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INTELLECTUAL PROLETARIAT

ONE of the sad problems of our time is the supply of redundant or unwanted intellectuals that are turned out in their hundreds every year by almost all the universities of the world. The democratization of Higher Education, like some other excellent ideas, is breaking down very tragically under the strain of everyday experience – the hard realities of the economic situation. Far too many Red-Brick Universities have sprung up and spread like mushrooms. As a result of this, there are now many more graduates in all sorts of subjects than ever before, but one wonders if this greater output of graduates has not been obtained at the expense of quality and also at the expense of social stability.

The line of demarcation between a Polytechnic and a University proper in the traditional sense of a seat of Higher Learning combining the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake with its direct or indirect results has been growing increasingly thin, so thin that it has almost become invisible. One feels that this line of demarcation is being rapidly removed in the name of social egalitarianism and social relevance in such a manner that now one can hardly any longer distinguish between a Polytechnic (a predominantly technical school) and a University. The two institutions cannot be distinguished from each other merely because one is empowered to confer degrees and the other is not. What is in a name? The idea of liberal knowledge has gone out of fashion with the generation of academics that believed in it. Governments that hold the strings of the purse crammed chock-full with the taxpayers' money have been dictating the new-fangled utilitarian policy. To support the new illiberal trends (the exclusion of the value of knowledge also for its

own sake, for instance) they enlist the services of obsequious educationists with an ideological bent of mind, mainly economists who equate humanity with numerals and fractions thereof. Governments everywhere, the more so in the less liberal countries, have their carefully hand-picked blue-eyed boys to help them justify the progressive (or regressive?) departure from the historical mission of a University as a seat of Higher Learning where knowledge can, and should, be pursued also for its own sake (a bourgeois luxury?).

We are a long way from the ideals which Cardinal Newman, consumate master of readable English prose and of clarity of ideas, discussed in his famous Dublin address on the function of a university. He was a great, clear-headed writer who could talk equally well on universities, drawing on the reserves of his wide personal culture, and on gentlemen and cads. Inevitably, the new times impose new conditions. We have to move with the times; indeed, it would be sheer folly to expect a modern university to survive perched on a height like an eyrie far from the madding crowd, where scholars, a handful of select, privileged professors, can pursue their studies without bothering about what is happening amongst the small fry outside the academic citadel to which they belong. Such a privileged community can no longer survive in our hectic, class-conscious society. The concept that a University should also have a social relevance is therefore sound; but only so long as the emphasis is on the word *also*. In other words, social relevance must be in addition to, and not instead of, the historical primary function of a University as a seat of Higher Learning where knowledge can be pursued for its own sake and continue to be, what it was for so many great minds, its own end. The stress must be not on class exclusiveness, but on quality regardless of the social status of the students' families. The wicked age of oligarchies is over. Or is it? The stress on quality must be uncompromisingly maintained, and where facilities are needed in order to enable the students of the poorer families to compete with those who come from better off families, these must be provided. The race for the prizes must be through the same racecourse under the same conditions. But once equality of opportunity has been made possible, universities should be more qualitatively selective. Only in this way can universities everywhere ensure a steady stream of good leaders in the various social and intellectual walks of life, and at

the same time maintain a reasonable ratio between the demand and supply on the academic market.

Far too many graduates are being produced everywhere who could have been more profitably employed where the demand still exceeds the supply. Unfortunately, we have everywhere an army of unemployed and unemployable graduates who will always bear society a grudge for real or imaginary wrongs, gnawed by the rankling feeling that they have been robbed of their youth and denied the opportunity of earning their living, because a short sighted and muddle-headed society has no place for them. Who is to blame for this? It is difficult to answer this question. Far too many wrong people have been put in the wrong places for the wrong motives. Ambitious careerists can be trusted to climb up the ladder of social promotion very unscrupulously, even if, to do so, they have to walk over other people's backs. When their legs are not strong enough, there is always somebody ready to push them up. I remember, some years ago now, a top-ranking British civil servant telling me that even stooges have their uses. The tragedy of highly placed mediocrity is immeasurable. There are far too many stooges everywhere, largely because they are the strongest bodyguard of the Servile State.

But to answer the question: One can, of course, say that the problem need not have been so acute either in Malta or in other countries had there been more careful long-term planning related to the country's industrial and academic market. Governments are always very lavish with vote-catching slogans, but they are not always as lavish or generous with long-term plans for the profitable use of intellectual manpower.

This is not merely an academic problem. It is also a social problem of great magnitude, and it is not confined to Malta or any other single country. It is the widespread rot at the roots of universities everywhere.

THE EDITOR

THE POPULAR GENRES OF MASS-MEDIA FICTION; OR, PAGAN MYTHOLOGY IN MODERN DRESS

By PETER SERRACINO INGLOTT

THE 'secularisation' of modern man, the 'eclipse of the sacred' in contemporary civilisation, the rejection of the supernatural by our age, is one of the themes most frequently discussed by contemporary theologians. Their accounts of the phenomenon have differed widely. Bonhoeffer concluded that modern man was somehow 'beyond religion'; Eliade that he was 'still religious in his subconscious'; Tillich that he asked religious questions in non-religious form; Barth that he was not at all different from his ancestors.... The disagreement is to be expected since there seem to be no agreed criteria as to the method of arriving at the truth on the matter.

One possible way that may be tried to form a picture of the situation of modern man with regard to religion is, perhaps, the analysis of the most popular genres of mass-media fiction. The 'entertainment' people seek is probably as revelatory of their psychological states as anything else. The purpose of fictional excursions into imaginary worlds is, no doubt, pleasure. As Aristotle wrote and Aquinas repeated, pleasure is characteristically given by 'images', because humans delight in perceiving likenesses; and as Freud showed, the root-reasons of pleasure lie in the same soil as the deepest desires of which men are often unconscious. Images made and sought for pleasure are perhaps never quite other than somehow projections of those often unexpressed and even repressed desires. It seems likely, therefore, that the imaginary worlds evoked for the entertainment of modern man will provide convincing indices of his 'state of soul'.

Just as children's games are rarely unconnected with everyday life, but more often than not are, in fact, an *idealisation* of the

actual world of their elders, likewise many 'escapist' films are, in fact, closely related to the real world of which they present an expurgated picture. When this relation is present in accentuated form, they hover between the realms of 'play' and 'art'. Paradoxically, however, it is probable that the closer they are to play, the more likely are they to be revelatory of the secret desires of the heart and akin in nature to the mythical kind of narrative.

In *What is Art?* Tolstoy argued that European art of recent centuries was doomed to be ineffective because it was not intelligible to all. It failed to give something to the 'poor in spirit' as well as to the educated. As an example of a true and perennial work of art he mentions the Old Testament story of Joseph and his brothers which, he says, will produce the same effect on a Russian peasant as on a Russian intellectual and also on a Chinese peasant. (Chap. X, pp. 177 ff., in the 'World's Classics' edition). What Tolstoy seems to be getting at is precisely the 'mythical dimension' of certain forms of narrative which may account for their universal popularity. During the last years of his life Tolstoy placed great hopes in the development of the cinema, then in its infancy. With great enthusiasm he pointed out the opportunities of conveying through the cinema to the masses the profound spiritual effects formerly produced by other forms of art. Must it be concluded that this was one of his great utopian dreams which reality has shattered, since the greater part of film production has lapsed beneath even making any claim to being, in any accepted sense of the term, 'art'?

The answer is certainly not so simple. Apart from the several artistic masterpieces which have not been box-office failures, the popular cinema itself, and not only in its silent days as some Tolstoyans are wont to lament, has been an important factor in the re-creation of minds open to mythical thought. However deficient most popularly successful films must be judged to be from the standpoint of aesthetic value and without wishing to minimize this deficiency which is tragic, yet one cannot fail to be struck by the fact that their basic themes and genres correspond to the basic themes and genres of the great myths of humanity. They

constitute some testimony that as Wittgenstein said in the *Tractatus,* 'When all the problems of science have been resolved, we have the feeling that the problems of existence have not yet been touched upon' – a feeling which had been inspired in Wittgenstein by the reading of Tolstoy.

It is worth recalling, in this contest, Freud's view that the aptest illustrations of mythical forms of thought were not to be found in 'those writers most highly esteemed by critics', but in the work of 'the less pretentious writers of romances, novels and stories, who are read all the same by the widest circles of men and women'. ('On Creativity and the Unconscious' – Papers selected by Benjamin Nelson – New York, 1958, p. 50). Likewise, it is in the more popular cinema that the clearest filmic examples are likely to be found.

A 'myth' is most often a story which explains the happenings and condition of the actual world by reference to some event which took place 'before time begun' or 'at the beginning of time' and which became the prototype and norm of subsequent events. The primordial event (some of the actors in which are likely to be beings higher than men) gives meaning and purpose to the later happenings modelled upon it. In this sense, it has been said that a myth 'never happened, but it is always there' – and, hence, it can be made to 're-live' actually by the carrying out of certain rites. The ritual re-enacts the mythical event in symbolic action with accompanying words and the supernatural force of the original event is thereby released. From this it is clear that mythical thought is based on a fundamental belief in some transcendent power which is the root-reason for the existence and structure of the world and its happenings.

The word 'myth' is being used in the sense now generally accepted by Anthropologists – e.g. *Malinowski,* in his 1925 study of the Triobrod Islanders defined it as follows: 'Myth ... is not an intellectual reaction to a puzzle, but an explicit act of faith born from the inner most instinctive and emotional reactions to the most formidable and haunting ideas'; and he goes on to say: 'the really important thing about the myth is its character of a retrospective, everpresent, live actuality. It is to the native nei-

ther a fictitious story nor an account of a dead past. It is the statement of a bigger reality still partially alive... in that its precedent, its law, its morality still rule the social life of the natives'. And another of the initiators of the modern science of Anthropology, *Radcliffe Brown,* has said: 'The myths of primitive society are merely the result of an endeavour to express certain ways of thinking and feeling about the facts of life which are brought into existence by the manner in which life is regulated in society.' (See also E.O. James: 'The Nature and Function of Myth' in *Folklore,* 1957).

