunt along with Roth Edmonds and his friends. On one of these annual hunting trips he meets Roth's mistress, who is part Negro, and with child by Roth. On Roth's behalf Ike attempts to persuade her to leave the South and forego her claim on Roth. He offers her $3,000 in an envelope. When, to his shock, he learns that she is Tennie's Jim's grand-daughter he crudely offers her the horn that was left to Tennie's Jim by General Compson.

The wheel has come full circle. Old Carothers McCaslin's repudiation of Eunice and Tomasina is now repeated five generations later in Roth's repudiation of his mistress. Unfortunately, the man who had condemned the first repudia-

tion with a grandiose gesture, endorses, nay, aids and abets the last one. The "curse of the McCaslins" has worked its havoc. Gone are the lessons of courage, humility and love taught by Sam Fathers.

The rejected girl gives eloquent testimony to Ike's failure, which confirms his uncompleted initiation. "Old man," she says, "have you lived so long and forgotten so much that you don't remember anything you ever knew or felt or even heard about love?"

Ike is a self-deprecatine *eiron* who, having completed the necessary steps for initiation fails to take the last one which would have ensured his decisive initiation into society. He more or less drops out of society, having repudiated both family and society, and compromises his principles in his old age when he offers what amounts to a bribe to Roth's mistress, thereby vitiating his noble sacrifice as a young man. It is ironic that an initiate who showed so much promise under the wise tutelage of Sam Fathers should reject society as a result of a near perfect initiation into the world of nature and be satisfied with an uncompleted initiation into society.

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1. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1949), p. 10.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 136.

3. C.G. Jung, "The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious," *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, (eds.), Herbert Read, *et al.* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966),Vol. VII, p. 110.

4. Leslie Fiedler, "From Redemption to Initiation," *New Leader*, XII (May 26, 1958), p. 22.

5. Ihab Hassan, *Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 41.

6. Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren, *Understanding Fiction* (New York: F.S. Crofts and Company, 1943), p. 344.

7. Mordecai Marcus, "What is an Initiation Story?" *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XIV, No. 2 (Winter, 1960), pp. 221-228. Marcus has classified initiation into three types, tentative, uncompleted and decisive. Since I find this classifcation valid and congenial for my purposes I have made use of them in my discussion of initation.

8. William Faulkner, *Three Famous Short Novels* (New York: Random House, Inc., Vintage Books, 1963), p. 186. All references to *The Bear* are taken from this edition and are indicated by page number in parentheses.

9. William Faulkner, "Delta Autumn," *Bear, Man and God*, (eds.), Francis Lee Utley, *et al.* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1964), p. 383.

THE AGONY OF A SLAVE NEGRO: THEME AND TECHNIQUE IN STYRON'S *NAT TURNER*

BY

K. P. SARADHI

Though a storm of criticism was unleashed in America on the publication of Styron's *The Confessions of Nat Turner* in 1967, it has, very surprisingly, only peripherally touched on the artistic quality of the book. While critics like Alfred Kazin, Van Woodward, Philip Rahv, Raymond Sokolov, Irving Malin and others have in a way praised the work for the power of the narrative,[1] for dealing with the most fateful and pressing concerns of the history of the USA—the theme of race relations—,[2] and for its contemporary relevance,[3] quite a few others like J.D. Scott, Wilfred Sheed, Herbert Aptheker, Ernest Kaiser, Richard Gilman, Martin Duberman have questioned Styron's competence to write about Nat Turner,[4] his historical insights,[5] and condemned the book as a depressing volume,[6] as a pastiche,[7] as a simplistic propaganda tract,[8] and as one written in the words of an antebellum Negro.[9] In the labyrinth of this *Nat Turner* criticism, the fact that the novel above all is a work of art has almost been lost, and the basic question whether the book has a firm controlling intention, a binding aesthetic structure, has escaped serious attention.

Yet, Styron himself has explained that his major preoccupation in writing the book is

> to take on the lineaments as well as I could of a slave and using that persona, walk myself through a time and a place in a manner of self-discovery. I was learning all along as I wrote about Nat what it must have been to be a slave....[10]

though, at the same time, he is also out to explore " in some kind of depth....American life and history."[11] This has involved him in a tightrope walking, he has admitted, the using of " the art of fiction to its ultimate degree," and, at the same time trying to be " faithful to the time and place " of the action of the novel.[12] Thus the caution in the " Author's Note " to the book that " it has been my own intention to try to re-create a man and his era, and to produce a work that is

less an 'historical novel' in conventional terms than a meditation on history".[13]

Styron has further emphasized that in taking on him the role of a Negro he was trying to do something unique, "to turn myself into a unique slave," to psychoanalyze "one of the few slaves in history who achieved identity".[14] To the question, "what made you feel that you could try what none else had," he has replied, "Rank intuition. I doubt that the feelings of the dispossessed, whatever their colour, are all that different. If you can sympathize with the dispossessed, you can certainly take on the lineaments of the negro".[15] In other words, Styron took on him the job of probing into Nat's "Confessions" having known that it was a challenge for him to assume the persona of a Negro, to *live* it,[16] and make it convincing. Following Camus method in "The Stranger" Styron felt that the Nat of the "Confessions" could be told through the eye of the condemned:

> ....Like Camus, I would centre the novel around a man facing his own death in a jail cell....and so there....was the architecture of the book, its framework, along with the idea of telling the story in the first person.[17]

Wilfred Sheed, one of the few critics who have taken a look on the technique of the novel, has felt that the book is a failure as a point of view narration. "A long book told from one point of view is always a risk; here the risk is prohibitive."[18] Melvin Friedman has found that "Styron's own idiom is grafted on to Nat's"[19] and the successive "I's" which constitute Nat Turner do not have the versatility or complexity of Camus or Proust.[20] Kaiser and others regard that Styron "has no equipment either factually or psychologically to write a novel about Nat Turner or any other Negro for that matter"[21] as his "vile racist imagination" has constantly pushed him to rationalize the oppression of Negroes in one way or another, and create "Sambos" instead of characters.[22] Aptheker points out that while Styron is largely accurate when he quotes from the original "Confessions," his omissions are deliberate and instructive. At times, says Aptheker, Styron also twists and falsifies certain facts to suit his Freudian psychoanalyst thesis in the novel.[23] On the other end of Aptheker's conclusions is the assessment of Sokolov:

> Styron combed the skimpy records and slowly thought himself into the mind of Nat Turner. Finally the

> psychic integration worked so well.... Styron became Nat and told Nat's story as if he were Nat, in one long astonishing recreation of the way it must have felt to be a slave in 1831.[24]

The main theme of the novel centres round the existential predicament of a man—a slave Negro—facing his own death in a jail cell. Nat Turner, the Negro, who has taught himself to be a preacher, has led a bloody insurrection against the white oppressors, which breaks up soon after it starts, resulting in the arrest, trial and execution of the rebel. *The Confessions* begins with the "Judgment Day" when Nat receives the sentence, and works back by way of "Voices, Dreams, Recollections" to the "Old Times Past" of Nat's childhood, adolescence and early manhood, collecting in the course of it the seeds of revolt. The Third Part "Study War" is the massacre where the pent-up rage of the slave is made to explode. The last Part, "It is Done...." leads the events to the moment of Nat's execution, where he quickly realizes that he is going to be one with the Lord.

These events of the story are woven into a form by the thread of Nat's imagination and are suspended on the poles of the "Author's Note" on one end and an excerpt from Drewry's thesis on *The Southampton* Insurrection on the other. It is only at these poles that the author intervenes personally in *The Confessions*, while the narrative itself is conducted in terms of the monologuist's own tone of voice.

The occasion for *The Confessions*, is a vividly conceived dramatic situation where a highly individualistic and self-conscious Negro with natural intellectual and spiritual gifts is made to unscroll his mind on the eve of his execution to a white racist who insists that Negroes are incapable of revolution and faith, and are denied redemption. Nat grows up under the tutelage of a kind master who promises him eventual freedom. This mirage, implanted in the mind quite early in his life, cuts him off from his brethern and makes him somewhat of a prig. Nat gloats on his distinctive role until suddenly, the bubble of freedom bursts and he is thrown into the hands of a brutal master and eternal bondage. In this break-down of the rising expectations, Nat comprehends the true nature of his enforced isolation, he is cut off from whites and blacks alike, and conceives his plan for a revolt which would be both direct and violent. The fact that Nat would finally be put in the custody of a decent master would

have no effect on his resolution: on the other hand, it would only intensify his sense of loss and drive him quicklier to the deed.

The central *motif* for Nat's insurrection should be sought in this loss of the promised freedom by his first owner, and Nat's conviction that the loss has been occasioned by his master's betrayal:

> ....as I lay slumped in the crowded, noisy pen with fifty strange Negroes, I experienced a kind of disbelief which verged close upon the madness, then a sense of betrayal, then fury....then finally....hatred.... Nor was it hatred for the Reverend Eppes—who was really nothing but a simple old fool—but for Marse Samuel, and the rage rose and rose in my breast until I earnestly wished him dead, and in my mind's eye I saw him strangled by my own hands.[25]

Nat rebels because he is denied the life of a decent human being, having been told what it is like to be a decent human being. The insurrection is a part of the initial enlightenment he has received, and if something happens that would drive him back to the life of the bondsman, he must bend every effort to resist the regression.

What good does the insurrection accomplish? Nat has the lawyer Gray answer the question for him. " It got you a pissyassed record of total futility, the likes of which are hard to equal,"[26] and harsher repressive laws for the slaves. Nat has led the revolt precisely because of his education and intelligence. But he also knows that the revolt itself is doomed to failure because he could only expect pity from the whites and envy and contempt from his fellow slaves. His insurrection should remain a one man affair in spite of the organized revenge of his fellow conspirators, because their intelligence and imagination are too blunt to enable them to comprehend his motives in organizing the insurrection. For the whites, he is less than a Man in spite of his intellect, and they can patronize him only if he remains *in his place*. There is thus but one ending to the novel, that the insurrection must fail, that it must end in Tragedy.

Just as Nat believes that he is carrying out the Lord's bidding in staging his insurrection, he asserts that the Lord has even asked him to confess; " The Lord said; *Confess, that*

all the nations may know, confess, that the acts may be known to all men."[27] After a youthful homosexual experience Nat turns an ascetic, and often practises fasts and penance to purify his anguished soul. Obsessed as he is with religion, for Nat this experience serves as a "symbol of communion with all his black brothers",[28] and he resolves to aviod all such fleshly feelings and consecrate himself to God's service. It is this urge to control his physical desire that makes Nat view Margaret with ironic detachment while she holds out the temptation of lust for him. He would have to come to grips with his predicament and not waste his energies in lust for nameless white girls. Sex would come in the way of his resolution to wage a war, it would hinder the progress of the revolution. Having thus taken on him the messianic talks of liberating the Negro slaves, Nat has not got anything to conceal any more.

The spirit of the Lord drives Nat on to *confess*, to *meditate* and not to *explain out*, or *dramatize* his experiences. Nat is thinking, ruminating on his predicament, and in spite of the implied presence of Gray, speaks as though he were trying to understand and reveal facts to himself. This 'thinking aloud' in itself, under the circumstances of Nat, has a boldly wrought dramatic impact, and the present tense at the opening and close of the novel purports the language to be clearly that of Nat, meant to himself and not to any one else, and intensifies the tension of the utterance. As the monologue proceeds, Nat's mind wades through innumerable experiences that come up to his mind in a jostle, and he shifts the tense with the shift in the occasion. The tone of a large part of the *Confessions*, however, is that of the speaker musing over his private predicament, reminiscing, justifying, accepting, excusing, Nat has actually different languages for different people and occasions, he even imitates the voices of others, though he also has what might be called his own language. It is the reader's awareness of the differences in not only Nat's language for different people and occasions, but in his own language as he thinks or remembers or accepts or excuses that is essential to the form and meaning of the *Confessions*. Nat is a self-conscious actor, and is out to present a point of view. Like the actor, he also knows that he must change his stance for the occasion if only to ultimately drive his view point with greater force. Towards the end of the second part as Nat tells his new master Moore that "I'm hungry," he is hit in the neck by the whip like a firesnake which sends him "afloat outside myself on a reddish cloud of pain".

Nat submits, his pride and arrogance yielding suddenly to the pain;

> Mastah! I cried in terror. Mastah! Mastah! Mastah![29]

However, not all the *Confessions* is intensively wrought drama. While the narrative holds on to the reader's imagination throughout wherever there are scenes of tension, important dramatic encounters, like when Nat discovers that he has been hijacked by Eppes to More, his exhorting his lieutenents to slaughter, the scene of Margaret's murder, etc., there is at times a digression into irrelevant nature descriptions and sociological speculations. It is at these places that we feel that the character is slipping out of the hands of the writer, developing into a parallel force, as the authorial personality against the personality of the character. The speculative digression at the beginning of the Third Part on the reasons for a Negro revolt speaks more for the author's point of view, and does not sound as if it is emerging from the Negro consciousness. In fact the opening " Author's Note " and, particularly, the excerpt from Drewry's thesis telling us how Nat was skinned and made a purse of after the execution, far from adding historical detail to Nat Turner's life, superimposes a narrative structure on the monologue which, instead of elevating, lessens its dramatic tension.

In addition to the nature of the character what invests Nat's speech with a complexity of psychological interest is the language itself. If we for once forget the historicity of the character of Nat, and view him as a stage creation, we find him using language with great deliberation, as a gesture to signify the inner motions of his mind. His speech modulations range from elaborate discursive ruminations to the battered syntax of emotional upsurge, and its thick imagistic quality and metaphorical turnings transport us into the personality of the speaker. We almost believe in Nat, in his revolt and suffer with him, both physically and emotionally.