The Christian Revelation is an interpretation of the universe and its history in mythical terms – except for the all-important fact that the central event is placed in the mid-stream of history. Its occurrence as a historical event can be checked by the methods of the historian, but the interpretation of it which is the foundation of faith is based on the acceptance of the "mythical" form of thought'.

Its 'myths' are the fruit of a historically-verifiable divine revelation although expressed in human and culturally conditioned language. But form and content are related like body and soul, not like a body and its clothes, and, hence, cannot be simply separated without damaging either. This is the root error of the Bultmannite school of 'demythologisation' of the Bible which leads to the 'death of God' theology, or rather a-theology. It has to be recognised that an unmythical account of the mystery of existence is just not possible. What can be achieved is a deeper understanding of the role played by the Medium. Otherwise, the result is merely that the 'true' mythical account (the Christian) is substituted by ersatz forms (pagan). Some idea of how this happens can perhaps be formed by examining the most popular genres of the cinema and their relation to traditional mythology.

Greek Mythology is still probably the best known in the West. It may be interesting therefore to give an example from another tradition, the African. I will borrow it from Claude Pairault. (Bull. C.S. Jean Baptiste, April 1965, p. 265-272).

> 'When God had made maize, Death won possession of it
> Death said to God: 'That which I have in my possession,

I will give it to the people then I will kill them.'
God said: 'Certainly not! I will give grass to the people. They will eat it and live, without it killing them.'
So God took the grass, and gave it to the people; but they did not eat it.
So Death retorted: 'That which I have in my possession, I will take it, take it to them. When they will have eaten it, I will kill them.'
So she took the maize, took it to them and gave it to the men.
The men ate of it. Death returned to the land of God.
Death said: The men are eating.'
God said: 'Yes, the men are eating. Ah well.... when you kill them, you will kill them only one by one.'

This story was recorded in 1959, in the village of Boum Kabir, inhabited by an agricultural people (S.E. of the Tchad Republic). They believe in One God (Noba) and his omnipotence over the world and all life within it. Even though the story does not explain how Death came into being or its ontological status, it is pictured as dependent on Him, because His permit is required for it to act and the action is subject to His conditions (which, it is noteworthy, allow an indefinite future for humanity while decreeing an end to each individual). A further important point to note is that in the region, maize is irreplaceable for nourishment, and in fact the same word stands for both concepts in the local dialect. Without it they would all perish. Why is this story a 'myth'?

Because it explains the actual mortal condition of humanity by reference to a primordial event; the only sort of explanation which is adequate. This myth clearly shows a recognition that man's nature is to live, and yet he dies; that God's nature is to increase life, and yet death destroys it; that God cannot have wanted man's death, but it cannot take place without His assent; that the staple food which ensures human survival is itself the pledge of human mortality, as it is the sign of man's emmeshment in the process of change, in time.

It is interesting to compare this myth with that recorded in the greatest epic of antiquity (besides Homer): Gilgamesh. (See my article: *The Structure of the Gilgamesh Epic,* in *Melita Theologica,* XVII, 1965 No. 1 p. 1-12).

The main types of myth are consequently, cosmogonies and anthropogonies – (stories about the origin of the world and of mankind) and eschatologies (stories about the end of the world and of mankind) which seek to explain the main riddles of human existence in the world: life, sex, suffering, evil, sin, death. The resemblance of the main types of myth (Paradise Myths, Transformation Myths, Soteriological Myths, and Eschatological Myths) which have been distinguished and classified by students of comparative religion to the main types of popular film will be the object of our investigation. It is worth stressing at this stage that a characteristic of the ancient myths was their *aesthetic* quality; is the loss of this a sign of pauperisation of the imagination, or the sympton of the divorce between the desire for them and disbelief in their interpretive validity of existence?

The Rationalist tendency of thought, which dominated Western Culture in the 19th century, denigrated myths as had done their precursors in previous ages. But already the Romantics re-acted against this attitude, and Existentialist thinkers reversed it. Karl Jaspers, for instance, has written: 'Mythical thinking has not passed away; it is proper to us in every age. We need to regain the mythical way of thinking in our ascertainment of what there is'. (See his 'Truth and Symbol', Vision Books, 1959). Nowadays, hardly anyone would say that myths are absurd or unintelligible, but rather that they require interpretation.

One reason for this is, undoubtedly, that when Freud began the exploration of the unconscious, he discovered a striking similarity between dream symbolism and mythical thought. To explain this similarity, he did not think it necessary to postulate as Jung did the existence of a 'collective unconscious' – a psychic background and matrix common to all men in which 'archetypes' (forms or images of a collective nature) are present and exert their action on all men; for these 'projections of the human mind' can be explained in terms of the structure of desire in man recognised by

Freud. It is not necessary in this context to go into greater detail into this question. But it is worth pointing out that only a 'mythical' type of explanation can be given for my certainty that I will die and for the possibility of a non-destructive love. 'Mythical' does not mean irrational or unfounded. On the contrary it is the only RATIONAL explanation of these two phenomena.

Mircea Eliade (*Diogène,* No. 41, Jan-March, 1963) has argued that epic and novel are the continuation at a different level and with different ends of mythological narrative. In both cases, a significant story or series of dramatic events supposed to have taken place in a more or less fabulous past are narrated. 'It is not necessary to recall the long and complex process by which mythological matter was transformed into epic themes. What deserves underlining is that narrative prose, especially the novel, has taken, in modern society, the place previously occupied by the recital of myths and fables in traditional and popular societies'. I think a stronger case can be made out for saying that it is film and television narrative even more than printed fiction which has assumed the rôle of myth today.

Eliade goes on: 'Moreover, it is possible to extract the *mythical* structure of some modern novels and exhibit the literary survival of the great themes and heroes of mythology.' I think the analysis of the most popular genres of film (which are also the staple ingredients of T.V.) brings out even more clearly an uncanny resemblance to the typical forms of pagan mythology. Four basic types of myth, discerned by students of comparative religion are (i) *Paradise Myths,* expressing the nostalgia for an irretrievably lost golden age; (ii) *Transformation Myths,* illustrating the fatal cycle of crime and punishment; (iii) *Soteriological Myths,* embodying the yearning after a superhuman saviour conceived as a dream idealistically removed from historical reality; (iv) *Eschatological Myths,* picturing an apocalyptic future, ambiguous in its outcome. The substance of these four kinds of myth seems to have invaded new forms and to appear in the Spectacular film, the Thriller, the Western, the Science-Fiction film. The resemblance will be delineated more clearly in subsequent paragraphs. It can be said of the popular modern passion for this genre of story, as Eliade does,

that it betrays the desire of hearing the greatest possible number of mythological stories desacralised or simply camouflaged in profane forms.

Eliade mentions two significant aspects of this recrudescence of pagan myth in modern dress: (a) the desire to escape into another world and (b) the desire to transcend time. The popularity of story-telling is seen by him as expressive of the human desire to get beyond the spatio-temporal co-ordinates of our life.

(a) The perennial popularity of 'paradigmatic' forms of narrated tales appears to correspond to a need which human beings always feel of being transported to 'another world'. The need is a complex one. There is both the desire to communicate or, more strongly, commune with others who are unknown in order to share their hopes and disappointments and to envisage what *might* have been the case if mankind had made different choices. The fascination of fiction seems to lie in the 'double reality' of its heroes and its happenings. The stuff of fiction reflects both the historical and psychological reality of a society and a magical escape from it through the imaginative creation of another world different from our own.

(b) The 'exit out of time' is, in Eliade's view, that which brings all fiction closest to mythology. The time 'lived' in fictional experience is different from that 'lived' in our daily life. A kind of transfer is operated to a transhistorical existence. The rhythm of fictional time varies infinitely, because each tale establishes its own. It is not necessarily the 'primordial' time of mythology, for it is usually apparently 'historical' time. But it is condensed or dilated with the freedom enjoyed in the world of the imagination. Fiction seems to be a response to the need felt by men of transcending the temporal rhythms of work and rest of our ordinary existence and enjoying different and strange modes of experience such as the establishment of a correspondence between the intensity and the duration of an experience which would make the freshness of discovery endure longer than the brief, butterfly-like flight of the passionate instant familiar to everyone in ordinary life. Fiction is an imaginative fulfilment of the desire to defeat the passage of time by embalming it in a permanent form which relives

with each retelling of the story, of the hope of delivery from the weight of 'dead time', time which crushes and kills the possibility of freedom, since that which took place is unalterable and the past cannot be undone.

PARADISE MYTHS

'In the beginning...' are words which sound like the magic 'open sesame' on a world breathing the freshness of spring and unspoilt novelty. It may be the beginning of the world as a whole, or since man is conceived as a microcosm, of the individual human beings; but in either case it is a vision of a primordial past, irretrievably tarnished by experience, yet still an ideal. Most 'escapist' (entertainment only) films seek to take us into this kind of world. The 'idealisation' is carried out it in one of three ways (a) enlargement of the world as known in our ordinary experience (b) ryhthmisation of it (c) evocation of childhood. The seeds of destruction are usually suggested in the image of the woman.

(a) The *'spectaculars'* reflect the dream of *superhuman scale.* Their aspiration to epic dimensions, however much stimulated by the realisation that bigness was an advantage the elder brother of the electronic media had which the younger could not have and however many of these mammoth constructions, launched with the hubris of the Athenian fleet set against Syracuse, end up with nemesis or a shipwreck of Titanic scale on the icebergs of public indifference, yet there is in them this dream of a world of titans, of giants, of heroes whose tale should be told in the style of a Saga, because their 'colossal' stature represents the human greatness which once 'at the beginning of time', was, and which has not been re-achieved in the course of history, but is still hankered after.