However, in spite of the character personality and the emotive force of Nat's language, *The Confessions* leaves an incomplete effect in our minds. Nat does not sound convincing when he offers explanations as to why he chooses the path of vengeance and yet does not kill more than once himself. His character gets dented and does not rise to heroic heights. Or, Nat's message that the Negro has every

right to kill *all* whites for the atrocities perpetrated on him might smack of rank sentimentalism. In fact, the response of *Ten Black Writers* to Styron's *Nat* is that it has failed to view the slave mind with the black's eye. For them, the leader of the slave rebellion is presented as a frustrated semi-religious visionary, unable either to rape or kill and without a heroic, revolutionary zeal.[30] Thematically, even if we ignore that Nat was a historical figure, the motivation for Nat's behaviour does not seem very convincing, and towards the end of the book, we are left wondering whether Nat was not just suffering from repressed sexuality or whether all his rebellion was not the outcome of his unrequited craze for white women.

It is this lack of proper dramatic motivation that comes in our way of the appreciation of Nat's language too, particularly outside the range of the scenes of tension. For instance, the generalizations on Negro psychology presented through the Negro view point, without a contextual strength, as the following, sound inadequate and banal Nat's condescending tone when he speaks of the whites tends one to think that Styron is deliberately struggling to present the Negro view point. Besides, as Sheed has pointed out, there is a recourse to the Victorian stylistic devices in setting the scene or opening a speech or a conversation like, " For many years it had been my habit.... ", " It was plain now that the sight of the dying child had caused even his adamantine heart to be smitten by guilt,"and such others which " lend an artificiality to the whole enterprise."[31]

> A Negro's most cherished possession is the drab, neutral cloak of anonymity he can manage to gather around himself, allowing him to merge faceless and nameless with the common swarm....[32]

Styron has rightly denied that there has been any systematic attempt on his part to present Nat in the Christ image.[33] In some external features like his age, the trade, the trip to Jerusalem, the accidental puncturing of his hand with a drill, Nat might conform to the Christ figure, but this resemblance cannot be pressed too far. Nat is an angel of vengeance, though feeble, and his obsession with religion is the outcome of his rebellion's pride generated out of frustrated hopes and does not form the fiery crux of his existence.

On the whole Styron's *Confessions* may be said to be an effective organization of the memories of Nat himself within

the framework of a one-man speech. The central theme of the novel, illuminating as it does the inner world of Nat, is the unifying force which underlies the divergent experiences of the character. However, the loose ends, in my opinion, result from a lack of proper understanding of the Negro personality which in turn make for inadequate motivation for the character behaviour.

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2. Louis D. Rubin, "William Styron and Human Bondage: *The Confessions of Nat Turner*", *The Hollins Critic* (Dec. 1967), 1-12

3. *ibid.*, p. 12

4. Ernest Kaiser, "The Failure of William Styron" in *William Styron's Nat Turner: Ten Black Writers Respond*, ed. by J.H. Clarke, p.55

5. Richard Gilman, "Nat Turner Revisited," *The New Republic* (April 27, 1968), 23-26, 28, 32.

6. Kaiser, *op.cit.*, p. 65.

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8. Roy Arthur Swanson, "William Styron's Clown Show" in *William Styron's The Confessions of Nat Turner* (Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1970), pp. 149-164.

9. Melvin J. Friedman, "*The Confessions of Nat Turner*: The Convergence of 'Nonfictional Novel: and 'Meditation on History'," *Journal of Popular Culture* (Fall, 1967), 166-74.

10. Styron quoted in "Slavery in the First Person," R.W.B. Lewis and C. Vann Woodward, *Yale Alumni Magazine* (November, 1967), 33-39.

11. *Ibid.*, p.35. Also, see, George Plimptox, "William Styron: A shared Ordeal," *The New York Times* (October 8, 1967), 2,3,30,32,34.

12. "Slavery in the First Person," *op.cit.*, p. 34.

13. *The Confessions of Nat Turner* (Random House, 1967). All textual references are from this edition.

14. "Slavery in the First Person," *op.cit.*, p. 35.

15. "William Styron: A Shared Ordeal," *op. ct.*, p. 2.

16. William Styron, "This Quiet Dust," *Harper's* (April 1965) 135-146.

17. "William Styron: A Shared Ordeal," *op. cit.*, p. 2.

18. *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

19. Melvin J. Friedman, *op. cit.*

20. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

21. *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

22. Herbert Aptheker, "A Note on the History," *The Nation* (October 16, 1967), 375-376.

23. *Ibid.*

24. Raymond A. Sokolov, "Into the Mind of Nat Turner," *Newsweek* (October 16, 1967), 65-69.

25. Pp. 246-247.

26. P. 112.

27. P. 15.

28. Robert H. Fossum, *William Styron* (William B. Eerdmans, 1968), p. 38.

29. P. 252.

30. See, Jimmie L. Franklin, "*Nat Turner* and Black History," *Indian Journal of American Studies*, Vol. I, No. 4 (November 1971), 1-6.

31. P. 65.

32. *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

33. "Slavery in the First Person," *op. cit.*, p. 36.

D. H. LAWRENCE'S *THE RAINBOW:* A NOTE ON THE CONTEXTUALITY OF THE SYMBOL

BY

RADHE SHYAM SHARMA

No part of *The Rainbow* has provoked more controversy than the concluding one. Criticism of *The Rainbow* has surprisingly remained centred upon the relevance or irrelevance of the last part. Most critics from Leavis onwards have found it rather arbitrary and inorganically imposed on the novel. Thus, Leavis felt that there were signs of " too great a tentativeness in the development and organisation of the later part, signs of a growing sense in the writer of an absence of any conclusion in view ".[1] He also found in " The Rainbow ", a note " wholly unprepared and unsupported, defying the preceding pages"[2]. Graham Hough had the same reaction. According to Hough the rainbow vision " is quite insufficiently based, nothing in the book up to now has led up to it ".[3] Goldberg in a recent study of the novel speaks of the " emotional falsity of the last few pages " and holds the end to be a " culminating weakness " more than " stylistic " and more than " local ".[4]

The failure of criticism to find the relevance of the rainbow Symbol in the total structure of the novel has been a failure of perspective. The theme of the novel is to find out the meaning of transcendence in the day-to-day existence of humanity. This quest for meaning in Lawrence fiction is invariably associated with symbols of transcendence, which are both human and non-human. It is in relation to these symbols of transcendence that the characters of Lawrence find their meaning in existence.

Society is constituted of the failures and successes of individual lives. Reality, thus, is a phenomenon of human existence relative to the variety and multiplicity of the selves that constitute it. The progress of existence is both vertical and horizontal. Societies move vertically in the evolution of new symbols and horizontally in the pure physical extension of families.

Critics like Mudrick who have found the novel " unduly repetitive " fail to locate the two dimensions of the novel.

According to Mudrick the " central fact of human existence " in *The Rainbow* is the " relationship between husband and wife " and the " living nucleus of this relationship is the act of sexual union ".[5]

It is natural for Mudrick to find the novel repetitive, for he misses the central point of the novel in the beginning of his argument itself. He, like the other critics, fails to take into account that what Lawrence was trying to explore in *The Rainbow* was not the fact of sexual union alone or the quality of experience. More than that, he was trying to suggest how the quality of experience changed with a change in the symbols of transcendence.

The Brangwen family is extended to three generations to emphasize the point that it is the symbols of transcendence which ultimately determine the magnitude or meaning of life. Through repetitive phases the same kind of experience is portrayed, but the quality of experience in its relations to symbols of transcendence is shown to have altered in each new generation.

Lawrence, however, does not completely shift his focus on the theme of transcendence and keeps it centered upon human experience. This saves the novel from becoming an allegory or a fantasy. He maintains that the physical bases of existence remain the same. Society continues to be stable in its roots, its blood-relationships, but its content varies with each variation in its symbols of transcendence, symbolized by the varying hues of the rainbow. The ethnological bases of society remain the same, like the rainbow arch, marked by the rhythms of nature and the cycle of death and life, but the hues of the arch keep changing.

Rainbow, is, therefore, conceived as a symbol of change in permanence, of flux in stability, of moment in eternity, of meaning in an apparently chaotic existence. The changing hues of the rainbow symbolize the changing layers of human consciousness. The rainbow is, thus, organically linked with the thematic and symbolic structure of the novel. It is not arbitrary or hastily executed as some critics would like us to conclude, for the whole action of the novel centres round the symbols which mark an intrusion of the unknown in the common human existence. It is, therefore, natural that the novel should have concluded at a symbol which would

relate the two dimension of existence set in the very beginning of the novel.

Apart from this it is quite possible that in conceiving rainbow as a symbol of transcendence in the eternity of phenomena, Lawrence was influenced by Jung and his study of the Cauda Pavonis and the significance of colours. In Jung's analysis the rainbow is the symbol of an " achieved synthesis ", the colours signifying the various aspects of transformation and the approaching birth of a new personality.[6] Perhaps Lawrence was trying to communicate some such insights as Jung associated with the rainbow as a symbol:

> Only the Gods can pass over the rainbow bridge: mortal men must stick to the earth and are subject to its laws. In the light of the possibilities revealed by intuition, man's earthliness is certainly a lamentable imperfection, but this very imperfection is part of his innate being, of his reality. He is compounded not only of his best intuition, his highest ideals and aspirations, but also of the odious conditions of his existence, such as heredity and the indeliable memories that shout after him; " you did it and that what you are!"[7]

There is further evidence that in the acceptance of the rainbow as a symbol Lawrence was greatly influenced by contemporary anthropological and psychological studies. It is quite likely that Lawrence, who was a voracious reader of anthropological and psychological literature, had read about the rainbow riddles in various mythologies.[8] In Norse mythology, the rainbow is described as a bridge constructed by God.

Thus, in his account of Gods, Snorre the historian refers to the story of " The Wanderer and The Three High ones ";

> " Then " said the Wanderer; " Where is the road from earth to heaven? " The High-one answered, slightly smiling; " That is no wise question. Have you never been told that the Gods built a bridge to heaven from earth, and its name is Bifrost, and you are sure to have seen it, but may be you will call it the rainbow. It has three colours, is built with cunning craft and is exceedingly strong, and yet it will be broken at the end of the world.[9]

Christiansen records several Scandinavian riddles which use rainbow as a metaphor.

It is perhaps appropriate to conclude that Lawrence had been influenced by his anthropological studies to reincorporate the rainbow symbol as a part of his new myth. Even the contemporary psychological interpretations of the rainbow as a symbol reinforce our hypothesis. Thus, in the interpretation of the Prentice Jones series of dreams where the rainbow occurs, Adler interprets the rainbow in the following terms:

> The Rainbow is a symbol of hope and divine grace; it originates outside human consciousness, it gives answer to the great question there is a meaning, in the transpersonal sphere. The phase of the great flood has come to an end, there is a covenant between man and God, between ego and as it were "trans ego". When the passion of the ego has burnt itself out to its logical end, the new answer of the self rises in the transpersonal sphere, it is the phoenix rising from the ashes.[10]

Apart from this, in Christianity, seven rays of the rainbow have been associated with the holy spirit's seven gifts, fourfold nature of man's perfection, body, mind, soul and spirit, and the three fold nature of trinity. In Jewish scripture it is associated with the covenant of God with man. Similarly, in Greek mythology it is associated with Iris the messenger of Gods.[11]

Dorothy Brett points out how Lawrence himself conceived the rainbow to be a symbol of eternity in the flux of time:

> It (rainbow) is meeting half-way of two elements. The meeting of the sun and the water produce, at exactly the right place and moment, the rainbow. So it is in everyhing, and that is eternal....the Nirvana....just that moment of the meeting of two elements. No one person could reach it alone without that meeting.[12]

The biblical, social and symbolic structures of the novel are synthesized and harmonized in the symbol of the rainbow. Had the novel ended on any other note the narratives would

have suffered substantially, for it is the rainbow which correlates the three structures and points to the 'direction of meaning' in the novel.

Rainbow embodies faith, renewal and hope, and thus, is essential for the unity of the thematic structures of the novel. If we put the novel in this perspective, we will find everything in the novel leading to the rainbow. However, what makes *The Rainbow* a unique work of art is the fact that though the action of the novel touches mythic dimensions, its context constantly remains human and social. It is this unique quality of the novel which makes it one of the profoundest works of art of our times.

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1. F.R. Leavis, *D.H.Lawrence: Novelist*, p. 172.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 170.
3. Graham Hough, *The Dark Sun*, p. 71.
4. S.L. Goldberg, "The Rainbow: Fiddle Bow And Sand", *Essays in Criticism* (Oct. 1961), pp. 426-427.
5. Marvin Mudrick, "The Originality of *The Rainbow*" in *A.D.H. Lawrence Miscellany*, ed. Harry T. Moore, *op. cit*, p. 61.
6. See for this aspect of Jung's analysis, Gerhard Adler, *The Living Symbol*, pp. 358 and 376.
7. C.G. Jung, *The Collected Works of Jung*, "Psychology and Alchemy", (London, 1953), Vol. XII, p. 109.
8. See for the rainbow riddles and related account, Reidar Th. Christiansen "Myth, Metaphor, And Symbol" *Myth: A Symposium*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok, pp. 64-81.
9. *Ibid.*
10. Gerhard Adler, *The Living Symbol*, p. 343.
11. Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore, And Symbols* (New York: 1961), p. 1319.
12. Dorothy Brett, *Lawrence and Brett, A Friendship* (Philadelphia, 1933), p. 267.

THE COMIC DIMENSION IN *THE ALEXANDRIA QUARTET*

BY

BALA KOTHANDARAMAN

Lawrence Durrell's tetralogy *The Alexandria Quartet* is a work of art of enduring significance, offering perennial scope for fresh and valid critical exegesis. The theme (" an investigation of modern love ", as the preface puts it), the structure (based on the Relativity Proposition), and the role played by Alexandria generally come in for critical praise or disparagement.

The comic element in the *Quartet* has hardly received the attention it deserves. Commentators on these novels mention, enpassant, that Scobie is the most outstanding comic creation after Dickens's creatures in English literature. Actually, the comic element goes deeper into the fabric of the work than a surface presentation of a few eccentric or humorous characters (such as Scobie or Pombal), and of laughable episodes and situations (such as Scobie's stories or Pombal's gaffes.)

Stanley Eskin, at the end of a discussion on Durrell's themes in the *Quartet*, points out the distortion caused by the usual serious, intellectual approach to the novels in its overlooking of the " vital comic dimension."[1] He describes this comic note as " a modernistic Rabelaisian element which reverberates most fully in harmony or in counterpoint with the serious intentions of the work." G.S. Fraser calls the *Quartet* " a lyrical romantic comedy in which the working-through of the life-force, the It, is celebrated in its very absurdity."[2] Love, adds Fraser, is a means whereby the It works itself out, but the working-out leaves, along with the joy of fulfilment, a taste of sadness.

While agreeing with this view up to a point (the first part is too simplistic in its sweeping generality, but the joy-cum-sadness aspect indicates the ironic perception of life which is a part of Durrell's comic vision), I should like to explore the comic dimension of the *Quartet* and hope to show that it is an integral part of the theme and structure of the work.

The term " comic dimension " is specifically used here as being adequately meaningful to describe the comic element in the *Quartet*. The novel is obviously not a comedy in the generic sense of the term: but only in its widest—namely, a concern with life and fulfilment, sympathetic (not cruel) laughter at failures, and unexpected happy endings following threatened death. Nor is it really a " lyrical romantic comedy " (see Fraser, above), although it has elements of the lyrical (the subjective reflective consciousness, the poetic descriptions, etc.); of the romantic and the Romantic as well as of " romantic comedy " in the Shakespearean sense, (Such as, e.g., the psychical growth of the main characters through their experience of love, through the perception that romantic love is an illusion: and the women educating the men in the correct intuitive approach to life).

The unmistakable comic spirit that hovers over the *Quartet* is, again, not the Meredithian which appeals to the mind, has the correction of folly as its aim, and recognises " no appurtenance of the sensuous, of sentimentality, of naturalistic defeat, of material accident, of waggish impertinent wit " as a Meredith critic has put it.

Durrell's comic spirit recognises these appurtenances —and hence becomes the weapon against disintegration and defeatism within his protagonists' minds (e.g. Pursewarden, Darley, or the desperate Balthazar of the earlier part of *Clea*). This is what saves the *Quartet* from becoming an out-and-out tragedy, particularly when its overall theme, the quest for self-identification in a world where acknowledged values have been lost, gives it tragic overtones.

The perception of this duality in human nature, viewed with the benevolent irony of the " appurtenances " mentioned above, gives rise to an artistic detachment which lends balance and proportion to the over-all view of life. Such a view makes the comic perspective necessary in a comprehensive response to life. This is why the comic spirit in the *Quartet* has been referred to as the " comic dimension ": thematically, it is one of the planes of the cosmos of the tetralogy; structure-wise, it subscribes to the structural motif of irony.

All this might suggest that the comic dimension in the *Quartet* is something esoteric. Actually, the spectrum is very wide and ranges from some downright earthy fun at one

end to an aesthetically satisfying comic vision at the other. Durrell himself has an exuberant sense of fun—" he could laugh," to quote his friend Henry Miller, " as no man has a right to laugh in a world so sick and troubled." " His special note," says Gerald Sykes, " is youthful and rebellious: even at times, as in his anti-diplomacy satires,[3] uproariously farcical."[4] Durrell feels happy to have settled in France where he is a " Camembert "; in England, with every one " worried to death about moral uplift and moral downfall," the artist feels an isolated figure, whereas on the Continent " one feels on a par with a good or bad cheese—the attitude to art of a Frenchman is the attitude to what is viable—eatable, so to speak."[5]

Pursewarden appears to be Durrell's spokesman in the *Quartet* against the " English death ". He generally sounds polemical when he holds forth on love and art, but Durrell has put in some light touches. Following Justine into a dark building overrun by immense rats, Pursewarden says he prayed silently; " Please God, remember that even though I am an English poet I do not deserve to be eaten by rats." (*Clea*, 138)[6]

Though the notable quality of Durrell's style is its over-blown richness, there are many tightly-packed, telling lines like this one bringing out a character or situation with great subtlety. When Father Paul comes to console Pombal on the death of Fosca, Darley describes the priest as " never to be found far from the centre of any scandal. He paused inside the doorway with an air of unction, with his features composed around an air of gluttonous self-satisfaction " (*C*, 208). Balthazar, before his " rehabilitation party ", has one problem—" Shall I leave my hair as it is? I look about two hundred and seventy when it isn't dyed." (*C*, 66) Leila recognises in her daughter-in-law Justine a kindred spirit, and so fears her. She plies Justine with crystallized violets, confectionery they both loath, and Balthazar comments, " I was delighted to be able to see women at their most primitive like this." (*B*, 91)

All through the *Quartet*, Durrell displays the comic writer's knack for observation in his character-sketches of both minor and major characters. Pombal and Pursewarden, who share a flat, and whose conversation is full of friendly insults at each other, take special delight in " adventuring

freely in each other's languages, rejoicing like school boys in the mistakes which cropped up among their conversations." (*M*, 140) Pombal, for instance, looks at his watch and exclaims " I am going to be retarded again " (He means, of course, " late again ").

Pombal is an official at the French Embassy. Some of Durrell's best satiric touches are directed against the diplomatic life, particularly the British. Mountolive finds himself posted in Prague after a refresher course in Arabic—the only consolation was that the others in the Chancery knew as little about the politics and language of the country; there were two Japanese experts and three specialists in Latin American affairs. (*M*, 37) There are digs at the " Portentous circumlocutions " of official English. Pursewarden describes the Errols (he is Head of Chancery at the Embassy in Egypt) as " formidably Britannic. They are, for example, *both* economists. Why *both*, I ask myself ? One of them must feel permanently redundant. They make love to two places of decimals. Their children have all the air of vulgar fractions! " (*M*, 87). Maskelyne, the Brigadier, " at some time in the distant past....had been wound up and set like a quartz clock. He will run his course unfaltering as a metronome " (*C*, 98).

To come back to Pombal—this fat, hard-drinking, womanising diplomat, always getting into scrapes and so losing his chance of achieving " crucifixion " (his term for promotion) is a fairly stock comic character, a type of the incorrigible rake. Uninhibitedly French, he fits in with the " animalism " of Alexandria, though he feels it lacks " finesse ". Daley, who shares a flat with him, rarely sees the same " visitor " come twice. Pombal is, however, a basically good-hearted type—finding, for instance, some kind of a job for many of these girls.

For Pombal, the " tiresome tread of protocol and entertainment " is full of exotic charm—the secret of his success, Darley thinks, is due to his " tremendous idleness, which almost approaches the supernatural " (*J*, 11). He dresses up as a washerwoman at the Carnival, in order to accost Pordre his superior, and get his own back on the latter. At one stage, Darley notices him enjoying himself (*B*, 197), but by the end of the festivities, Pombal is in hot waters; the pin from his hat was the weapon which killed Toto de Brunel,

and the Deuxieme think him responsible for murdering one of their trusted agents. Darley finds Pombal in hysterical tears and laughter at the flat, banging his head rhythmically on the wall, shouting " Merde, Merde " . . . . (*B*, 209).

Only the day before the Carnival, he had got into his third scandal of the month—one of the most hilarious episodes in the book. He takes Sveva, one of his more determined " partners " to a quiet spot on the lake to break off with her. Sveva starts hurling rocks at Pombal's car, damaging it, and at Pombal, screaming " Amour, Amour "—" I never want to hear the word again ": She throws herself in to the water, Pombal jumps after her, and a policeman rescues them. (*B*, 171). After every gaffe, Pombal takes refuge in his gout chair, an old-fashioned high-backed, red velveteen chair, putting up his wadded leg on a footstool.

Pombal achieves " crucifixion " to Rome at the end of *Justine*. In *Clea*, he is back in Alexandria, and a changed man keeping strictly faithful to his new love, Fosca. But Fosca dies, leaving Pombal distracted. However, at the end of *Clea*, he is back in France—and as incorrigible a rake as ever.

Scobie is a richer comic figure. An old (over seventy years of age) seaman, he still imagines himself physically fit and tries to maintain a touching dignity despite his exiguous condition. A tiny pension and a small salary as Bimbashi in the Egyptian police Force hardly keep body and soul together. A queer figure to look at—" physically he has drawn heavily on the replacement department " (broken jaw, ill-fitting dentures, one glass eye, etc.), he all the same commands the affections of those around him—particularly his Arab neighbours in Tatwig Street. He has a fund of enthralling stories for his listeners, mainly about his friends Tony Mannering, the son of an M.P., (who influenced Scobie's conversion to Roman Catholicism), and Budgie " who is made out to be some kind of an inventive genius. Scobie attempts to practise one of Tony's " inventions "—an inexpensive Mock Whisky, an astrocious concoction he brews in an old iron bath-tub.

It would be impossible to summarize the long—and often tall—stories told by Scobie in his own inimitable style, with his outdated slang, and retain their peculiar flavour.

The highlight of his career is when he is made head of the Secret Service (*J*, 138), and he asks Darley to aid him in cracking the 'code' of the "boustrephedon" used by Balthazar's Cabal. How seriously he takes his duties makes amusing reading. One point over which he gets into disagreements with his Arab friends is his objection to circumcision—particularly when he is ready to use his police authority try to stop them.

Scobie's downfall, as he himself ruefully feels it would be, is what he refers to as his "tendencies" to transvestism, coming over him at the full moon. He dies, dressed as a woman, kicked to death by the ratings of a ship, and his friends Balthazar and Nimrod hush up the scandal.

But death gives him a new dimension—in a short time his Arab friends venerate him as a saint "El Scob." Even while alive, there is something legendary about him—"origins he has none—his past proliferates through a dozen continents like a true subject of myth" (*J*, 106). With the proverbial parrot (wich can recite the Koran, and swear obscenities), and his fund of stories, he is a combination, a benevolent pirate-cum-Ancient Mariner. His 'Tendencies' and his occasional gift for prophecy (he foretells Clea's experience with Amaril in Syria) recall the mythical figure of Tiresias. Durrell's gift for mythopoesis and comic irony are excellently blended in the canonisation of Scobie. He is believed to help barren women and impotent men: the notorious bath-tub becomes the receptacle for placing offerings: he has a shrine to himself, and a priest (the same Abdul whom he had helped out in *Balthazar*, now an appropriately aged and hunched devotee), as well as a name-day, his 'Mulid', which is celebrated with the legendary fervour of Alexandria and to which Durrell devotes one of his most highly polished set-pieces (*C*, 252 seq).

This thematic and structrual 'tour de force' enhances the comedy of Scobie into a comic dimension in the *Quartet*. Durrell, while making full use of the variety of myths which are a part of Alexandria, creates one himself, and provides an ironic commentary on the ease with which legends can be created in the El Yacoub-El-Scob transformation when the atmosphere is conducive to a willing suspension of disbelief. Scobie lives on for his more sceptical friends in Clea's gift for mimicry—this "holy fool" as G.S. Fraser calls him-who combines childish innocence with sexual kinkiness, ineptness and degradation with an idea of the holy.

Most of the comic elements in the *Quartet* are, in fact, blended with some other aspect of thematic or structural significance, thus giving a comic dimension to the tetralogy. The novels abound in stories which have a touch of the lurid, the macabre,[7] the grotesque, tinged with humour, what Carl Bode calls Durrell's " lovely low-comedy sense of the grotesque." Mountolive's escape into the Arab quarters disguised in dark glasses and a ' tarbush ' after his final break with Leila ending with the lurid adventure in the child-brothel (*M*, 259 seq.), is a symbolic cathartic release for him both from himself—his life of discipline and restraint—and from his bondage to a lost image of Leila. Pursewarden's macabre story of his friendship with an Italian poet haunted by a vampire (*B*, 190-3), appropriate in the atmosphere of the Carnival, ends on an ironic note typical of him: " Of course it's true," Pursewarden tells the astonished Narouz, and adds; " I have never been in Venice in my life. "

The instances could be multiplied, but this statement by Pursewarden brings into focus the vital basis of the comic dimension of the *Quartet* which is, paradoxically enough, its serious intent as well--the question of what is objective reality, and whether it does at all exist. The comic vision depicted in the *Quartet* suggests that irony, the perceptive understanding that arises out of a recognition of " la condition humaine " caught between illusion and reality, is the saving weapon against what could otherwise become tragic catastrophe.

This is worked out at various levels. With his public school background and his diplomatic training, Mountolive finds his life falling into a set pattern of restraint and self-deception. His " real life became a buried stream, flowing on undergound "—the cultural and spiritual side nurtured by Leila. But, ironically enough, when he finds the crises of the " realities " of his position unbearable—the suicide of Pursewarden revealing Nessim's complicity in the Palestinian plot so that he must necessarily act being the Ambassador, and also Leila's strange reluctance to meet him—he finds the aridities of his official duties and the social rounds a useful narcotic. He finds himself using the avuncular " dear boy " to his juniors, correcting and rephrasing their official drafts needlessly—items he had resented in his superiors when a young officer himself.

On the reflective level, the novel considers the many-faceted human predicament from " what can we say we

really know about man? That he is, when all is said and done, just a passage for liquids and solids, a pipe of flesh?" (*J*, 79), through the experience of loving and living, to smiling at serious things; "for those of us who feel deeply and who are at all conscious of the inextricable tangle of human thought there is only one response to be made—ironic tenderness and silence," (*J*, 30), as Darley puts it.