Mircea Eliade has written: 'In the last analysis, the myth of superman satisfies the secret nostalgia of modern man who, in knowing himself to be fallen and limited, dreams of revealing himself one day as an "exceptional person", a "hero"'. Often the limitless powers of Superman are shown camouflaged under a humble disguise.' (In *Diogène,* 41, Jan-March 1943).

(b) An alternative to this change of dimension and magnifica-

of the *scale* of human existence, like a conjuror turning a sixpence into a florin, is a change of *rhythm* from the unsmooth, jagged and jogging pace of every day life to the musical, quasi-mathematical perfection of such worlds as are presented in musicals. Here, it is not a picture of titanic scale, where it is the sheer strength and weight of body that carries an implicit menace of collapse, but of idyllic settings of nymphs and unspoilt nature, where the implicit danger is in the fragility of the delicate and graceful structure evoked, like (to use an image of Evelyn Waugh's) 'a Ming vase in the hands of a gorilla'. It is not surprising that man bungled the work of grace; but these films say:

> Don't let it be forgot
> That once there was a spot
> For one brief shining moment
> That was known as Camelot.

Many *'musicals'* take us into this world where people's walk is dance, their speech, song – a world of colour and music such as exists in dreams, but not in reality: an 'idyllic existence' such as characterizes the pagan myths of the 'golden age' and the dreams of paradise.

(c) The Cinema has given expression to this myth particularly in its evocations of *childhood.* Bazin concluded from the frequency of its successful portraval in the cinema and the relative rarity in literature that there was a secret affinity between the cinema and childhood. The films which go back to the origins of an individual's existence to picture its happiness are perhaps the deepest filmic expression of the nostalgic belief in the existence of a 'golden age', a paradise of innocence, before corruption set in.

In *Louisiana Story,* a boat is carrying a boy, along a river, and the camera captures the view of the landscape emerging out of the dissolving darkness, and the boy calls out their names in a way which evokes Adam at the beginning of Genesis, and the cosmic poetry of Claudel or Milosz. What is achieved is precisely an innocent child's vision of the world. There is no bitterness, no anguish, no unkept promises, no regret for happy harvests, but the limpid water in which gather the reflections and caresses of light.

That is the myth of childhood simply and beautifully expressed.

In *Citizen Kane,* there is a double perspective on childhood. On the one hand, it is evoked in the memory of Kane himself, as he rises to success and falls into isolation, in its mythical form as the age of happiness. On the other hand, the viewer of the film can see that childhood as the source of his later disasters. He is born illegitimate and the inheritor of wealth. He is born into two different worlds. He is the heir – because of the illegitimacy – of the world of the underprivileged whom he tries to champion in his newspaper and as a candidate for political power. But he is also the heir of the world of the wealthy, by reason of the fortune he comes into on reaching adulthood. He tries to keep a foot in both worlds and falls out of both. Subjectively his childhood evokes the nostalgia for carefree joie-de-vivre; to the objective viewer it appears as the seedbed of his later frustrations. There is much more complexity in *Citizen Kane* than this, of course; but the ambiguity which childhood assumes in the film is perhaps the key to its whole interpretation.

(d) The presentation of woman as a seducer, as the weakest spot by which corruption creeps in like an insidious serpent, which is hardly ever done in true-to-life style, but according to certain set patterns and types, giving rise to legendary conceptions of the 'stars' who embody in slightly different forms the 'temptresses', announces the next typical form of myth; the seed of the weed in the garden of paradise will flower and transform it into the human jungle of criminals and the chill of cold blooded violence on the one hand, of the sleuths and the thrill of pursuit on the other. But the dream of childlike innocence unadulterated purity, of magnificence in stature and in colour – the forms of the golden age – still haunt the imagination.

2. The Transformation Myths and Crime and Punishment Films

1. The second main type of myth is that of a story recounting a 'fall' from the original state of happiness – the 'golden age', because of some crime the consequences of which bring about a radical transformation of the human condition.

The theme of metamorphosis is one of the most frequent in my-

thology, as Ovid's famous set of poems illustrates, whether it is man becoming beast as the result of some mysterious fault against the rulers of nature or the reverse transformation as the result of some redeeming act. The mutability of matter is the metaphysical basis of these stories.

2. It is interesting from this point, of view to compare Disney's animated cartoons built around a fixed type of antropomorphic animal with Norman McLaren's, in which in his own words (in a BBC TV film) 'things butt into each other and change into each other.' In 1947, he made a film around the French song *La Poulette Grise* which consists entirely of dissolves, fade-ins and fade-outs in time with the slow tune of the music and developed the favourite theme of this: the hen-and-egg cycle, but with the hen dividing and finding itself again eventually in the egg. Another film of McLaren's shows a blinkety-blank bird who escapes from a cage and runs into what looks like an enemy. They chase each other, charge into one another, in collisions that look hateful, but could be loving, until in a last meeting, they mate and the characteristic McLaren consequences follow in a flow: twin-hearts, flowers, the egg, oneness. The depth of the art of McLaren consists, in the first place, in the perfect relationship of sight and sound as the theme of multiplication, fragmentation and reunification is worked out in intricate geometric patterns or dance movements, in audio-visual music. In his *Pas de Deux,* which is a sort of drama of a dancer and her many selves spreading out fanwise and refusing into an integrated person, and his *Neighbours* (1953), animated with real people, the application is explicitly made to personal and social life. McLaren explores the metamorphoses of figures that disintegrate, separate into fragments, change into each other through aggression or through self-oblation, until unity is achieved again. Here the theme is developed with subtle beauty.

3. Armand Cauliez in 'Le Film Criminal, le Film Policier' (du Cerf) shows that there is an almost universally fixed pattern followed by the genre:

(i) The gangster wants to fulfil himself in a society which is unjust and does not allow him to achieve his ambitions. He becomes an 'outlaw', cut off, isolated. M. Meslin wrote of Simenon:

'Simenon's work is characterised, in part, by the retelling of the same story with multiple variations: it is that of the escape of a man of mature age, socially well-established, who breaks his social bonds, leaves his family, in search of a primitive purity, an emotional warmth which he finds only in death. Against this sorrowful figure, there stands in counterposition the strong, stable, well-balanced figure of Maigret, unchanging and always identical with himself. Confronted with the escape from order, Maigret reassures' (Cahiers Universitaires Catholiques, Dec. 1963, p. 137). The two opposed figures are those of the unhappy individualist, seeking self-assertion by becoming an outlaw, and the happy conformist, who seeks the outlaw out as a menace to the fold.

Anatole Broyard has noted the importance (shown by the non-proliferation) of murders in Simenon. The act of murder is 'a crystallisation ... the summation of the killer's character, a dramatic mobilisation of the scattered forces of the self, the last restor of an ego threatened with disintegration. In *Maigret and the Wine Merchant,* the murderer clearly feels that it is better to kill than to suffer the death of the self' (New York Times, July 13, 1971, p. 35). The person he kills is the agent and symbol of the depersonalising society. To Simenon, murder is 'an extreme form of psychic indigestion: the killer simply cannot swallow the victiom's behaviour'. The victim usually sums up that which is offensive in society to the killer (e.g.) the hypocritical esteem in which a man whose private life is amoral because of his business or public success. 'Murder in Simenon's books, is almost a religious act. It can be committed only by a believer, a more or less conventional person.' Although the murdered man (in the Wine-Merchant Story) had slept with the wives of most of his friends, Maigret soon concludes that no one of them would kill him. They are of the same ilk as he was. None of them really cares about him as a person or wants to destroy what he stands for. Nor do any of the women he went for. 'Did you love him?' ... 'I don't know what you mean.' The only possible murderer is someone, to whom the dead man meant something, if only that his existence with an outward facade of well-being hiding inner decay was an offence against which it was right to strike.

(ii) The outlaw fails 'stupidly'. He falls a victim to his own mistakes rather than to his adversaries. The conflict turns out to be less between the forces of order and the outlaw than between inner forces in the outlaw: between his 'primitive' or 'childhood' self and his 'actual' or 'grown-up' self. His search for self-fulfillment is directed backwards towards the primitive, the solitary, rather than the social.

The rôle of the pursuers appears to be less that of hunting down the guilty man than that of calculating the respective shares in the responsibility for the crime of the different members of the collectivity. The individual appears to be the scape-goat in whom evil has erupted from the murky depths of society. To look into these, rather than to catch a criminal usually appears to be the main objective of the huntsmen. Why has society driven this man out of the hole in search of an isolated self-assertion rather than of self-development within the social framework?

That is why Maigret is so effective as the representative of the 'good' side of the established order, in reality out of love with that which the murderer struck against, but unwilling to approve the murderer's methods, because of his own psychological preference for conformism over the alternative of outlawdom. And for this he is ready to make his daily small sacrifices. That is why Maigret is the psychological antithesis of, say, James Bond. While Bond exists in a vacuum, Maigret is comfortably married and firmly settled into bourgeois life. It's not unusual for him to wonder, in the midst of an investigation, what's on for dinner. At one point in 'Maigret and the Wine Merchant', the case is going badly and the Inspector wishes he could stay in his warm bed, instead of going out into the rain to look for an elusive killer.

Between the Inspector and the Murderer, there is in common the recognition of the unworthiness of what the murdered man stood for, and the essential difference between the self-assured man of order and the rebel in a perpetual uncertainty about himself. The murderer's first question when he meets Maigret is, 'What's your opinion of me?' The murdered man asked his mistress the same question after making love. The killer is a man who had probably 'spent the greater part of his life searching people's faces to find

out what they thought of him.' The confrontation between the Inspector and the Murderer sums up the entire situation of which the crimestory is the expression.

The murderer comes to Maigret's apartment in the middle of the night to give himself up, he stands in the hallway where the light has already gone out, timidly tapping at the door. The Inspector receives him in his bathrobe; Madame Maigret serves them hot grog, asking, 'Sugar? Lemon?'

The killer apologizes for the state of his clothing; he hasn't had the means of keeping it clean. He is desperately anxious to be understood. He wants to be reassured by Maigret that his behaviour was consistent with his character. Please don't let the murder be a mistake or a solecism. He has put so much of himself into it that his whole being depends upon its 'rightness'. At the prospect of leaving with the Inspector's lieutenants, the murderer confesses that he feels a bit nervous. 'It's like going to the dentist.' Maigret apologizes for the handcuffs: 'It is necessary to comply with the regulations.'

It almost always ends like that. Inspector Maigret simply says to the killer, in effect: Well, now you've expressed yourself in an antisocial way that, for complex reasons, we can't afford to tolerate, and so we'll have to take you along to the station.'

Robert Warshaw in his essay on the 'Gangster as Tragic Hero' has argued that modern egalitarian societies require their citizens to pretend they are happy, especially in public. The Mass-Media are not allowed through direct or indirect censorship, to present a picture of the ordinary citizen as unhappy. Since some citizens are not happy, this is expressed only in *disguised* forms such as the gangster film. The 'world' in which the gangster lives does not outwardly resemble the 'world' of the ordinary citizen, but disguises it so that it does not appear to be a picture of the reality of modern society. In fact, the gangster film presents a conventionalised image of a society in which egalitarianism makes unhappiness inevitable. There is the 'upper world' – the city – which, if its rules of social life are accepted, reduces the individual to anonymity and produces the stultification of his personality. The gangster is the man who attempts to assert himself as

an individual, by rejecting society's rules and creating the 'underworld'. Ultimately he is defeated. His choice leads to unhappiness just as much as the ordinary citizen's decision to conform to the rules of his society.

The gangster film expresses the dilemma of the citizen; he can choose to fail as an individual either through *conformity,* with the consequent death of his individuality or through *self-assertion* like the gangster, with his consequent physical death. This gives the citizen the sense that his conformity is a free choice, but only out of alternatives which all inevitably lead to ultimate failure, represented by the conventional gangster film image of the City as a City of Death. The gangster film expresses the tragic consciousness of the citizen in an egalitarian state in which the self-fulfilment of the individual is impossible, but which does not allow this view to be expressed openly.

Against the correlation of disguise in the expression of the sense of inevitable doom with the indirect censorship practised in a certain type of society, it can be said that psychoanalysis has shown that the masking of the painful is a universal tendency. Warshaw's particular thesis seems to be that the deepest reason for the popularity of the gangster film is not the sadist tendency to identify with the brute for which it gives an occasion, but a deep adhesion to the old idea that selfassertion implies breaking the law. The picturing of the selfassertive man as evil serves only to disguise the real nature of this deeper appeal in order to gain social or political tolerance for its presentation in an egalitarian society. I suspect that the disguise is demanded rather by the universal temptation not to face the unpleasant directly.

Warshaw is, on the other hand, I think right in underlining the pagan 'tragic' fatalism implicit in the gangster-film. Perhaps it is misleading to associate this world-view with only the 'egalitarian' society as the would-be crusher of the individual self, and it is more correct to see the gangster-film as one typical expression of the pagan concept that the heroic person is doomed to defeat by some kind of cosmic law.

The pursuers get their man in the end not so much through their own ability, but because of his fatal mistakes. His final defeat is

seen to be the result of some sort of cosmic law of poetic justice, a last clause inscribed into the contract of existence.

Two particularly interesting examples:

– *'A Place in the Sun'*. A man plans the murder of a woman, but destiny steps in before him and she dies without his help. But he is accused and condemned. His intention had been carried out on its own accord. The judicial error of his condemnation is seen as a supernatural form of immanent justice.

– *'Chicago Nights'*. The 'negative hero' in his hideout, a room symbolically inhabited by birds of prey, kills himself, showing the 'innerness' of the conflict and of the punishment.

(iii) Sometimes, the criminal actually accepts his punishment as a kind of deliverance from a 'curse', or mysterious fate which had been hanging upon him.

Three examples:

– *The Man in Flight.* A Woman killer is finally arrested. She reacts as though saved.

– *Conflict.* Humphrey Bogart, on being captured, says 'I'm saved'. He walks to the gallows in a mystical aura.

– *The Right to Live* (Fritz Lang). The 'spirit' of Father Tom tells the 'hero', captured by the guards as he attempted to escape from prison, 'You're a free man!'

In these examples, a hint of 'salvation', even if only through death and in a mysterious way, is provided. Otherwise, there is only the self-redressing mechanism of Fate conceived in a thoroughly pagan way. An issue cannot be found out of the mire of corruption in which man has been caught up by his own sole forces. Can there be a Messiah who will bring him deliverance through some more than ordinary power?

4. It is also interesting to note that *war-films* are often cast into a fairly similar mould, consisting of three basic elements:

(i) *group solidarity,* highlighted by the ugliness of betrayal, which war tends to bring out more than any other experience, except, of course, love;

(ii) *self-sacrifice,* for the attainment of the goal set by the

group, highlighted by the ill-consequences of failure to carry it out;

(iii) *the destruction of the enemy,* in which the built-up and and pent-up aggressivity is given the chance to exit from the heart.

THE WESTERN AS SOTERIOLOGICAL MYTH

The 'Western' is perhaps the most typical genre of cinema entertainment. The basic pattern of the story is related to the most central and universal of all myths: that of the Saviour-Hero.

Perhaps the character of the cowboy-hero can be best brought out by considering three typical traits which distinguish him from ordinary mortals and constitute his similarity to the demigods of pagan mythology who descend from the heavens on rescue work, i.e. his attitudes to law and order, to sex and the family, to work, money and the other necessities of ordinary life.

1. He lives in a world where violence is rife and guns are always visible. He can, of course, shoot better than anyone, but he never does if he can help it, and since he never can, he will hold his fire until the last second, until his own life would be lost if he missed. He wants peace and order, and it is for their restoration that he shoots. He does it coolly, and his coolness is his most striking trait amid the violence around. He is cool, but not content. He is a lonely figure, with a gentle melancholy hanging about him, the mark of his loneliness. But his loneliness is not like that of the gangster. The gangster is alone, because he has rejected the values of his society, against which he has set himself. The cowboy, on the contrary, accepts these values, and only regrets that they are not observed by all, nor will they be enforced by anyone, unless he takes action at the appropriate (i.e. the last) moment. The cowboy is alone because the milieu in which he lives is one in which the State is impotent to secure the observance of the laws of the game it has established and disorder occurs when these are not observed. He is the apostle of their observance. Peace and order require the service of his gun and that he should handle it better than anyone else. But he is not happy at this state of affairs. He would rather not be called upon to intervene. Yet, when he does, he does it with the same unruffled, unrebellious air

with which he would love to conform. He does not boil over because of the failure of the State. He just steps in.

It is easy to understand why the 'Wild West' would so readily be accepted not only by all Americans, but by the denizens of all big, modern metropolis. It is the milieu of insecurity in which the 'lonely crowd' finds itself there: loving conformity, but plunged into insecurity by the prevalence of violence over justice, by the establishment disorder. The lonely crowd of the modern metropolis admires the Cowboy who seeks to protect his peace even at the cost of soing it violently, and identifies readily with the melancholy resignation with which he accepts his rôle, his lack of tension in carrying it out once it is recognised as his inevitable rôle, since no alternative is envisaged.

2. The Cowboy's thirst for peace keeps him lonely in other ways as well. He does not look for love. If it comes, he accepts it, but he does not seek it. The typical situations in which he finds himself are ones in which love-making appears marginal to the fundamental problems of existence. If he happens to love a woman, she does not often belong to the West, and they cannot understand each other. The woman who understands him is the saloon-girl, for whom love does not imply an enduring personal relationship, who does not need a protecting male. For her, there is only sexual need. The cowboy's independence is his most valued possession; he does not wish to endanger his negative freedom.

3. The Cowboy is never in a hurry. He does everything with an easy manner. Hardly ever do we see him at work, even if he happens to possess a ranch. The only goods which matter to him are his horse, his gun, and the suit he never changes. If he happens to produce a wad of notes, it comes almost as a surprise; he seems to be indifferent to wealth and poverty, to where he sleeps or how he lives in normal circumstances. This apparent total freedom from material needs is what gives him, above all, his superhuman dimension. The Cowboy descends on his horse, accomplishes his task, and departs like the demigods of old, abandoning transitory love affairs and all other entanglements, on his horse.

Paul Engelmann, in his 'Letters from Ludwig Wittgenstein with a Memoir' (p. 92-93) recalls how the philosopher enjoyed, especial-

ly in their early days, the *Wild West* films which always ended with 'a wild chase after the villain, victory of the good, liberation of the kidnapped girl, happy ending. To Wittgenstein all this constituted a similarity to the genuine fairy tale as the acting out of a wish-fulfilment dream. What he found here had nothing to do with an educational purpose, but was pure enjoyment, a spiritual release which art has ceased to offer today... Again and again Wittgenstein emphasized the significance of the "happy ending". To make a film without a happy ending, he thought, was to misunderstand the fundamentals of the cinema'. On this view, Englemann remarks: 'Holderlin in his lines on Oedipus describes man's victory over his lower nature, a victory only attained through his death, as "highest joy". In this sense, of course, the very consummation of tragedy can be felt to be a happy ending.... It is a belief built on the basic idea... that art must always lead to a solution, and the individual work of art be an example demonstrating such a solution. Whatever one thinks of this as a general theory of art, it seems to underly the perennial popularity of the Western'.