Balthazar, the philosopher and doctor, prides himself on his "ironic detachment" which helps him "conserve the powers of feelings which should by rights be directed towards those we love and which are wasted on those who die" (*B*, 166). And, watching Darley and Justine, he is glad that he has been "spared an undue interest in love. At least the invert escapes this fearful struggle to give oneself to another" (*J*, 82). Ironically enough, he makes a fool of himself over a worthless Greek actor, slashes his ugly hands, and it is the love and care of his friends which saves him and helps him overcome his sense of shame.

Pursewarden, Balthazar tells Darley, "is an ironist"—hence his equivocal air, his apparent frivolity, his sense of humour which separated him from the world—"where can a man who really thinks take refuge in the so-called real world without defending himself against stupidity by the constant exercise of equivocation?" (*B*, 102)

Pursewarden leaves John Keats, the newspaper reporter, absolutely baffled by his answers at an interview; "It is the duty of every patriot to hate his country creatively." About the Conference of the Arab Committee due to start that day, he comments; "When the English feel they are in the wrong their only course is to cant." To Keats's question, "Am I to understand that you are criticising British Policy?" Pursewarden replies, "Of course not. Our statemanship is impeccable." Asked whether he was planning to write a novel in Alexandria, he replies, "If I am denied every other means of self-gratification." (*B*, 101-2)

Earlier, in *Justine*, Pursewarden is seen through Darley's eyes as a novelist who has suddenly won wealth and fame, the secret of which, he tells Darley, "is sex and plenty of it" (*J*, 101). *Balthazar* presents a more appreciable figure, though somewhat enigmatic. The enigma remains through *Mountolive* and *Clea*, Pursewarden being another of the charac-

ters who acquire a greater significance after death—particularly for Darley in the process of his artistic growth. Pursewarden's death itself becomes an enigma, as the different facets he presents suggest different reasons for his suicide. Balthazar takes it " to have been an expression of contempt for the world, contempt for the conduct of the world " (*M*, 211). The officials in the Embassy see other reasons; Maskelyne and Errol think he killed himself out of shame after discovering Nessim's complicity in the Palestinian conspiracy (for Pursewarden had been opposing investigation of such a suspicion.) Pursewarden's suicide note to Mountolive mentions this aspect, and also adds that as he, Pursewarden, had warned his friend Nessim about the discovery of the plot, he was taking this way out in the " conflict between duty and affection " (Mountolive's phrase). The Darley of *Justine* thinks that the suicide was the usual dissatisfied artist's clichè of an end, but in *Clea* he learns of another reason from Liza. This is that Pursewarden removed himself from the scene so that Liza would be freed of their incestuous relationship (which had harmed his own marriage), because the " dark stranger " he had prophesied for Liza had arrived in the form of Mountolive. A hint about this is suggested in the straight narrative *Mountolive* (pg. 166) where Pursewarden is said to have been reading, on the morning of his suicide, a letter from Liza, with grave preoccupation. Liza also speaks of the guilt Pursewarden felt at their relationship, particularly after the death of their blind child.

" I was born under Jupiter, Hero of the Comic Mode! " Pursewarden says in his " Conversations with Brother Ass " (*C*, 133). In the course of this long, polemical harangue on the role of the artist, Pursewarden touches on the history of literature, sex, and religion, among other topics. Jesus, he holds, is a great Ironist, a comedian; " generations of mystagogues and pedants have lost the sense " (of the Beatitudes)—because " Truth disappears with the telling of it. It can only be conveyed, not stated; irony alone is the weapon for such a task " (*C*, 135). Pursewarden's own trilogy is called *God is a Humorist.* He agrees with Rabelais that the " best things to do with a great truth is to bury it in a mountain of follies where it can comfortably wait for the picks and shovels of the elect " (*C*, 133).

To Darley, apparently Pursewarden is one of the elect: that is the sum of the stunning effect the reading of Pursewar-

den's letters to Liza have on him (*C*, 166-7). He realises that he has done the image of Pursewarden an injustice, that Pursewarden's " Poetic or transcendental knowledge, somehow cancels out purely relative knowledge," that the " black humours," the irony of Pursewarden,[8] which he had found so wounding was " really tenderness turned inside out like a glove ". What Pursewarden was seeking was not " the logic of syllogism or the tide-marks of emotions, but the real essence of fact-finding, the *naked* truth, the *Inkling*. . . .the whole pointless Joke. Yes, Joke! " (*C*, 167). This, in turn, is that " if two or more explanations of a single human action are as good as each other then what does action mean but an illusion—a gesture made against the misty back-cloth of a reality made palpable by the delusive nature of human division merely? " (*C*, 167).

This statement connects up subtly with the irony implied in the artist's coming-of-age (in the case of Darley) writing down with trembling fingers " the four startlingly simple words, ' Once upon a time. . . .' (*C*, 275). The subtle irony lies in that this naive burst of creative genius follows the complex discussions off-and-on throughout the *Quartet* regarding a new " " classical form for our age " in literature based on the Relativity Theory. And also, because the *Quartet*, in the structure of the four books (the number could be increased as suggested by the Work-points at the end of *Clea*)[9] becomes a complex working-out of the many explanations of a set of human actions. It is a complex " roman à thèse ", in its discussion-cum-illustration of modern ideas on the diffusion of personality, the destruction of Time as a linear concept through the " Prisomsighted " narration, etc., and finally turns out to be a Kunsterroman with an apparently mystifying conclusion.

The comic dimension thus links up thematically and structurally with the concept of Art in the tetralogy. And as Art involves the question of the illusion and reality,[10] of life, of love, the city Alexandria and other elements in the *Quartet*, the comic dimension by implication becomes linked with all of them. It is, in other words, one of the vital planes of perception in the complex cosmology of the *Quartet*, and hence an integral part of the total work.

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1. In " *Texas Quarterly* ", Vol. V, No. 4, Winter 1962, pp. 59-62, Eskin quotes Kenneth Rexroth's consideration of Durrell's humour as the dominant element in the *Quartet*.

2. G. S. Fraser, *Lawrence Durrell: A Study*, Faber and Faber, London, 1968, p. 147.

3. A reference to Durrell's *Esprit de Corps Sauve qui peut* and *Stiff Upper Lip*.

4. Gerald Sykes: "One Vote for the Sun", in Harry T. Moore, ed. *The World of Lawrence Durell*," H. P. Dutton and Co., N.Y. 1964, p. 148.

5. Durrell, in an interview with "Paris Review", reprinted in *Writers at Work*, Second series, Seeker and Warburg, 1963, p. 221.

6. References to the text of the *Quartet* are to the Pocket Book, New York, edition: *Justine*, 1961; *Balthazar*, 1961; *Mountolive*, 1971; *Clea*, 1961; and will be denoted by initial and page number, thus: (*C*, 138).

7. *e.g.* the cruel trick Balthazar plays on the Randidi family—"another story of our pitiless city" (*M*, 212).

8. Pursewarden's nickname for Darley—"Lineaments of Gratified Desire," a play on Darley's initials. Darley is the "Brother Ass" of Pursewarden's "Conversations with Brother Ass."

9. Cf. author's Note to *Clea*: "I have sketched a number of possible ways of continuing to deploy these characters and situations in further instalments."

10. It is interesting to note that Durrell's keen sense of observation as a comic writer (as illustrated earlier in this paper) lends a touch of realism to the fictive world of the *Quartet* which is a complex construct of various kinds of reality and illusion.

FANTASY IN *THE FINANCIAL EXPERT*

BY

M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

I

One of the most significant features of the Indian milieu is its 'complacency in the face of apparent contradiction.' While Arthur Koestler characterises it as "indifference", E. M. Forster posits that the Indian mind has a penchant for "vague platitudes", for "arguments that lead nowhere.... with little idea of logic or facts". This view is echoed and reechoed—like the primeval "bou-oum" of the Marabar caves—by almost all those who find their encounter with India oscillating between amusement and annoyance. A recent affirmation in this regard carries the assumption a step further and regards the physical angularities as only an extension of innate spiritual dissentions.

> ....India's contrasts and contradictions did not end with the obvious, visible world. They were matched in the inner world....Contrast and contradiction, have penetrated deep into the Indian spirit, the Indian mind and soul, whether Hindu or Muslim, Sikh or Christian.[1]

Whether this is totally valid or not is a moot point. For, one can adduce equally weighty evidence to the contrary. John Wain, to cite a significant example, strikes a refreshing note of dissent and suggests that contrasts and contradictions are not peculiar to the Indian ethos alone:

> The one thing no average Western visitor ever fails to say on returning from an Eastern country is that it offers a continual series of....contrasts between old and new. Actually, I doubt whether the East is any different from the West in this respect....Because England, for instance, is tidier on the surface....it would be a mistake to assume that the historical picture is any less confused....The confusion isn't on the surface—but it's there. The Western psyche is just as bewildered, just as fragmented, as the Eastern could possibly be.[2]

Therefore, the jostling of the old and the new—the muted confrontation between tradition and modernity—is an invariable in our awareness as well as aesthetic and philosophic explication of contemporary cultural context.

While resolution of the conflict between tradition and modernity is an indispensable preliminary for meaningful, pragmatic action on the social and political level, it is curious that this very dichotomy functions as a significant, seminal source of aesthetic tension for the creative writer everywhere. For the Western consciousness the disintegration of traditional values is a fact of felt experience—*a fait accompli*—and its inroads have left indelible imprints on the literature of a whole century. In the Indian context, however, it has peculiar implications. Appreciation of these is necessary if the rhetoric of the Indian novel in English is to be meaningfully analysed. This is particularly crucial in regard to a novelist like R. K. Narayan whose apparent simplicity of texture and design traps us into critical platitudes.

While the Indian novelist in English shares with his Western counterpart the conflict between tradition and modernity,—with, of course, necessary variations dictated by the nuances of the cultural paterns concerned—he differs from him sharply in the divergent *use* he makes of this syndrome. The increasing tempo of industrialization results in the creation, inevitably, of a distinct urbanised milieu which is, at least apparently, at variance with the rural and the traditional. In the Indian context, it results in a continuing confrontation between the 'quietistic', essentially conservative mores and the modern modes of life and thought.

This confrontation is, admittedly, bewildering to the rational mind accustomed to neat patterns of logic and life. For the creative writer, however, it is a problem he cannot bypass or ignore. He has to resolve it aesthetically so that the confrontation is not allowed to affect the organic nature of his art. In short, even those writers who do not ostensibly concern themselves with this problem—who are not, to use William Walsh's phrase, "particularly contemporary" in their themes, such as, for instance, Narayan himself—have to reckon with this as an inextricable component of their aesthetic creation. To this extent, one can assume that the conflict moulds not only the thematic implications but also

the structural design. The tradition/modernity syndrome gives us a clue not only to the *content* of Indo-Anglian fiction but also to its possible aesthetic *modalities*. As David McCutchion has pointed out:

> The tension between past and present, between tradition and modernity gives the Indo-English novel its dominant moods: sadness and fantasy.[3]

But it has to be noted that these fictional alternatives—of nostalgia, fantasy and one can add, protest, as in the case of Mulk Raj Anand—are both predominant *moods* as well as aesthetic *modes* of theme and structure. From this perspective, if ' nostalgia ' may be taken as regret at the flux of time and the resultant sadness over an allegedly glorious past, we have this abundantly in several Indian novels in English the most illustrious being *The Serpent and the Rope*. Similarly, in writers such as Mulk Raj Anand, we find ' protest ' at social injustice—and by implication at traditional social structures—functioning almost as a mode of perception. While these two predominant moods are ultimately anti-aesthetic—the one could degenerate into smug, spiritual complacency and formlessness and the other into propaganda —it is only R. K. Narayan's novels which firmly anchor themselves to the basic syndrome of the novel as a *genre*: appearance and reality, since the predominant operative tool is fantasy. In short, fantasy is not only a good critical insight illumining Narayan's unique quality as a novelist, but also a viable conceptual tool which explains—together with " nostalgia " and " protest "—the enduring achievement of Indian fiction in English.

II

On the surface, it would appear almost absurd to regard fantasy as a possible mode to analyse the apparently placid world of Malgudi. Moreover, since Narayan's basic stance is realistic and his primary concern is anti-romantic, it would be particularly difficult to establish fantasy as a viable, operative mode of analysis. While many would concede that Narayan's novels depict child-like heroes (with infantile fantasies) in quest of self-fulfilment, the implications of their fantasies do not seem to have been noted in detail. For instance, it was David McCutchion who, probably for the first time, drew attention to this fact:

> Both R. K. Narayan and Sudhin Ghose delight in the fantastic for its own sake. They have the same avidity for the bizarre detail of ritual and ceremony, for superstition, folk legends, temple processions, and country melas. Both prefer child-like heroes, who see the world as larger than life, strange and wonderful.[4]

The delight in the fantastic is not, however, it seems to me, for its own sake but for the sake of a deep-rooted aesthetic use. Narayan himself pointed out the sources of a novel in the Indian *milieu:*

> ....villagers' lives are monotonous and sedentary, and there is no story awaiting in a village, the birth place of a good novel being half-way house between a static village and an anonymous industrial city.[5]

Therefore, the novelist has to have access to the real intentions behind individual and social behaviour. From this point of view, fantasy—both individual and racial—offers a clue to the vital springs of human behaviour in a given context. This is because, the sources of fantasy lie imbedded in the several layers of social and cultural milieu. Religion and family, for instance, deserve special scrutiny as powerful sources of myth and fantasy. "To be a good writer anywhere," as Narayan himself pointed out , "one must have roots both in religion and family...."[6]

Fantasy functions, therefore, as an aesthetic device to depict, decipher and probe hidden motives, submerged intentions and springs of individual and collective behaviour. This is particulraly relevant in the Indian context: the expectations of the average man roused by the persistent propaganda of the 'welfare state' remaining largely unfulfilled, fantasy, both social and political, functions as the inevitable escape-mechanism for individual fulfilment.

III

Of all the novels by R. K. Narayan, *The Financial Expert* is of crucial significance, from this perspective. This is rooted basically in the fact that in this novel fantasy is integrally linked to both theme and structure. Unlike other

novels where fantasy is muted and is merely tangential, in *The Financial Expert* it moulds the nature of the protagonist as well as the narrative design.

At this point it is necessary, however, to pinpoint the conceptual components of 'fantasy'. I have taken it to signify, simplistically and primarily, " wish-fulfilment at the imaginative or dream level "; or as the denotative refererent has it, it is " an imaginative sequence, especially one in which desires are fulfilled ". From this point of view, fantasy can be characterised as transformation of one's frustrations into triumphs at the imaginative level. It could also represent an extension into the world of imagination of one's longings propelled by an enlarged conception of self. Denied articulation and meaningful context, fantasy can assume the form of *vicarious ritualization and enjoyment.* Moreover, another significant component of fantasy—apart from wich-fulfilment,—is identification with the whim or pleasure of a moment. In this regard it is " a form of creative imaginative activity, where the images and trains of imagery are directed and controlled by the whim or pleasure of the moment.".[7]

Against this background, the rise and fall of Margayya, the financial expert, is explicable in terms of the nascent growth and eventual, inevitable dissolution of his fantasies: though one should not automatically correlate dissolution of fantasies with destruction of the self—particularly is the case of an irrepressible character like Margayya. However, Margayya's fantasies are not the adolescent, sophomoric dreams of a bachelor of arts like Chandran, nor are they the romantic yearnings of some one like Ramani. The complexity of his fantasies—in regard to money, himself and his son—is rooted in his constant endeavour to redefine his self. One of the clues to his character is to be found in what one may style the assumption of a chosen self. This explains his anxiety—almost neurotic—to efface all antecedents, parental and familial. He has a mortal fear of anyone discovering the fact that his ancestors were pall-bearers because it tends to neutralise his assumption of a new self stemming from his fantasies. In fact, the assumption of a new name—a new identity—is symbolic of the desire for a new self shorn of all its earlier constricting elements chief of which is the dread of some one discovering his antecedents. He becomes acutely conscious of this when he searches for a suitable alliance for his son:

> He had never thought that anyone of consequence would care to ally with his family. There was a family secret about his caste which stirred uneasily at the back of his mind. Though he and the rest were supposed to be of good caste now, if matters were pried into deeply enough they would find that his father's grand-father and his brothers maintained themselves as corpse-bearers.[8]

From this point of view, Margayya's dread of a dead body on the pavement (pp. 22-23) is rooted as much in the typical Indian revulsion to the ritualistic impurity associated with a corpse as in the reluctance to be reminded,even momentarily, of his pall-bearing ancestry.

This draws attention to the basic components of Margaayya's fantasties–and by implication,–to the main assumptions behind the redefinition of his self. Central to this redefinition is Margayya's concepttion of himself as a financial saviour. Narayan's descriptions in this regard are highly suggestive: Margayya regards himself as " a sort of money doctor who would help people to use their money properly with the respect due to it ". (p. 101). Similarly, he is a " financial mystic " dedicated to the self-chosen mission of educating people in the great significance of money since they "don't know how to tend it, how to manure it, how to water it, how to make it grow and when to pluck its flowers and when to pluck its fruits."[9] In short, his constant awareness of ' a scheme ', ' an idea ' which would " revolutionize the life of his fellow men ", which would " place him among the elect in society", and " make people flock to him and look to him for guidance, advice and management ", (p. 102), is matched only by the less elaborately drawn and yet unmistakeably suggested fantasies of Dr. Pal and " the Lord of the House of Englightenment". While Dr. Pal is a self-proclaimed messiah dedicated to lead erring humanity to the haven of domestic harmony, the Lord of the " House of Enlightenment " has a comparable mission:

> It's my mission in life to inform at least ten mortals about Death each day and educate them. People must learn to view death calmly.[10]

It is a significant clue to the pervasive role of fantasy in the novel that while Margayya, " the Lord of Uncounted Lakhs ", as Sastri his clerk describes him, has fantasies, he does not

lose his grip on reality. But the mad man,—in whose "House of Enlightenment" a most bizarre scene gets enacted—has delusions of his 'divine' personality, which includes ability to make himself invisible at any moment to anyone.

Thus these three characters—Margayya, Dr. Pal and the mad man—seem to represent the three major strands of fantasy woven into the texture of the novel and these strands are explicable in terms of their self-proclaimed vocations: money, sex and death, respectively. Margayya, however, stands apart from the others by the fact that his fantasies have, in addition to money, another source: his son Balu. Margayya's ambitions in regard to his son are animated by the desire,to achieve through him, vicariously, the satisfaction of a craving for formal education. In fact, in this regard Margayya represents the typical Indian father who generally tends to regard his children as potential instruments to exorcise his own sense of failure. While the desire to educate his son is understandable, Margayya's conviction that Balu was cut out for the medical profession since he secures twelve marks in hygiene—among single digits in all the other subjects—can only be explained in terms of what is certainly a vivid, over-reaching imagination. It is this ability to identify himself with a particular object or idea and to make it the nucleus for crystallizing a sequence of fantasies which forms an important component of Magayya's psyche. For instance, while sitting on the park bench, Margayya sees an approaching car and immediately his fantasies are stung into acton:

> Cars were being driven towards Lawley Extension. Huge cars. He watched them greedily. "Must have a car as soon as possible," he said to himself. "Nothing is impossible in this world."[11]

This sounds highly ridiculous since Margayya at this point of the narrative does not possess enough money even for household expenses. But the absurdity loses its edge if one remembers the essentially fantasy-ridden nature of Margayya's mind. Similar is the case with his "visions" regarding his son, articulated in the same breath:

> His mind gloated over visions of his son. He would grow into an aristocrat. He would study, not in a Corporation School, but in the convent, and hobnob with the sons of the District Collector or the Superintendent of Police or Mangal Seth, the biggest mill-

> owner in the town. He would promise him a car all for himself when he came to the College. He could go to America and obtain degrees, and then marry perhaps a judge's daughter....[12]

Margayya's fondness for his son is obviously illustrated by this paragraph but this fondness is also allied with a constant fear of some calamity befalling Balu. This becomes so pronounced that his mind begins to generate fantasies of cruelty inflicted on Balu. A significant example in this regard is his reaction to the priest:

> "Perhaps he is a sorcerer, or a black magician or an alchemist." He threw a frightened look at him and then at the shack in which he usually dwelt. "Perhaps he has hidden human bodies in that shack, and extracts from the corpses some black ointments, with which he acquires extraordinary powers."
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Margayya wanted to get up and run away. In the starlight the man looked eerie; his hollow voice reverberating through the silent night...." Perhaps he will ask me to cut off my son's head." He imagined Balu being drugged and taken into the shack ....[13]

This fantasy transforms itself into a nightmare and Margayya has recurring dreams in which this fantasy is repeated:

> He slept badly, constantly harassed by nightmares composed of the priest, the secretary, and Arul Doss. One recurring dream was of his son stepping into the shack in the temple, with the priest standing behind the door, and all his efforts to keep him back proved futile. The young fellow was constantly tiptoeing away towards the shack. It bothered Margayya so much that he let out a cry: 'Aiyo! Aiyo!'....[14]

It is obvious, from all this, that Margayya's character and career become meaningful in terms of his fertile fantasy-weaving imagination. It is this that enables Margayya to regard himself as the favourite of the goddesses of both wealth and knowledge, Lakshmi and Saraswati:

> Margayya felt immensely powerful and important. He had never known that anybody cared for him.... and now to think that two Goddesses were fighting to confer their favours on him. He lifted his eyes, glanced at the brilliant stars in Heaven as if there between the luminous walls, he would get a glimpse of the crowned Goddesses tearing at each other....[15]

By thus liking Margayya's fantasies with the traditional Hindu religious deities of wealth and knowledge, Narayan deepens and intensifies their essentially archetypal nature. The extraordinarily pervasive nature of Margayya's dreams and fantasies becomes clear if they are compared for instance, with those of a character like Bakhs in Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable*. "The hindrances in the labyrinthine depths of Bakha's being," as Anand tells us, "weave...strange, weird fantasies and dreams."[16] But the correlatives of these fantasies are those such as social status, and education to which Bakha does not have easy access. Therefore, to the extent they are fulfilled, these fantasies are dissolved and the dreams concretised. Moreover, there is nothing intrinsically absurd or eccentric in Bakha's ambitions. In Margayya's case, however, those with regard to money and Balu do not—and cannot in the nature of things–have concrete correlatives. It is this deliberate ambivalence at the heart of Margayya's desire for money which gives his story a touch of the absurd. As David McCutchion has pointed out:

> Margayya's rise to wealth and power is the dream fulfilment of a down-and-out. From the time he realises a fortune from the sales of *Bed-Life* or *The Science of Marital Happiness* to the time he sets up as a banker giving twenty per cent interest, and carries home every evening rupee notes by the sackful, the story is sheer extravaganza. The social and psychological truth behind the fantasy which is a satirical allegory of financial speculation and big business, the acute portrayal of the relationship between sentimental father and worthless son, do not make the presentation any less absurd.[17]

But this absurdity is rooted in the fact that Margayya himself does not, presumably, know the nature of his fantasies regarding money. This is sensed partly by his wife who is tempted to ask him:

> Why should you work so hard? Haven't we enough? And what are you amining at[18]

If this essentially indefinable nature of Margayya's attitude to money is kept in view, *The Financial Expert* does not remain merely 'the wish-fulfilment of a down-and-out'. On the contrary, it assumes the dimension of a powerful, almost archetypal fable of financial ambition. Narayan's subtle descriptions, placed in significant contexts, reinforce such a view. For instance, the description of the stacks of money in Margayya's house borders on the weird and the bizarre:

> In his home the large safe was filled up, and its door had to be forced in, and then the cupboards, the benches and tables, the space under the cot, and the corners. His wife could hardly pass into the small room to pick up a saree or towel: there were currency bundles stacked up a foothigh all over the floor.... more sacks emptied themselves into the house every-day....[19]

A similar note of fantasy characterises the evocation of the crowd at Margayya's house, waiting to demand their de-posits:

> The street became congested with people converging on his house; people hung about his steps and windows ....peeping through the window, Margayya saw *seas and seas of human heads stretching to the horizon*, human faces at their most terrifying.[20]

All this draws attention to the vital role of fantasy in the novel. As an aesthetic mode it prevents Margayya from degenerating into an absurd figure and blunts the edge of the essentially antiromantic—and correspondingly satirical—intentions of the novel. Above all, by basing the novel on pervasive, but highly muted, archetypal fantasies—of sex, money and death—Narayan makes it, though "specifically Indian" in its setting, "generically human" in its implications.

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1. Frances Letters, *People of Shiva* (London, 1972), p. 256.
2. John Wain, *Essays on Literature and Ideas* (London, 1966), p. 256.
3. David McCutchion, *Indian Writing in English* (Calcutta, 1969), p. 36.

4. *Ibid.*
5. Ved Mehta, "R. K. Narayan," *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, Jan., 23, 1972, p. 34.
6. *Ibid.*
7. James Drever, *A Dictionary of Psychology* (London, 1955), p. 205.
8. *The Financial Expert* (Mysore, 1970), pp. 150-151.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 108.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, p. 29.
14. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 41.
16. Mulk Raj Anand, *Untouchable* (New Delhi, 1970), p. 75.
17. David McCutchion, *Op. cit.*, p. 34.
18. *The Financial Expert*, p. 163.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 164.
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176. (Italics Mine).

RABINDRANATH TAGORE'S *MALINI* AND W. B. YEATS'S *THE COUNTESS CATHLEEN* : A STUDY IN "*HOMINISATION*"

By

SUDHA RANGANATHAN

Without pressing too hard the analogy between Tagore's *Malini* and Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen* it is possible to suggest that there is a core of values common to both enriched, obviously enough, by "imaginative emanations". The movements of human experience that they embody derive their ultimate significance from such values postulated by Buddhism and Christianity as compassion and universal love. Placed side by side, *Malini* and *The Countess Cathleen* show their agreement in their emphasis on the subordination of the individual to the collective good and in their implicit call to "man's upward climb in consciousness".

The plot of *Malini* centres on the conflict between *Right Effort* and *Right Goal* — a conflict that takes in its sweep the Eight Noble Truths of Buddhism — Right View (*Samyag Dhrishti*), Right Knowledge (*Samyag Gnan*), Right Conduct (*Samyag Charita*), Right Speech (*Samyag Vak*), Right Action (*Samyag Vyam*), Right Effort (*Samyag Krishi*), Right Resolve (*Samyag Sankalp*), Right Livelihood.[1] The clash between The Buddhist ethic and the ritualistic-ridden Hindu ethic is brought out by the Brahmins' demand for the banishment of the king's daughter, Malini, who is drawn to Buddhism because of its stress on compassion and love for all sentient beings. The forces of reaction and fanaticism led by the hot-headed, strong-willed Kemankar and the scholarly Supriya fall into disarray when Malini, the very picture of Holiness, appearing suddenly in their midst is hailed as an incarnation of the Goddess, "The divine soul of this world." Kemankar tries to leave the country in search of foreign help to prevent the king and his people from falling a prey to Buddhism and enlists the support of Supriya who is to act as his "informer". But he is soon captured when his secret is leaked out to the

king by his trusted friend, Supriya, who succumbing to the beauty of Malini is anxious to save her and the kingdom from the ravages of a civil war. Malini in her infinite kindness persuades her father to grant a reprieve to Kemankar, who unmoved by Supriya's pleading ("My friend, is not the world wide enough to hold men whose natures are widely different?....Cannot faith hold their separate lights in peace for the separate worlds of mind that need them?"[2]) kills him with his chains in the act of embracing him. Malini surprises the king who is about to strike the murderer by saying, "Father, forgive Kemankar,"[3] which act of hers symbolizes the resolution of the dialogic movement embodied in the play — a movement spelt out in terms of ideas and articles of faith from an external to an internal one, from a material to a spiritual one. To interpret Malini's act as one revealing of her being drawn to Prometheus-like Kemankar ("God defying captivity"[3]) is to denude it of its spiritual layers of meaning. Her admonishment of Supriya ("Why did you forget yourself, Supriya? Why did fear overcome you? Have I not room enough in my house for him and his soldiers?"[4]) is suggestive of the need for the evangelisation of men and women to their own belief in universal love and Brotherhood of Man. Malini does show an intuitive perception of the working of an immanent teleology that can fashion the life of mankind toward some unattained development, which cannot be explained in terms of deterministic "truths".