The Westerns which have tried to give a more human content to their story, such as *Shane,* or to make them more historically truthful, have only succeeded as long as they kept the mythical framework intact. In similar vein, in a perceptive review of 'Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid' (*The Month,* April 1970, p. 238-240), Bruce Stewart wrote: 'Like any myth, the Western has collected around it a body of dogma and fixity of practice.' He notes that Butch Cassidy's success lies in its being faithful to these 'rules of the game' – the 'horse-sense' of the Western – yet giving the myth an original twist by presenting the heroes as *puzzled* by the fact of their experience, precisely and inexplicably falling into the established pattern. 'The clichés of the form take them unawares'. This goes on becoming more apparent until the end which reaches them 'baffled losers-if not precisely to life, then at least to the Hollywood myth... In death, they are still not reconciled to the myth that has dogged them.' The film, is, hence, a sign of a growing discomfort of question-raising, of a kind of inbility to be satisfied with the myth in its purity; yet of its endur-

ing hold on the popular imagination (troubled, perhaps, by the figures of Bonnie and Clyde).

J.L. Rieupieurout, in his book, 'La Grande Aventure du Western', compares the Western to the Ancient Epics of Europe and Asia. It is built on the oral traditions of tales told by the early Americans about the primitive phase of their history, just as the Epics are rooted in the legends of the early days of their respective peoples. Its 'credibility-value' is the same as theirs; not historical, but mythical.

'It is true that supernatural persons and prodigies, such as gods, goddesses angels and saints, do not haunt its universe or intervene in the course of human actions, but is this enough to deny an epic character to the Western? If we think that their presence may be secret, unavowed, transposed, then we shall see them transfigured according to the particular nature of their environment. The nature of their (Western) environment and of its inhabitants, settlers or wanderers, calm citizens or shooting meteors across the horizon, did not allow the American epic to be peopled by the abstract beings favoured by the old legends. But the key characters of the western have in themselves the supernatural dimension which can transfigure a sheriff, a cowboy or a herdsman into a hero or a demon-outlaw according to whether he serves Goodness and Justice or Darkness and Evil.

It is not certain, moreover, that oneday in time their personality and actions will not leave the native soil where they have lived and poets won't admit them to the world of the unreal and the marvellous. Jesse James and Billy the Kid found, on the morrow of their brutal death, an easy access to the kingdom of shadows where the memory of the dark actions of hereunder are lost. Voices were raised to their glory and they grew into archangels, in such a way that their names are still surrounded with a beatific popular veneration which forgets the trouble raised elsewhere by their turbulence and their exorbitance in the service of evil. Legend ensures the passage to immortality and dowers its beneficiaries with a super human dimension' (p. 420-1).

Rieupierout wrote these lines before the days of the strange and complex phenomenon: *the Western 'all' italiana'*.

(d) THE ESCHATOLOGICAL MYTHS AND SCIENCE-FICTION

From its very beginnings, the cineam made use of its potentialities of evoking the marvellous by producing films of the genre later to be called 'science-fiction' and which look forward to a transformation of life such that it spells the end of earthly existence as we know it.

The genre was initiated by Georges Meliès in his *Voyage dans la lune,* as far back as 1902. In the study *Images de la Science-Fiction* by J. Siclier and A.S. Labarthe (7e Art, du Cerf), it is said that Meliès does not take science seriously. It provides him with his own elements: the vehicle and the theme of interplanetary travel with which he replaces the magician's wand, the devils and the fairies of his previous scenarios. In short, it allows the cinema to introduce us to the marvels of the modern age which already had begun to take the shape of a myth. It is because of this that Meliès did the work of a forerunner' (p. 15).

'The most significant title of all his productions is "The Voyage across the Impossible" (1904). For, whether it is a matter of the moon, or the sun, or the Pole, it is always an impossible exploit which has to be accomplished. Science introduces this exploit into the realm of the possible, but it is envisaged from the point of view of the poetical imagination. For Meliès, science is a mystical key: it opens up all the realms which are forbidden without it' (p. 16-7).

The later cinema has produced more complex examples of the genre. To quote a bare minimum of significant examples:

In 1926, Fritz Lang made *Metropolis*, surely a prophetic film. A palace directed from on high by the Masters, worked by the Slaves. The people in the middle-formen and subordinates – are obliged to side with the strongest. But in the underground of the subhumans, a girl, Maria, pacifies the misery of her cogenerates by her evangelical action. Taken into the presence, one day, of the son of the supreme Master of Metropolis, she provokes in the young man a dangerous passion. For he, in the name of love, begins to think of a coming closer together of himself and the slave people. The Master sees it differently. He entrusts it to his damned soul, the inventor Rothwang who lives in one of the tunnels des-

cending downwards, to 'solve' the situation. Rothwang builds a robot in the likeness of Maria. Maria is imprisoned and the robot is made mechanically to move the slaves to revolt, affording the Master the occasion to exterminate them. The factories are laid waste in the great struggle and the living quarters are flooded. But, thanks to Maria and the son of the Master the population escapes to safety. The false Maria is shattered and Rothwang perishes on the floor of the gothic cathedral. The two hostile forces become friends and the era of well-being begins. The Christian, apocalyptic overtones are more obvious visually in the film.

'The dehumanised crowds of the underground city, halfway between men and robots, these "submen" pitted against the "supermen" of the city on high, evoke, as they appear in Lang's imagery, the deportees to the concentration camps going to work until their ensuing death. The human slave is seen in a way as the last stage towards the domestic robot. This "prophetic" aspect, of course, only emerged later' – observe the authors quoted above. Rather, however, than a prophecy of the Hitlerian era, what Lang had in mind is clearly an eschatological picture such as have always haunted the imaginations of men in ages when a sense of impending doom was created by their historical situation, when they felt that a chapter in history was being closed and another opened. It has been shown that this is the climate in which Utopias flourish – none were produced between Plato's *Republic,* and More's *Utopia* rapidly followed by Campanella's *Città del Sole* and a number of others. The eschatological myth is closely linked to political questions: the relationship between the Kingdom of God and political structures.

So are, of course, the anti-Utopias typical of our age. (Science gone mad). From this point of view, Godard's *Alphaville* is a significant example. As a critic has remarked: 'As well as its obvious basis in popular fiction and strip-cartoon, *Alphaville* is rooted in a wider, more time-sanctioned mythology... Two myths in particular seem to me important as background to *Alphaville.* The more obvious is that of Orpheus and Eurydice. Natasha is a shade among shades: Lemmy-Orpheus descends into the underground to bring her back to life – to bring her light, the fire of her cigarette-

lighter, which makes him also like Prometheus, who defied a father-figure as apparently omnipotent as Alpha 60. Natasha is in a sense the centre of the film, its most complete character in the traditional sense – i.e. the one most nearly approaching a rounded reality – and *Alphaville* is about her resurrection, the film's most intense and beautiful image'.

A more complex example still is *2001: A Space Odyssey*. This is because the style employed is perhaps the most *ritualized* seen so far in the cinema. As Jean Basile wrote: 'The plot is just an ordinary space-fiction adventure... In fact, the success of this film is built on a number of other points. The story, in the first place, is a Utopia and the interest of the young in the world of tomorrow is well-known. It is mysterious, hence allows a wide range of interpretations and authorizes the individual imagination to find what it seeks. The music... is omnipresent and has given Strauss's "Also Sprach Zarathusta" an entry into the world of Rock. The eye, finally, finds a grandiouse visual poem over which it can roam without any preoccupation other than to see. There are, of course, the satellites infinitely revolving in the infinity of the void... The abstract sequence of the fall on Jupiter.... takes up the latest cinema technique known as the "kaleidoscope of LSD 25". That is, the visual images are a projection of mental images in a manner which makes us realise better the genius of Walt Disney when he made *Fantasia* – the psychedelic utopia, or the "eschaton" envisaged by the generation of the Woodstock Festival.

Old and New Pagan Forms: Values and Dangers

The analysis of the staple ingredients of what has been called 'popular, non-aesthetic' cinema yielded a substance with an uncanny resemblance to pagan mythology: the nostalgia for a hopelessly tarnished golden age, a fatalistic acceptance of the cycle of crime and punishment seen as the alternation of hubris and nemesis, the yearning for a superhuman savior nourished as a dream idealistically removed from historical reality, finally an apocalyptic future, engineered by science, ambiguous in its outcome... All this is sought as 'escape' from the real world around

us, but the refuge is still too closely related in its characteristic features to the prison it was intended to eclipse for the 'evasion' to be considered a mere matter of pure play. The invasion of the substance of the old myths into the new forms makes it a case of what Nicholas of Cusa called 'serious fooling' – a favourite pastime of the Renaissance humanists who were fascinated by what they took to be the convergence of pagan mythology and the Judeo-Christian tradition. (See E. Wind: 'Pagan Myths in the Renaissance', Faber & Faber).

What can a truly Christian attitude be towards these new pagan 'forms' produced by and characteristic of the culture of our electronic age?

(a) In the attitudes of the early Christians towards the pagan art forms and culture syndromes of their pre-literate, and hence figurative, age at the popular level, two sharply opposed positions emerge. On the one hand, some, like Tertullian, condemned them wholesale as diabolical and evil; on the other hand; others, like Origen and Clement of Alexandria, following the example of the Apostle of the Gentiles at the Athenian Areopagus with, moreover, apparently greater success, welcomed them as stepping-stones to Christianity – forms made obsolete by the fulness of revelation, but still a ladder which could be climbed to reach the Truth –, then thrown away (as Clement of Alexandria put it in his *Stromata*). The ultimate prevalence of this attitude is evidenced by the initial adoption of pagan art-figures given a Christian content (such as the adoption of the Hermes Crioforos as the Good Shepherd). With the disappearance of paganism in the part of the world known to Christians, first in the Byzantine East and later in the Latin West, specifically Christian images, from wall-painting to icon and gradually in any other medium, were produced.