Malini dramatizes the attempt to subordinate the individual interests and impulses, predilections and preoccupations to collective good and the welfare of the community as a whole — an attempt that defies individuation through calegories of religiosity. The careers of the principal characters point to the need for the individual's participation in social reality at an empiric point where he may be able to fulfill himself in an extension of the possibilities of life. Viewed in this perspective Supriya's betrayal of his friend, Kemankar, and his murder at his hands seem to have "symbolic resonance" and exemplify involvement in moral ambiguity. Malini and Supriya in their different ways provide a double perspective on the idea of an active consciousness that responds to the stimuli of love and life and the dynamics of betterment of man.

Yeats's *The Countess Cathleen*, too, focuses on the significance of the sacrifice of the individual for the promotion of public good and the obligation of the individual to differentiate between surface ambivalences and essential equivalences. The "action" of the play presents among other things a kind of dramatised abstraction of the pattern delineated by the trials and tribulations of a moral being : an idealist unaware of the living conditions of the common people but moved even by tales of woe, the countess is prepared to give up most of her wealth in order to alleviate the suffering of the famine-stricken peasants, and actually directs her steward to buy meal, grain and cattle for them. Two demons disguised as Eastern Merchants arrive offering to buy souls and succeed in convincing the countess that what she has ordered for her people will not arrive in time to save them. The countess rejects the love of the poet, Aleel, signs away her soul, and soon after dies with the "storm in her hair", and in the ensuing battle over her soul between the hosts of God and those of Satan the former win, since what is important is the Right cause, not the Right Effort.[5] To identify the countess with Maud Gonne, who had fallen ill while serving the cause of the Irish peasantry with boundless devotion, isn't so meaningful as to regard her (the countess) as a mythic image employed by Yeats to emphasise the motivational as against the sensory or the empirical. The very fact that the play is charged with ethical and religious significations suggests that the drama needs to be considered at the level of ultimate meanings which get telescoped as the drama surges forth to its inexonable finale. The portrayal of the demons masquerading as Eastern Merchants and waiting with "eager claws and beak", before the countess dies, to catch her soul and carry it away, to their Master points to Yeats's preoccupation with the problem of evil that makes man an aggregation of possibilities. Despite the "fact" that a few of her people feel that their souls are not worth the price that the countess is offering, the play does argue that no sacrifice by the individual is too dear for the achievement of collective welfare, thereby preaching a kind of transcendent humanism.

Both *Malini* and *The Countess Cathlean* plead for the intensification of the processes of human consciousness, since whatever the demographic structures in which the

world may arrange itself, progress is possible only through "hominisation". --Teilhard's term for spiritual growth. Their protagonists in embracing the ideal of self-abnegation reveal an inner dynamic that can possibly ensure for humanity a life informed by higher values like universal love and compassion.

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1. *History of Eastern and Western Philosophy*, ed. S. Radhakrishnan (George Allen and Unwin, London : 1952), p. 152.

2. Rabindranath Tagore : *Collected Poems and Plays* (Macmillan, Great Britain : 1967), p. 496.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 497.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 295.

5. *Collected plays of W. B. Yeats* (Macmillan, London : 1960), p. 50.

"SENSE OF LIFE" IN KAMALA MARKANDAYA'S *NECTAR IN A SIEVE*

By

K. VENKATACHARI

What distinguishes Kamala Markandaya from most of the other Indo-Anglian novelists is her ability to portray the Indian milieu without having recourse to sensationalism and to dramatize the abstractions of Indian selfhood without being obsessed with myth. Her novels explore a wide range of Indian experience cutting through the crust of moralism and rationalization in order to bring out the subliminal rhythms of change and growth. They reveal a profound concern with the structures of motive and meaning that underlie the temporal situation in which the Indian society finds itself and focus on the "sense of life" which defines the nature of the individual's responses and the essence of his character.

Ayn Rand defines a sense of life as "a process of emotional generalization"[1] describable as "a sub-conscious counterpart of abstraction"[2], though it is not conceptually identifiable. A person's "sub-conscious mechanism sums up psychological activities, integrating his conclusions, reactions or evasions into an emotional sum that establishes a habitual pattern and becomes his automatic response to the world around him. What began as a series of single discreet conclusions (or evasions) about his own particular problems, becomes a generalized feeling about existence, an implicit *metaphysics* with the compelling motivational power of a constant, basic emotion—an emotion which is part of all his other emotions and underlies all his experiences . . ."[3] Although there is nothing programmatic about the "ordering" of the inner landscape of Kamala Markandaya's fictional world it is the sense of life that maximises the reality of its movements of life.

Kamala Markandaya's novels defy interpretation in terms of a dialectic of manners and morals, since they dramatize "the moments of love for existence". In *Nectar In A Sieve* it is Rukmani's sense of life that explains why

her spirit is not broken under the sheer pressure of events which seem to be the machinations of a malignant fate. It is, indeed, Rukmani's story that the novel tells—the heart-rending story of a woman who has to endure unspeakable suffering and misery throughout her life and whose life seems "one long stillness of prayer" in the face of the most formidable forces out to crush her. She is subjected to extremes of adversity, and yet if she is harried by it, all that she shows is a strange quiet and intensity, which bespeaks of her sense of life.

> Privately I [the narrator Rukmani] thought "Well, and what if we gave in to our troubles at every step! We would be pitiable creatures indeed to be so weak, for is not a man's spirit given to him to rise above his misfortunes? As for our wants, they are many and unfilled, for who is so rich or compassionate as to supply them? Want is our companion from birth to death, familar as the seasons or the earth, varying only in degree. *What profit to bewail that which has always been and cannot change!*

> His eyes [Kenny's] narrowed: Whether from our long association or from many dealings with human beings and whether one kept silent or spoke to cloak one's thoughts, he always knew the heart of the matter.

> "Aquiescent imbeciles", he said scornfully, "do you think spiritual grace comes from being in want, or from suffering? What thoughts have you when your belly is empty or your body is sick? Tell me they are noble ones and I will call you a liar".

> "Yet our priests fast and inflict on themselves severe punishments, and *we are taught to bear our sorrows in silence and all this is so that soul may be cleansed*".

> He struck his forehead. "My God!" he cried. "*I do not understand you.. I never will.* Go before I too am entangled in your philosophies."[4] (Italics mine).

This dialogue between a poor, ignorant villager (Rukmani) and an educated, self-sacrificing Westerner (Kenny) does not merely illumine a striking aspect of East-West encounter—does not suggest any domination of sacerdotalism or glorification of mortification of the flesh—but a "sense of life", which is traceable to the interaction between a certain socio-cultural complex and "a system of personal strands". To appreciate this "sense of life" which marks every response of Rukmani to the world around her one needs to give up the habit of substituting the "gestures" and attitudes, which formalize and even complexify experience, for the experience, which actually absorbs them and which serves as their matrix.

As the novel, starting on a quiet note that brings out the slow, unhurried life of the villages, moves forward, Rukmani's family is overtaken by disasters and misfortunes and soon finds itself in the grip of hunger and fear. The failure of the monsoon, the abandonment of her daughter by her son-in-law, the famine and then the floods—all happening in quick succession—conspire to rob Rukmani of whatever means she has had to make life tolerable, although they leave her dignity and spirit unimpaired. Her helplessness is accentuated when complications set in with the establishment of a tannery in her village, which to Rukmani forbode evil, not progress—economic or otherwise.

> Somehow I had always felt the tannery would eventually be our undoing. I had known it the day the carts had come with their loads of bricks and noisy dusty men, staining the clear soft greens that had once coloured our village and cleaving its cool silences like weeds in an untended garden, strangling whatever life grew in its way.[5]

But with her ingrained philosophy of life she is not prepared to blame the tannery for every misfortune that her family suffered. "And whatever extraneous influence the tannery may have exercised, the calamities of the land belong to it alone, born of wind and rain and weather, immensities not to be tempered by man or his creations. *To those who live by the land there must always come time of hardship of fear* and *of hunger, even as there are years of plenty.*

This is one of the truths of our existence as those who live by the land know that sometimes we eat and sometimes we starve" (Italics mine). This awareness of the human condition from which she and her family take their definition lies at the root of her fortitude and make her cling to the indestructible life, whatever sacrifices she may have to make for it. This, indeed, is her affirmation of her commitment to the whole texture of experience which can be interpreted only in terms of her sense of life. The way of life to which she is born has set the pattern for her engagement with life—an engagement characterised by consistency and sensibility, born of an intuitive perception of her immediate reality and an emotional responsiveness that has the character of the instinctual.

The sufferings that Rukmani has had to undergo on account of death, desease, deceit, and disloyalty, degradation, have not embittered her heart or broken her spirit. There were, undoubtedly, moments when her mind was "like a paper kite dipping to every current of air, unsure of its own meanings", but did not become desperate despite the relentless struggle for existance she had to wage from day to day with hardly any hope of relief. It is her sense of life which enables her to absorb all the shocks and surprises of life unflinchingly, since the response to life that she manifests is conditioned by a sub-conscious philosophy—an inner rhythm to which her life ticks and which makes for acceptance of life.

> So good to be home at last, at last. The cart jolted to a standstill. I looked about me at the land and it was life to my starving spirit. I felt the earth beneath my feet and wept for happiness. The time of in-between, already a memory, coiled away like a snake within its hole.....
>
> "Do not worry" Selvam said. "We shall manage". There was a silence, I struggled to say what had to be said.
>
> "Do not talk of it" he said tenderly, "unless you must."
>
> "It was a gentle passing", I said. "I will tell you later."

This passage with which the novel ends puts into personal terms what in fact is a question of sense of life which neither time nor tragedy can obfuscate.

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1. Ayn Rand, *The Romantic Manifesto* (The New American Library, Inc., New York : 1971), p. 27.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Ibid.*, p. 26.
4. Kamala Markandaya, *Nectar In A Steve* (Jaico Publishing House, Bombay : 1973), p. 113.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 134.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 189.

BOOK REVIEWS

RAJA RAO by M. K. Naik, (Twayne's World Authors Series 234, New York: Twayne Publishers, Inc., 1972) pp. 163.

With the emergence of Indian writing in English a major department of study in the arena of world literature, on the one hand, and the growing concentration by Indians on creative writing in English, on the other, the struggle to find and explain the worth of the Indian output is becoming increasingly sharper.

In line with this need is the book by Prof. Naik on *Raja Rao* which seeks to deal with Raja Rao's literary achievement in terms of his philosophical and metaphysical thinking which, contends Prof. Naik, is supremely Indian in essence.

The main thesis of Prof. Naik in his study is that the Indian writer in English can retain his identity only by transcreating the Indian ethos in an idiom independent of the Englishmen's, suffused with native colour and rhythms. Raja Rao's English, more than that of any other Indian novelist, with its "Indian rhythms and intonations.... develops an unmistakably Indian ethos" (p. 146).

The puestion, however, is: does such an exposition in English with "similes smelling of the soil," in itself constitute great literature? If the mere presenting of the Indian ethos in English in native terms is the aim and purpose, the popularity of such a writing could be due to the Westerners' interest in the esoteric nature of the Indian ethos, and not because of its artistic or technical quality. Moreover, to a Westerner, not well-versed in the Indian lore, the reproduction of a few common native idioms—with a mythical overcoating and an undercurrent of philosophizing—might mean satisfactory artistic recreation, but for a native, such an exercise would only mean a facile simplification of the complex Indian experience. Prof. Naik would have done well to ask himself the question: whatever is the material of his experience and the medium of his expression, what is the distinctiveness of Raja Rao as a novelist? He does, however, answer this question as an afterthought towards the end of his monograph: "his position as the most 'Indian' of Indian novelists in English, as perhaps the finest painter of India

and of East-West confrontation in all its aspects, as symbolist, myth-maker and philosophical novelist, and as an original voice in modern fiction would seem to be of a kind the world will not willingly let go" (p. 150).

Though the text of the monograph is divided into six chapters followed by a "Conclusion", the ambitious project designed in the above lines is not even delimited by the titles of its chapters. Some of the chapter headings like "The Cow that Cried over Spilled Blood," "The Kingdom of God Is Within a 'new'," carry us into mythical and metaphysical realms, while the analysis itself leads us only to a general idea of the main strands without linking them to the central thesis. The first chapter is heavy with Raja Rao's early life, while in the second and third chapters there is an over-working of the significance of juvenilia.

Raja Rao's three novels are treated in three different chapters. While the narrative techinque of *Kanthapura* is compared to the puranic mode, *The Serpent and the Rope* receives all-round approbation. Whereas what really is of dramatic interest in the novel is, I think, the psychology of the protagonists Rama, Madeleine and Savithri, Prof. Naik reads it mainly as a "sustained piece of symbolism and a re-creation of an ancient Hindu myth" (p. 99). Though the obtrusiveness of the metaphysics of *Cat and Shakespeare* is obvious to any reader, in Prof. Naik's estimate it is a delightful comdey rich in philosophical content.

The book reads as a personal tribute to a close friend than a critical assessment of the writer.

K. P. SARADHI

THE Immigrants by Reginald Massey and Jamila Massey Hind Pocket Books (Orient Paperback), Delhi, 1973, p. 168.

The Immigrants is a sensitive novel projecting both a personal predicament and a social problem. The balance between these two pulls in Indian consciousness has not been frequently achieved in Indo-Anglian fiction and it must be said that Reginald and Jamila Massey have succeeded appreciably in attaining this elusive equipoise.

The Immigrants, as the title suggests, explores an almost unexplored field of human experience, the trials and tribulations, joys and sorrows of Indians living in England. A substantial number of these immigrants are Punjabi-speaking and their encounters, personal relationships, jobs and business, are skilfully shown in this novel.

At the centre of the story is Iqbal Singh, a Sikh boy whose fortunes in India and in England contribute to the substance of the plot. From a tiny village in the strife torn pre-partition Punjab to the burning cauldron of Lahore, from the modest beginnings in Delhi to the adventures in love and business enterprises in London—it has been a long way for Iqbal. The experience is sometimes exhilirating, and sometimes exasperating; it, however, has a chastening effect on his personality. He thus becomes the focus of the novelist's attempt to dramatise the personal predicament as well as the problem of the Punjabi immigrant in U.K.

The process of Iqbal Singh's development from a state of naive innocence to that of maturity is clearly spelt out. His initiation into physical passion and sex begins with Uma's ascent into the tower. In the tower Uma's " body yielded to him.... His whole body pulsated to the thrilling passion of that first kiss " (pp. 30-31). Soon after, Uma "led him to her room." Iqbal's rather expeditious entry into secxal indulgence is again repeated in his experience of the passionate and mercurial Tara, the wealthy business-man's—Mr. Arvind's—daughter. Iqbal is caught between Susan, an English girl with whom he is in love and the unpredictable Tara, the daughter of his boss. Susan was his fiancèe and Tara seemed jealous of her. In a Birmingham hotel Tara " kicks off her shoes, sits on the floor " and " moves up close to him". Iqbal's fingers then " struggled with the

hooks of her blouse and undid them. She herself unhooked her bra and his hands played with her breasts." The description of the sexual intercourse is brief, un-Lawrentian and extremely earthy and matter-of-fact, an experience of lust rather than love. Susan, in contrast, is a very sensible girl and it is only Iqbal's incomprehension of that love implies that keeps him away from her. He is much too mundane, and therefore perhaps in Tara he finds only the animalistic woman who promptly betrays him at the appropriate moment.

A modest Punjabi girl, Asha, is married to Mark, a sensible English boy. This situation provides a prosaic contrast to the tempestuous relationship between Iqbal and Tara.

The Immigrants appears to end on a rather ambivalent note regarding Iqbal-and-Susan-relationship. Iqbal's educative process is far from complete—and he does not seem to learn from his unsavoury experience partly because he is indeed an incomplete, and insensitive, man. The portrayal of Susan and her parents is far more convincing than the Iqbal-Tara embroglio. Had Iqbal's personality been probed into greater depth, *The Immigrants* would have become one of the truly remarkable novels of Indo-Anglian literature. As it is, *The Immigrants* moves skilfully on the surface, a new kind of surface, though. It must be recognized, however, that the two novelists-Reginald and Jamila Massey—have shown remarkable skill in portraying the twin dilemmas of the modern Indian immigrant—the subjective predicament allied with the complex social and cultural issue of coming to terms with an alien society. The style and structure are both admirable and contribute greatly to the power of the Massey's art of fiction. *The Immigrants* thus is an artistic innovation, though of qualified achievement, in modern Indian creative writing in English.

VASANT A. SHAHANE

KHUSHWANT SINGH by Prof. V. A. Shahane; Twayne Publishers, New York; pp. 176.

Criticism of the Indian novel in English seems to have oscillated, until very recently, between mere textual explication, often exasperatingly banal, and the audacious advancing of ponderous claims with characteristic complacence. In either case, is seems to have substitued explanation for scrutiny and cliches for critical canons. This points to the unmistakable failure to perform the essential function of aesthetic evaluation. The situation is rapidly changing mainly owing to the quality of interest Indian novel in English seems to evoke at Present. One redeeming feature of this interest is that it is no longer a nebulous appreciation but an apparently systematic survey with the accent on candid appraisal. This is reflected in the Twayne's series on Indian writers of which Dr. Sahane's book is in many ways a representative one.

However, while the overall usefulness of a series is undeniable, its logic of being comprehensive can only be achieved at the expense of ignoring selectivity as the criterion. This is particularly relevent in regard to a writer like Khushwant Singh who has, as Dr. Shahane himself notes, very pronounced views on the nature and quality of Indian writing in English.

Khushwant Singh with more than his usual frankness declared his " premises " of Indo-Anglian criticism. " The only authors who merit consideration," according to him, " are those published in England or the United States," and since, inevitably, " the number of Indian authors published abroad is no more than twenty and the total number of their publications does not exceed one hundred," one can hardly posit even the existence of Indo-Anglian literature. Therefore, " literature," Khushwant Singh concludes, " is too pretentious a word for a bundle of books." While the implicit logic here is unassilable, this has peculair implications: the major premise of foreign pubication as indicating the quality of Indo-Anglian writing is a very clever gambit with which one can exclude many " natives " while remaining oneself a " pucca sahib " with access to the " elite " of Indo-Anglian writing.

Any one who attempts to evaluate such a writer, obviously, has a very delicate—and highly ambivalent—task

to perform. Dr. Shahane is realistic enough to recognize this and he does not allow these assumptions to colour his own assessment. The aesthetic logic of the book, nevertheless, is determined in more ways than one, by the peculiar nature of Khushwant Singh's writing. One invaluable feature in this regard is Dr. Shahane's integrated view of Khushwant Singh's achievement; it is, however, inevitable that the uneven nature of the novels should lead Dr. Shahane to a detailed analysis of story, character and theme rather than to the applying of exacting critical criteria. In this regard Dr. Shahane's care for probing and explicating narrative detail is painstakingly minute. Not only does he find symbols in unexpected contexts, he has also succeeded in making the reader aware of a possible form and design in Khushwant Singh's fiction. In this respect both *I Shall not Hear the Nightingale* and *Train to Pakistan* receive detailed analysis. Khushwant Singh's attempt to transform, in *Train to Pakistan*, a momentous historical event into an enduring human tragedy is clearly brought out by Dr. Shahane —though the novel often seems to slide into a sort of predictable melodrama. A similar thoroughness marks Dr. Shahane's analysis of the background of Indo-Anglian writing in the initial chapters—though one wonders how this is helpful in view of the serious reservations Khushwant Singh himself has with regard to the very fact of its existence.

In spite of these imbalances which are rooted in the very nature of Khushwant Singh's writing, the book remains valuable as a candid appraisal of a writer whose achievement can hardly be ignored. But whether this achievement has an enduring core is a moot point—as Dr. Shahane's book itself makes it abundantly clear.

M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

SUGGESTION AND STATEMENT IN POETRY by Krisha Rayan: University of London, The Athlone Press, 1972; pp. 182; Price £ 2.75.

Books on the nature and operative components of poetry tend, by and large, to be insufferably platitudinous or annoyingly abstract. This is due is much to linguistic imprecision as to conceptual flaccidity—a combination which inevitably results in repetitive banalities. Invariably the critical tools sought to be fashioned prove only of marginal use in understanding the rationale of poetic creation and response.

Krishna Rayan's book, from this perspective, is remarkably free from these inane abstractions and cliches. Not only does it maintain the closest correspondence between concepts and live examples, it also never tries to reduce the complexity of aesthetic problems to naively simplistic categories. This is all the more refreshing since much of modern criticism about the nature of poetry is marred by a persistent tendency to to regard aesthetic concepts as rigid monolithic structures rather than pragmatic tools flexible and fluid in their nature. Analytical criticism in our day has made impressive progress in formulating a number of viable concepts (Irony, Paradox, Ambiguity etc.) which have formed the basis of both revaluation of highter to neglected phases of English poetry as well as of the nature of poetry itself. There is a tendency, however, to regard thse concepts as exclusive categories rather than as interrelated components of the essentially synthetic and organic nature of poetic creation.

Part of the significance of Krishna Rayan's book, from this point of view, lies in suggesting necessary correctives in our critical vision. Basing his main assumptions on the seemingly simplistic modes of suggestion and statement, he goes through the entire syndrome of contemporary critical *milieu* to establish the differentia of poetry. But what gives the book its unique distinction is the eminently successful attempt to illumine the implications of the concept of " sugestion " by finding meaningful parallels in Sanskrit poetics.

While thee are a number of books on comparative aesthetics (one remembers in this context the remarkable work done by critics like Prof. Pravas Jivan Chaudhury) what mars their approach is the understandable, but hardly defensible, overeagerness to *find* parallels where none exist,

This has the corresponding effect of throwing critical caution to the winds. Krishna Rayan's book is almost totally free from this tendency. While he does elaborately describe the parallels, he resists, by and large, the temptation to arrive at rigid conclusions.

The generic term " suggestion ", according to Krishna Rayan, corresponds to the seminal concept of " Dhvani " in Sanskrit poetics. In spite of the dissimilar cultural *milieux* from which these concepts stem. " it is clear." he says, " that in a very real sense the exponents of *dhvani* and the exponents of suggestion have been looking at the same phenomena and reaching the same findings." This conceptual correspondence between " suggestion " and " dhvani " leads Krishna Rayan to one of the most clear-headed discussions on the aesthetic of emotion. While the chapter entitled " The Lamp and the Jar: Stated and Suggested Meaning " is a masterly exposition of some of the seminal ideas of Sanskrt poetics in relation to Western aesthetics, the most interesting chapter, however, is on " The objective Correlative ". Not only does Krishna Rayan establish the axiomatic nature of Eliot's key concept, he also establishes its validity by bringing in analogies from the Indian concept of *Rasa* with its corollaries of *sadharanikarana* (universalization and *Sthayi bhavas*. Krishna Rayan's critical insights in this chapter constitute an outstanding contribution to our knowledge of the generally confusing problem of the objectification of emotion in poetry.

The book remains distinctive, in short, in combining unerring critical insights with a largely successful attempt to transform these insights into pragmatic evaluative as well as descrpitive tools.

M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

THE BRINESHRIMP by Rhyll McMaster, University of Queensland Press, 1972; p. 45.

Much of contemporary poetry is concerned, by and large, with alienation, despair and related components of the existential repertory articulated with almost predictable frequency. Consequently, the temptation for the practising poet, to substitute abstraction and analysis for evocation and presentation is as irresistible as it is fatal. One inevitable result of this is to slide into the naively discursive which is still further vitiated by linguistic laxity.

Rhyll McMaster's poetry, from this perpective, is refreshingly individual. The ability to make the familiar the commonplace and the apparently insignificant—the shrimps of individual and social existence—entrancingly beautiful through sheer purity of perception is as rare as it is difficult to nurture. It is in this art of presenting objects and experiences in their rugged individually and angularity that this poet finds her forte. " I like to work down," as she herself says, " to the bones of things and on baring them find an untouchable mad puzzle in their straightness." This is, however, no mere pondrous intention kept piously in abeyance in actual practice but the barest truth about Miss McMaster's poetry as evident in this (her first) book of vese. While the collection has a wide thematic range, it also shows remarkable mastery of both sentiment and syntax.

Whatever the theme, Rhyll McMaster's central concern as a poet—ranging from the descriptive ' The Brineshrimp ' to the contemplative ' Slanted World '—is to evoke experience in all its authenticity without an irritable reaching out after ultimate philosophic meanings. Though she is very much aware of the fatal attraction of intellectual abstraction, her delight in life pulls her back to the world of concretions. This tension between awareness of the essential absurdity and unpredictability of life and the felt need for the normal and the natural gives to her poetry a peculiarly astringent quality of directness. In this regard ' Slanted World ' is in many ways a significant example:

> I rose to catch the early morning,
> the different japanese-painted world of six a.m.
> The chilled sunlight in long, uneasy fingers
> stretched across the terrace,

snatching at the zithered goldfish sucking at dew drops
by the ponds cement edge.
They swam to goggle at my dabbling finger, quirked
like a magnified, nail-headed worm,
then tucked away, giving disappointed air-gasping
suck-suck-burrpps.

. . . . . .

Another world lies
in my garden—for me to see through slanted eyes;
I walk with care in the strange-world orient
atmosphere of six a.m.
where, surfacing to bubble-break their silver ceiling
the careless goldfish laugh.

Such poems draw attention to the *differentia* of Miss McMaster's poetry: a delightfully minute eye for detail juxtaposed with distrust of all abstractions. A similar dread of the 'meddling intellect' marks "Doors for other people", which affirms the experiential as against the conceptual:

How close to important thoughts I am.
For many hours they kick in my head
then limp away into the rusling bushes
and the curtains blow listlessly.
Better perhaps if I could be a simple person
content to be comforted by tinkling conversation.

This preference for actual experience is rooted in an unblinking perception of the "wonderful" nature of the world:

World,
world you are wonderful—
cruel, clean, slow-lying;
you slide through me leaving butter rings.

This awareness of the 'wonderful' world not, however, minimize or obliterate its curelty and ugliness.' There is a muted but unmistakable consciousness of the deep-rooted anamolies of contemporary social and individual existence. In "Surprise attack", for instance, the death of a stray dog by "a clout from some unabated car wheel" becomes a cameo of brutal, unprovoked violence smouldering at the base of our life. Similarly, the predicament of the blacks gets a tacit recognition in "Shaking the flame",

Miss McMaster is at her best, however, in poems like "Case number 5" where there is a constant alternation between fantasy and reality:

> Mary admired Peter
> and Saul wanted
> Bob and Janice who
> loved the inside of her head
> sat apart watching
> Mary and Sam and their two children
> watching Peter and Helen
> observing each other
> while Brian who loved trees and solitude
> watched a silent movie
> playing behind his eyeballs.
>
> . . . . . .