As late as 800, the Libri Carolini speak of the difficulty of distinguishing images of Mary and Venus.

(b) For an era, it was as if, for Christendom, paganism existed no more and there was no missionary problem, involving the dialogue of living cultures, any longer. There was, however, the great issue of the heritage of pagan philosophy which the Arabs

brought again to the knowledge of the West. Victory, again went, in time, to those who were ready to extend a discriminating and qualified welcome to the new 'ladder' – without even the need of discarding it completely after use. Images foreshadowing the truth have a permanent, mind-disposing function, as preliminaries to Revelation.

(c) With the Renaissance, *both* the discovery of the New World and new routes round the Old so that the missionary challenge represented itself *and* the recovery of the unbaptized (i.e. authentic) pagan culture of classical times, the issue was again re-debated and the same two diametrically opposed concepts re-emerged. This time, however, it was the idol-smashing Francis Xavier whose methods triumphed, while his fellow Jesuits, Ricci and De Nobili who favoured the mandarin-with-the-mandarins and guru-with-the-gurus approach had to suspend operations.

Today, they have, however, been proclaimed right by the Second Vatican Council and their attitude resumed by such pioneers as Monchanin, although they are still opposed by some Protestant theologians, especially of the Barthian School, such as Kraemer. (Cfr *La Vie Spirituelle* (435) Jan 1958 p. 72-95).

This potted history is instructive, if, as has been argued, the culture of which the 'popular, non-aesthetic' cinema is the expression has an affinity with the pagan cultures of the past. Indeed, it is not too difficult to make the necessary transpostitions in order to arrive at a determination of this attitude.

VALUES

(a) A first consideration is a value which deserves to be more appreciated today in a technological age in which habits of thought tend to be moulded above all by the methods of the natural sciences and is still haunted by the Cartesian ghost-in-the-machine picture of man – than it could have been in early Christian times. Cinema entertainment helps precisely to restore to modern man the ability to think 'mythically' or, in other words, the faculty of symbolic thought. Without it, access to faith in Christianity is closed. This constitutes, clearly, an important contribution to opening up the road to Faith.

(b) The very content of the myths is such that they can serve by contrast and comparison to prepare the mind to perceive how surprisingly yet accurately the Divine Revelation in Christ meets the deepest aspirations and often not fully conscious needs of man – those he hardly dare express, so bold and big do they loom to the mind which does not know the gift of God, that they only emerge disguised in ambiguous images: *larvatus prodeo*. In its very aesthetic poverty, the popular cinema can prepare for the joyful surprise of secret dreams come true.

(c) Moreover, all genuine communication requires finding something in common to serve as a medium. When persons share a world-vision, the task is perhaps not too difficult. When, however, communication has to be attempted between persons with different backgrounds and world-visions, there must be a search for symbols and images which can be mutually understandable because they flow out of the zone of experience they have in common. Just as the early Christians had to seek for intimations of Christianity in the pagan religions when approaching pagans, in a manner similar to the way in which they presented Christianity as the fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecies to the Hebrews, likewise today's Christian witness must find the common ground shared with the unbelievers of today – whose 'myths' are those of the film world. The analogy of these to the ancient myths is not accidental, for both are attempts at the same type of clarification of the fundamental structures of human existence and the dynamism of the struggle between Love and Aggression. By reviving these myths in a manner appealing to the modern mind, however poor they may be in comparison to the great 'aesthetic' myths, cinematic experience can create a symbolic language such as was provided by the Ancient Near East Cultures to Israel and by classical culture to Christianity. Although it must be remembered that the deep meaning of Christianity can only be adequately grasped from within the community of believers, this is not to say that there is nothing in common with the values and images of those outside with which there can be some degree of communion. The first step towards this is understanding in depth and the effort to find the elements of a common language which in our day can hardly be any-

where except in the Media Images.

DANGERS

(a) There is also the danger noted by the Fathers with respect to Pagan Myths and by Aquinas with respect to all use of images: that of mistaking the image for the reality, the danger of idolatry. This does not mean that a cult of the 'cinema-gods' will be developed similar to that of believers towards God, – although some filmfans actually come close to it in their attitudes both internal (imitation of the way of life) and external (pin-ups, etc.) to the 'stars' of the electronic media; but it means that the habitué confuses the 'escapist world' with the real, or, to put it in other words, will accept the world picture provided by the entertainment media as authentic, the mythical adumbrations as the definite truth, instead of as an easily deceptive shadow. This would be the result of taking the mythical world of the cinema too seriously, to fail to realise that it is really more 'play' than 'art' as these have been defined above.

(b) The converse danger – also a mistake about the nature of the relationship between image and reality – is to take the mythical world of the entertainment cinema as *pure* play and to miss its subtle connexions with the reality of which it is an ideal projection. The result of this danger – perhaps more easily fallen into than the first by all but the most unsophisticated – is likely to be a cynical despair. The tenousness of the artistic dimension is the cause of this failure to engender hope, by thinning out the threads linking the ideal projection with the actual reality. The point was remarkably perceived by Coleridge: 'Hope is the master element of a commanding genius, meeting with an active and combining intellect and an imagination of just that degree of vividness which disquiets and impels the soul to try to realise its images' (*Biographia Litteraria*, ed. Potter, *Selected Poetry and Prose*, 1950, p. 399).

(c) Finally, all *mythical* explanation produces disatisfaction in a reflexive mind until it is seen to have a *historical* fulfilment in Christ. Unless the hidden reference to Him is seen, it is difficult

to have even real 'enjoyment', instead of mere 'distraction', and the real world will remain wrapped up in the ambiguous mood of bitter-sweet melancholy characteristic of the classical world. Myths are valuable when they act as a stimulus to reflexion, when they give food for thought. When they do this, they become works of art and rise into a higher sphere.

MANZONI E GLI INGLESI

By ALFONSO SAMMUT

QUESTO discorso sulla fortuna del Manzoni nel paese d'oltre Manica non ha nessuna pretesa di una ricerca originale e dettagliata del problema ma, piuttosto, di un'organica ed aggiornata puntualizzazione basata su un materiale frammentario attinente all'argomento. Di fatti non esiste nessuno specifico lavoro di questo aspetto del Manzoni, con eccezione dell'articolo di Nicoletta Neri, pubblicato nel 1930.[1] Ciò che abbiamo a nostra disposizione è reperibile in fugaci accenni, contenuti per lo più in articoli apparsi, nella maggior parte, su riviste e giornali ed in qualche saggio, nei quali gli articolisti o saggisti sfiorano *en passant* il nostro argomento. Nel presente lavoro, avvalendoci del sostanziale, ma per certi aspetti ormai superato contributo della Neri e di altri stimolanti suggerimenti, abbiamo cercato di ricostruire, nei momenti salienti, l'avventura del Manzoni nel paese di Shakespeare fino ai nostri giorni. Disse appunto la Neri più di trent'anni fa: 'Forse più che di fortuna, per l'opera manzoniana in Inghilterra, converrebe parlare di *sfortuna:* ché essa appare, in generale, stranamente incompresa'.[2] Oggi questa sconfortante affermazione non ha forse quella validità storico-critica, che poteva avere nei tempi in cui scrisse la studiosa, ma certamente non si può, neanche oggi, parlare di un successo strepitoso, benché ci sia stata una riscossa del prestigio del grande scrittore lombardo, dovuta alla traduzione inglese de *I Promessi Sposi* di Archibald Colquhoun, una versione non del tutto brillante, ma pur sempre di gran lunga migliore di quelle apparse in Inghilterra fino al 1951, anno della sua pubblicazione.[3] Sarà merito di questo studioso il risveglio dell'interessamento e dell'entusiasmo per il Manzoni in Inghilterra.

[1] N. NERI, *La fortuna del Manzoni in Inghilterra,* in 'Atti della R. Accademia delle Scienze di Torino,' vol. 74, t. II (1938-39), pp. 531-69.
[2] *Ibid.,* p. 3.
[3] A. COLQUHOUN, *The Betrothed,* Dent & Sons London and New York, 1951. Rist. 1952 e 1954. Nuova ed. 1956, Rist. 1959.

La fortuna di uno scrittore in un paese straniero, va misurata e studiata dai riflessi delle sue opere negli scrittori di quel paese, dalla quantità e qualità delle versioni, dagli studi compiuti su di lui e, qualche volta, dalle sue ripercussioni sul costume e sulla civiltà. Per quanto riguarda la prima possibilità, diciamo subito che il Manzoni, contrariamente ai suoi predecessori compatrioti del '500 non ebbe seguaci in Inghilterra. La sua influenza si esaurisce in una vaga e discutibile presenza nella novella di Walter Scott, *The Fair Maid of Perth*, pubblicata nel 1828, un anno dopo quella dei *Promessi Sposi*. Si è voluto vedere un certo reciproco influsso fra Scott e Manzoni,[4] ma mentre gli appassionati della *Quellenforschung* sono riusciti a riscontrare molti echi scottiani nel romanzo del Manzoni, l'influenza di quest'ultimo, fu scoperta e sottolineata in alcune rassomiglianze di procedimento tecnico, d'ispirazione nell'intreccio nonchè nella creazione di alcuni personaggi della suddetta novella. Di fatti, la novella dello Scott ha come trama un matrimonio contrastato da prepotenti e da certi imprevisti avvenimenti. Sempre, secondo i sostenitori di questa tesi, Caterina, la giovane protagonista del romanzo scottiano sarebbe ispirata da Lucia, perseguitata e minacciata come questa, da un altro don Rodrigo, che porta il nome di Rothsay. Inoltre, l'atmosfera politico-sociale della novella risentirebbe di quella secentesca spagnola con il comune sopruso della legge sotto il debole regime di Roberto III di Scozia dov'è ambientata la vicenda dello Scott. Questi, mi sembra siano i punti di convergenza più rilevanti registrati nelle due opere; però a nessuno sfugge che tali parallelismi, benchè suggestivi, non approdino a risultati convincenti, come, ad esempio, la vicenda matrimoniale che potrebbe risalire nell'ispirazione embrionale, addirittura, alla commedia terenziana e plautina. Per parlare di un influsso attivo non è sufficiente un semplice addentellato tra un personaggio ed un altro, ma bisogna tener conto di altri fattori più profondi ed incisivi come l'atmosfera, il pensiero dominante, l'ispirazione nell'ideazione dei personaggi, motivi che vengono studiati, riassorbiti e trasformati da conferire alla nuova opera una sua propria ed originale fisonomia.

[4] A. COLQUHOUN, *Manzoni and his Times*, J.M. Dent London, 1954, pp. 188-9.

Il vero punto di partenza, nella storia della fortuna del Manzoni in Inghilterra, comincia con le versioni delle sue opere che furono tutte tradotte, con la comprensibile eccezione delle due tragedie di cui furono resi in inglese soltanto i cori. Il suo capolavoro vide la luce in versione inglese appena un anno dopo la prima edizione italiana nel 1828.[5] Il primo a dare l'infausto avvio a queste traduzioni risulta il reverendo protestante, Charles Swan, cappellano della marina inglese, che pubblicò il suo *The Betrothed Lovers* a Pisa. Forse è davvero il caso di dire per questa traduzione che sarebbe stato meglio se nata non fosse, perchè venne fuori un lavoro costellato di gravissimi errori e, per di più, costituí un aberrante esempio per i futuri traduttori inglesi e, conseguentemente, influenzò in un modo negativo anche il pubblico inglese nei confronti del Manzoni. Da un esame superficiale ci accorgiamo che Swan, in mala o buona fede che fosse, riuscí a travisare (non certamente per il meglio) ed a rendere inappetibili, già per se stessi non molto graditi al lettore inglese, il contenuto e la fisonomia del romanzo e, cosí uscí fuori una copia scialba e imprecisa. Non sto qui ad elencare tutte le manchevolezze della versione del Swan ma basterebbe segnalare alcune stonature e stravaganze commesse da lui per avere una remota e superficiale impressione del suo trattamento. In primo luogo abbreviò il libro a 34 capitoli, eliminò l'introduzione, ridusse i brani riguardanti Gertrude, il cardinale Federico, i due capitoli della peste, la descrizione della fame nonchè quella dell'invasione dei Lanzichinecchi. Poi se veniamo al rendimento letterale spiccano errori veramente madornali nella cattiva interpretazione di frasi, nella confusione di terminologia e via discorrendo. Cito, ad esempio, lo scambio tra il bravo manzoniano ed il bravo aggettivo e cosí 'quel fiore della braveria italiana' riferentesi, com'è noto, all'Innominato diventa, 'the flower of Italian bravery', di cui il nostro don Abbondio sarebbe stato molto più contento ma poi tutto quel famoso, comico soliloquio sulla mula perderebbe la sua *raison d'être;* (cap. xxiii) i 'libri in volgare' diventano 'books for the vulgar' (cap. xxix) mentre 'saltar di palo in frasca' (cap. xxxviii) risulta 'he leapt from the frying pan into the fire' che non ha nulla a che vedere con il detto proverbiale italiano. L'elenco di queste frasi divertenti potrebbe essere

[5] *The Betrothed Lovers*, trans. By C. Swan, Capurro, Pisa 1828.

prolungato ma non può essere di nessun giovamento a questo discorso.[6] Alla traduzione del Swan seguirono altre tutte anonime: la prima in ordine cronologico, fu pubblicata a Londra nel 1834 col titolo *The Betrothed,* ristampata due volte,[7] mentre l'ultima, fatta sul testo del 1827, risulta quella edita da James Burns ed accolta favorevolmente perchè fu ristampata anche altre volte.[8] La prima completa versione curata sulla definitiva edizione de *I Promessi Sposi* del 1840-2 vide la luce a Londra nel 1845 con il titolo: *The Betrothed Lovers, a Milanese story of the XVII century with the Column of Infamy.*[9] Per quanto riguarda la tecnica di queste versioni, salvo alcune attenuanti nei confronti dell'ultima, non c'è molto da rallegrarsi perchè, sostanzialmente, non sono dissimili a quella del primo traduttore. Anche qui prevalgono i molteplici errori d'infedeltà nei confronti del testo originale – eliminazione e riduzione di brani, travisamento di periodi, frasi fallose e cosí via. Inoltre bisogna osservare, come scrive F. Ghisalberti 'la scrupolosa riserva protestante dei traduttori di non condividere le idee religiose dell'autore e di non aver intenzione alcuna di propagarle'.[10]

Dopo l'ultima versione del 1845 dobbiamo aspettare più di cent'anni per ritrovare una nuova versione inglese in commercio, pubblicato in Inghilterra.[11] Ma questo volta il traslatore inglese voleva riparare i danni dei suoi predecessori col rivendicare la lesa dignità dell'autore ed offrire al pubblico inglese il capolavoro manzoniano nella sua quasi completa ed autentica fisonomia. La scoperta del Manzoni in Inghilterra risale appunto a questa traduzione, pubblicata, come poc'anzi detto, nel 1951. La versione del *The Betrothed* di Colquhoun apparve simultaneamente a Londra e Nuova York, riscuotendo un immediato e strepitoso successo tanto

[6] Per un elenco più completo di questi errori, vedi il già citato articolo della Neri, pp. 6-7.

[7] *The Betrothed,* Richard Bentley London 1834. Rist. 1856, 1876.

[8] *The Betrothed,* James Burns, London 1844. Rist. 1876, 1893, 1914.

[9] *The Betrothed Lovers, with The Column of Infamy,* Green and Longmans, London 1845.

[10] F. GHISALBERTI, Critica Manzoniana d'un decennio, Casa Manzoni, Milano 1949, p. 338.

[11] *The Betrothed,* trad: di A. Colquhoun. *op. cit.* Vedi nota n. 3. Nel 1924 apparve una versione di rev. Daniel J. Cooper a Nuova York.

come impresa editoriale come per il suo valore intrinseco.[12]

Nelle numerosissime recensioni sulla traduzione tutti hanno avuto parole di elogio sulla capacità penetrativa e la serietà dimostrata dal Colquhoun specialmente dai suoi compatrioti, mentre da parte dei recensori italiani non sono mancate le voci di riserva benchè, in ultima analisi, approdino anche loro a conclusioni positive. Sarah Champion è uscita con queste frasi, 'here at last is this meaty, human, pleasant book in an English worthy ... of the original Italian ... and very readable'.[13] 'Mr. Colquhoun', scrive Freya Stark, 'has carried through a careful and pious task, and a very difficult one, for the best translator in the world could not switch the language and thought of that Italian age into the currencies of our world and time to-day'.[14] E Bernard Wall osserva che: 'The long neglect of Manzoni in England was only repaired in 1951 with the version of Colquhoun. It takes its place belatedly on our bookshelves, together with other great European novels that have become classics – and it still remains unique, unlike them all'.[15] Meno entusiasti, ma certamente più obiettivi i recensori italiani fra i quali cito i due più autorevoli, Emilio Cecchi e Mario Praz. Cecchi nell'esame della versione ha annotato alcune 'minuzie e sfumature' come quando l'Innominato, già convertito, raduna i suoi bravi e li indirizza con l'insolita frase di 'Figlioli'. Colquhoun, dimenticando la metamorfosi spirituale avvenuta nell'Innominato dopo l'incontro col cardinale, l'ha tradotta con 'My lads' che all italiana risuona press'a poco, 'Ragazzi' o 'Giovanotti' dal tono un po' bravesco. Cecchi ne sottolinea altri difetti però basta il titolo della recensione, 'Colquhoun scopre Manzoni agli inglesi' per poter dedurre il suo giudizio di soddisfacimento.[16] Più moderata e parsimoniosa di aggettivi sonori la recensione del Praz, il quale, però dopo aver segnalato nel testo inglese frasi e periodi fallosi, finisce col rendere omaggio al traslatore attribuendogli 'il grande merito di rendere leggibile e ac-

[12] Nove mila copie furono esaurite in sei settimane. Vedi G. ALBERTI, in 'La Stampa' (Torino), 15 ottobre 1951.

[13] S. CHAMPION, in 'John O'London's Weekly,' 20 luglio 1951.

[14] F. STARK, in 'The Observer,' 29 luglio 1951.

[15] B. WALL, *Manzoni*, London 1954, p. 2.