Not only do we find here a clever presentation, as in a drama, of sharply individuated characters—individuated through apparently simple epithets 'admired', 'wanted', 'loved', 'watched' etc.—we are also brought face to face with the private selves in which each is locked up thus blocking all meaningful communication at the individual or social level.

Poems such as these reinforce the initial impression that in this young Australian poet—recipient of the Harri Jones Memorial Prize for Poetry by the University of Newcastle—we have a talent remarkably sensitive to the content as well as the craft of poetry.

M. SIVARAMKRISHNA

ROOTS AND FLOWERS by Mulk Raj Anand.

The pamphlet *Roots and Flowers* comprises two lectures given by Mulk Raj Anand at Karnatak University on " The metamorphosis of technique and content in the Indian-English Novel." The title is significant in that it brings out the central argument of Anand that the Indian English novel is rooted in the Indian ethos and tradition but gains its sustenance and strength from its exposure to the outside world; and that by absorbing the vital elements, it puts forth flowers fragrant of India life and culture in the grand bouquet of world literature. Although Anand's effort to clarify the conceptual basis of modern Indian fiction is a welcome and pioneering step, one wishes for a fuller treatment of his basic premises and an ampler support for his conclusions.

Anand's first lecture outlines the main factors responsible for the change of artistic sensibility from the Bardic recital to the modern " human narrative." The major *differentia* according to him are the shift of emphasis from God to Man, from the timeless epic to the time-bound novel, and from metaphysical ruminations to the bare physical realities of human existence—the conflicts and struggles of the common man in search of freedom from constriction at different levels. The broad features characterising the modern novel are lucidly brought out, but the line of demarcation between what Anand calls " The Bardic recitals " and the present novel form is more neatly and firmly drawn than is really warranted. The author leaves out a large segment of secular literature in the classical sanskrit era—not to speak of the literature produced in the middle period which connects the ancient with the modern. For instance, *Mritcha Katika* by Sudraka, *Mudra rakshasa* by Visakhadatta, and *Shatakas* of Bhartru Hari and Amaru are great secular works which defy Anand's rigid categorisation. Such a long jump from the ancient to the modern is a *tour de force* which might enable him to prove his point but which could not be a faithful representation of Indian literary heritage and tradition. Even Anand's exposition of the epic themes is expressive of a point of view which is contestable. The *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata* do not rest on supernatural props nor are they buttressed by Divine sanctions. The epics are a saga of human courage, endurance and valour and are inspired by a lofty sense of duty and dedication to the happiness and wellbeing of the family, society and the state.

According to Anand, the task of the novelist is to work out " a synthesis between the relevances of our inheritance and the dynamic values of the West." Anand with his pronounced Marxist beliefs shows little evidence of having attempted a synthesis between the two cultures. We should be interested in knowing the finer values he has gleaned from Indian inheritance though we have his animadversions on the evils of organised religion and the predetermined categories of Indian thought—framed in the cosmic design.

Anand lists two major influences on the novelists of India in the twenties and thirties: (i) the Joycean stream of consciousness technique in the presentation of life and character, and (ii) the concept of change of consciousness derived from Tolstoy, Balzac and Gorki. It would have been useful if Anand has mentioned the names of the other Indian novelists who came under the sway of these influences to determine how real and pervasive the impact has been. With the exception of Anand himself, no Indian novelist, I think, has consciously attempted to integrate the two forces in depicting the human situation.

In the second lecture, he discusses his *Untouchable* and Raja Rao's *Kantapura* to illustrate the transformation of the novel in form and in content. In the *Untouchable*, Anand adopts the Joycean technique of illumining the underlayers of Bakha's mind in his deepest urges and aspirations, his disappointments and defeats through a dream sequence. The dream imagery is drawn from the familiar scenes of a North Indian village in the 1930s assimilating within itself Bakha's multidimensional feel of the real and the romantic in life. This stream, however, takes a fateful turn when Bakha on being slapped for touching a brahmin becomes a changed man conscious of his self-pride and dignity. It is here that the impact of the humanist trend in Europe on Indian consciousness expresses itself in the Indian context—a feeling of revulsion and revolt against the ossified caste hierarchy, colonialism, and all forms of discrimination.

Raja Rao's *Kantapura* is again a time-bound novel written under the impact of Gandhian moral values. By quoting a few excerpts from the novel, Anand is able to show the dynamics of change in the basic attitudes of different characters under the pervasive influence of Gandhi's non-violent revolution—whether it be a lawyer who would never accept a false case or a cloth dealer who would sell only home-spun

khadi. There is little evidence, however, of Raja Rao having adopted the stream of consciousness device in the portrayal of character.

Furthermore, it would not be entirely correct to assume that the concept of change and evolution in character depiction is a modern development or is peculiar to the Indo-Anglian novelists of this century. Such changes could be be discerned in the masterpieces of earlier writers as well. The idea is not new: only the forms in which change occurs vary—the modern mode being a rebellion against the evils of establishment—whether religious, socio-economic, or political in pursuance of a juster and more dignified living.

The two lectures are a pioneering effort in analysing the important shift in artistic sensibility derived from the modern forces in international novel writing. And on the lines proposed by Anand, there is scope for the study of the Indo-Anglian novel in greater depth and detail.

The Karnatak University deserves praise for publishing the lectures. What irks the reader, however, is the number of printing errors in this short pamphlet.

SATYANARAIN SINGH

CLOSE THE SKY, TEN BY TEN: Poems by Jayanta Mahapatra.

In spite of the sanctity accorded to criticism, and in spite of the poets-turned-critics' emphasis on the creativity of the critical art, a critic in his/her assessment of a literary work cannot always escape the charge of having been unduly (or unjustly) severe on it. More so when young poets and their creations are under consideration.

Indian writing in English has come of age and so its newness is no longer debated. Nor can this writing he discussed with reference to Indian mysticism or religious philosophy only, since the Indian writers have overridden this crest and have sighted new horizons. Jayanta Mahapatra is one such navigator; and in this slim volume he discovers new waters, explores new depths and comes up with some unexpected results.

Forty nine poems in *Close the Sky* deal with the whole gamut of human emotions. They vibrate with laughter as much as they pulsate with terrifying fears of a lost soul. The author has made his poems alive with a sense of movement and this movement, a throb, a beat of life, becomes his strongest point. Apart from the various techniques and ' tricks ' of arranging words and lines—as in the *Nun*—which serve as a punctuation guide, it is the the flow of sound and meaning which makes poems like *Absence*, *City Night*, 2 *A.M.*, *Three poems of a City*, worth exploring: they communicate the overplus of felt life in moving forms. Then there are some consciously literary poems like *The Report Card*, *Sanctuary* (which incidently gives the title to the book) and *Peace Negotiations*. The poet here has been unable to subdue the heaviness of his subject with " gusts of poetic impulse", just as he has not been able to resist the use of typical Indian themes in the *Yogi*, *A Ritual*, *The Blind Beggar*. The result is that the true rhythm and simplicity of emotion get bogged by inane words, bad alliteration ("slumped sorrowing eyes") and thwarted sentimentality:

> So did let myself be dragged along
> into the addiction of dying
> measure by measure.

But there is much in Mahapatra's poetry, especially in poems where sensitivity matches the subtlity of thought,

that holds great promise; and his poetry will be read with particular interest by those having catholic understanding of the nature of poetry.

ANITA S. KUMAR

WORKSHOP *NEW POETRY*, No. 18, 1973, edited by Norman Hidden; Workshop Press, 2 Culham Court, Granville Road, London N 44 JB; pp 40; 30 p.

Scouting for promising creative talent, particularly in regard to poetry, is a job which very few people will be able to do consistently, if at all. With the almost total breakdown of all structural or syntactical inhibitions, there is such an abundance of versifiers today that it requires something more than love of poetry to choose what is likely to endure. Moreover, with the preponderance of alleged 'poetic' themes it is all the more difficult to distinguish genuine, authentic talent from what is merely a contemporary sensibility.

Workshop *New Poetry* magazine has been evidently performing this crucial function not only uniterruptedly but also remarkably well. Founded by Norman Hidden in 1967, *New Poetry* has already achieved notable distinction as a discerning forum for emerging talent as also established poets. Its guest editors include G. S. Fraser, Charles Obsborne and Philip Toynbee and it has an impressive list of contributors which includes W. H. Auden, D. J. Enright, Ted Hughes, Thom Gunn, Ted Walker, Lawrence Lerner and others.

The unique achievement of the magazine lies, however, in locating new voices with unerring insight. Norman Hidden has already edited for Hutchinson an anthology of new poets many of whose work appeared for the first time in his magazine. It is particularly pleasing to note that *New Poetry* has a special page for poets aged eighteen or under. And if the poems chosen in this number are any evidence, this is indeed a provileged page for any poet under eighteen. Both the poems chosen here—by 17-year-old Stuart Delves and 14-year-old Hugh Goldsmith—show an authentic note of individual talent as well as unmistakeable verbal finesse. Similarly, the *New Poetry* has a page for local societies for poetry and the present number contains "Sunday Night" (by David Johnson) which won the 1972 George Crabbe Memorial Competition run by the Suffolk Poetry Society.

These regular features, however, do not in any way exhaust the refreshingly original flavour of the magazine, both in its format and contents. The present number

contains poems whose thematic and structural variations have a wide range. While we have the light bantering voice of James Kirkup, (" Arts Administrator "), we have also the mature talent of Roger Iredale which evidences an apparently effortless ease for juxtaposing startling incongruities:

> Nightmares circle circus ring;
> cabinets, sawn up, display
> the girl-friend sliced in fillets,
> gunman's leer, the dead men
> lining airports.
>
> dead for revolution's sake,
> and dead to give
> the psychopath his toy
> to play with and the revolutionary
> fun.

(" *Accension Day: II* ")

Similarly, his " A Simple Case " projects with ostensible almost statistical, unconcern the collapse of a whole culture caught in the cameo of a mental patient. The alternating voices of the patient and the consultant—obviously—function in separate universes of discourse without any communicating link:

> I have come to report
> the total loss of my papers.
> I left them lying
> in a place frequented by the public
> and, lamentably....
>
> *Do not despair.*
> *Machinery exists for cases such as yours,*
> *and we can help.*
> *Cling hard to your identity, remember*
> *who or what you were.*
>
> My name was on
> the uppermost, the pink
> one with the photograph

and details of the place
where I was born, and who....

Who you are
Will be decided later. Meanwhile,
take off your
clothes and stand against this wall.
Do not delay.

(" *A Simple Case* ")

Poems such as these are concrete evidence that the *New Poetry* does care for its job. And with its terse reviews and editorial notes entitled *Kryptos*, the magazine is indeed a delight to read and possess.

M. SIVARAMKRISHNA.

JOHN CROWE RANSOM, by Thornton H. Parsons; Twayne Publishers, Inc., New York; pp. 172.

It is strange but true that Ransom's poetry — unlike his prose — has not received its meed of critical attention; and Professor Parsons's book is intended to make up for what he calls "an unjust neglect". Parsons's book not only provides a painstaking and perceptive study of Ransom's poems but also highlights his triumphs—traceable to his ever seeking poetic effects from "the built-in paradox of his poetics" — that add a new dimension to English poetry — be it British or American.

The classification of Ransom's poems as those about "Death", "Love", "Time and Change", and as "The Narrative and Whimsical Poems", respectively — which incidently serves as a basis for the division of the book into different chapters — seems too rigid an approach to the exploration (and examination) of Ransom's themes, and techniques to do them justice. A comparison of Ransom's early poems with his later ones suggests that it is through appeal in a poem to a "code" (as it were) that he "complexifies" the object. His poetic success, may, indeed, be ascribed to his deliberate adoption of a technical device — the *aesthetic distance* — to impart form and complexity to poetic utterance; and it is a triumph of Ransom's virtuosity that within this "distance" his irony is able to operate and produce telling effects. What is most distinctive about Ransom's irony (and what, perhaps accounts for the uniqueness of his poetic statement) is that it functions in a sort of triquetrous relationship between narrator, situation and "code", which critics have pointed out and which Professor should explicitly have brought out in his incisive analysis of Ransom's poetry.

If there is a noticeable awkwardness about Ransom's poetic technique in his early work, *Poems about God* (1919), it is not entirely due to fancy being "at work in the service of sentimental convention" as Professor Parsons avers (p. 19) but due to his poetic stance being unsure of itself, which explains why these poems seem to be groping their way between delineations of the island-like Southern

communities and psychological (and spiritual) stresses. For instance, the poem, "Grace", is not merely what Professor Parsons glibly calls "a denunciation of the undignified way in which a humble and pious hired man succumbs to death" but a profound, ironic comment on what seems to be God's indifference or callousness, fellowship of the fields and the physical repulsiveness of Death, in which the irony, however, seems ineffectual because of the absence of a mode or element of unification. It is only in his mature poetry where the role of the narrator is so fashioned within the "aesthetic distance" as to allow greater play of irony that the disparate elements are integrated and "a brief forgiveness between opposites" achieved. For example, Ransom's masterpiece, "the Equilibrists", centres on the detached narrator's questioning of the code, which seems to value honour more than the consummation of love and which induces in him a feeling a sadness at the lovers' "torture of equilibrium". This poem--"a rare magician's art" (p. 75)--owes its power and appeal, as many of his later poems do, to not only "the dramatization of its ironies" (p. 75) but the engineering of an "aesthetic distance" within which an appeal to a code that scores over events is possible.

The comprehensiveness that is aimed at in Professor Parsons's study of Ransom's poetry is, perhaps, what accounts for the opaqueness that marks his comment on certain passages and the inadequate attention paid to the study of the "tension" among differently related plurisigns in a poem. Indeed, certain portions of the book are disappointing in that they offer no more than superficial analyses dressed up with a great deal of scholarship. But all the same, Professor Parsons's work is a valuable "propaedeutic" to one of the most difficult and rewarding poets of modern times—John Crowe Ransom.

K. VENKATACHARI

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