[16] E. CECCHI, in 'Europeo', 21 ottobre 1951.

cetto agli inglesi d'oggi il grande romanzo italiano'.[17] Del resto lo stesso Colquhoun, prevedendo queste critiche ha detto nella prefazione che: 'No translator of *I Promessi Sposi* can hope to reproduce the cadence, the subtlety, the terseness of the original prose. Some of the irony and humour which come from the particular connotation of a word or phrase is also lost'.[18] La versione del Colquhoun, prescindendo dai suoi difetti e pregi intrenseci, ha avuto il merito indiscusso di aver portato all'attenzione e di aver suscitato un'ondata di entusiasmo degli inglesi per il Manzoni. E sembra che questo risveglio non sia stato una reazione momentanea, frutto di una vasta ed organizzata pubblicità, perchè si è aumentato e rafforzato di più fino a nostri giorni. Di fatti recentemente è stata pubblicata un'altra versione de *I Promessi Sposi* fatta da Bruce Penman.[19] Il Penman, traduttore anche di novelle italiane pubblicate nella serie *Penguin Book of Italian Short Stories,* in una conversazione mi ha raccontato che ha speso tre anni per tradurre il romanzo e che ha cercato di evitare tutti gli errori in cui era caduto il suo predecessore, come, ad esempio, del uso dialetto, di colloquialismi nei dialoghi, l'uso del presente storico che suona male nell'inglese moderno e frasi idiomatiche non interpretate bene. Questa nuova traduzione, scritta in un inglese corretto, piacevole e facilmente accessibile a tutti, contribuirà, certamente, a mantenere viva l'ammirazione già acquisita per il grande scrittore lombardo presso un pubblico inglese più numeroso.

Minor risonanza hanno avuto le altre opere del Manzoni in questo paese. Le *Osservazioni sulla morale cattolica* apparvero in inglese nel 1836[20] mentre un sommario del *Dialogo dell'Invenzione* fu pubblicato nel 1899[21] e la *Storia della Colonna Infame* insieme alla versione de *I Promessi Sposi* del 1845. Le sue liriche

[17] M. PRAZ, in 'Idea', 8 novembre 1951. Per un completo elenco di queste recensioni vedi bibliografia.

[18] *The Betrothed, op. cit.,* p. ii.

[19] *The Betrothed,* trans., with an introduction by Bruce Penman, Penguin Books 1972.

[20] *A Vindication of Catholic Morality or a refutation of the charges brought against* it by Sismondi in his history... Keating and Brown, London 1836.

[21] *A Dialogue of the Artist's Idea, by Manzoni, the author of I Promessi Sposi paraphrased from the Italian* by Rev. J.A. Drewe, London 1899.

e i cori delle due tragedie apparvero in varie riviste ed antologie.[22] Per quanto riguarda il loro valore letterario ed artistico lasciano molto a desiderare. Orlo Williams parlando di una versione degli *Inni Sacri* apparsi in un'antologia scolastica *Italian Gems* III li ha descritti 'bruttissimi'[23] mentre la Neri in un giudizio complessivo sulle tradizioni poetiche scrive che 'dell'originale, se non altro, sopravvive un'impronta, il filo del pensiero, lo svolgersi dell'immagine'.[24] E non poteva succedere altrimenti; quando uno avvicini il testo con dei preconcetti in partenza, per di più, sprovvisto di una buona conoscenza linguistica, il risultato non potrebb'essere che un fallimento. I traduttori inglesi, con la loro *forma mentis* impregnata d'un ideologia riformistica non potevano echeggiare fedelmente nelle loro versioni le idee ed i sentimenti manzoniani animati, com'è noto, di un alto e devoto misticismo cattolico.

Nella cronistoria di queste versioni s'inserisce la saggistica inglese sulle opere e sulla personalità dello scrittore con i primi commenti critico-esegetici apparsi sempre in quella selva di riviste dell'Inghilterra dell'ottocento e, di recente, nei pochi lavori dedicati interamente all'autore. L'avvio alla storia della critica manzoniana in Inghilterra l'ha dato la rivista, *London Magazine* con due articoli pubblicati nelle edizioni di settembre e di novembre del 1820, seguiti da un altro apparso nella *Quarterly Review* di ottobre. Gli articolisti prendono in esame la tragedia del *Carmagnola* e cominciano con alcune riflessioni storico-letterarie lamentando la carenza di una tradizione tragediografica italiana e la scarsa stagione in questo campo. Il commentatore del *London Magazine* dà un resoconto della tragedia e finisce col sottolineare l'originalità e l'alta poesia del dramma mentre quello della *Quarterly* si vanta che gl'inglesi non hanno nulla da imparare dal Manzoni per quanto riguarda la violazione delle tre unità ed, in fine, rileva che il Carmagnola ha un valore poetico, ma la condanna come opera teatrale perchè priva di qualsiasi tensione drammatica.

[22] Per un elenco completo delle edizioni e delle ristampe di queste versioni, vedi Neri, *art. cit.*, pp. 14-20.
[23] O. WILLIAMS, *Omaggio britannico a Manzoni* in 'L'Esame' (Milano) II (1923), p. 454.
[24] N. NERI, art. cit., p. 20.

Queste prime considerazioni sulla tragedia italiana, in genere, e sulle caratteristiche di quella manzoniana risuoneranno in commenti successivi da cui emergono altre impressioni. Cosí in un articolo del *Blackwood Magazine* dell'agosto 1826, dopo una breve discussione sul romanticismo italiano, l'articolista esamina l'altra tragedia, l'*Adelchi,* definendola storica e ispirata al modello shakespeariano senza però avere personaggi di spiccata personalità come quelli del drammaturgo inglese. Soggiunge poi una grave stonatura, ripetuta a iosa in altri commenti, sulla 'ingiustizia poetica' in quanto Carlo Magno non viene punito, accusa estesa anche al *Conte di Carmagnòla.* Osservazioni semplicistiche ed assennate continuano ad apparire in commenti di riviste come, ad esempio, quello della *Monthly Review* del gennaio 1827 dove ritorna l'accusa di 'ingiustizia poetica', giustificata questa volta dalla storia ed in quello del numero inaugurale della *Foreign Quarterly Review* nel 1827 in cui lo scrittore, dopo aver lodato il Manzoni per non aver osservato la regola delle tre unità, per la modernità del modello, per il mantenuto rigore dall'atmosfera tragica nelle due tragedie, poi passa ad elencare i loro difetti: esilità della trama, stile gonfio e retorico, mancanza di carica drammatica, la solita moralità sbagliata, cioè il sopravvalere dell'ingiustizia e dell'inganno senza un'adeguata punizione.

Con la comparsa dell'edizione de *I Promessi Sposi* nel 1827 e la quasi immediata versione inglese, l'attenzione e l'interesse degli articolisti si sposta sul capolavoro e l'analisi si allarga e si arrichisce di nuove riflessioni letterarie accompagnate da qualche accenno alla biografia dell'autore. Il primo articolo dedicato a *I Promessi Sposi* è quello della *Foreign Quarterly Review* di novembre, 1827, in cui l'anonimo articolista, abituato forse alle complicate ed astruse vicende del romanza scottiano, ne rileva lo schematismo elementare di quello manzoniano e, in complesso, ne dà un giudizio negativo. Fra tanti commenti relativi al lavoro manzoniano fino alla morte dell'autore, il più assennato, equilibrato ed originale risulta quello apparso sul *Christian Remembrancer* dello agosto, 1843 dove in una nota di confronto tra Scott e Manzoni, divenuto ormai di moda a scapito dell'Italiano, viene esaminato il ruolo diverso che la chiesa svolge nei due scrittori: 'mentre nello Scott si vive nella sconfinata e luminosa vastità

della natura della quale la chiesa è soltanto un elemento paesistico, nel Manzoni la chiesa pare aduggi e opprima come una volta gotica le voci e i sentimenti della folla che sta sotto'.[25] Un giudizio, com'è noto, che ha avuto ulteriori sviluppi nella storiografia critica italiana,[26] ma, a mio modesto avviso, poco convincente, perchè quella folla, una volta sottratta a quella chiesa, le sue 'voci e i suoi sentimenti' non avrebbero nessun altro punto di riferimento in cui si giustifichino la loro presenza ed il loro modo di agire nel tessuto religioso del romanzo. La morte del Manzoni offrí l'occasione per altri scritti in cui si intrecciano parole encomiastiche ed altre denigratorie come, ad esempio, quello di C. Mary Phillimore sul *Macmillan Magazine* di luglio del 1873 dove la studiosa, indugiando sul solito paragone Scott-Manzoni, ne dà un giudizio positivo ed elogiattivo sullo scrittore italiano mentre, di ben altro tenore, fù quello della *London Quarterly Review* del gennaio 1874, in cui, oltre al capolavoro, vengono discusse anche le liriche. Il commentatore dopo un elogio al *Cinque Maggio,* critica gli inni sacri ed accusa l'autore di essersi indirizzato su una strada sbagliata e, cercandovi tracce di protestantesimo, finisce con un augurio rivolto agli Italiani per convertirsi a questa religione. Segnaliamo, in fine, l'articolo nutrito d'interessanti e succose riflessioni firmato da Ellen M. Clerke e pubblicato sulla Cattolica *Dublin Review* dell'ottobre, 1882. Il critico, dopo aver discusso il ruolo importante svolto dal Manzoni nella storia del romanticismo italiano, riconoscendo in lui il fondatore, il caposcuola e l'ultimo rappresentante, delinea intelligentemente le sue caratteristiche di scrittore: la sua profonda conoscenza dell'anima umana, la sua eccezionale potenza creativa, l'aspetto liricizzante delle sue opere ed il suo determinante contributo ad una rinnovazione stilistica della letteratura italiana sciolta dalle tradizionali pastoie accademiche.

Da quanto finora abbiamo sentito sulla critica ottocentesca inglese, dato il suo carattere piuttosto dilettantistico e concessa l'attenuante di una superficiale conoscenza della lingua italiana, fra le stonature registrate, emergono anche alcune considerazioni ritenute ancora valide, come la liricità del mondo poetico man-

[25] F. GHISALBERTI, *op. cit.*, p. 338. Vedi anche N. Neri, *art. cit.* p. 28.
[26] *Ibid.*

zoniano, il ruolo decisivo della religione, l'esilità degli intrecci, la sua mancata vocazione drammatica. Inoltre si constata pure, tenendo conto anche delle versioni, una polarizzazzione di attenzione continua sull'autore, un fenomeno lampante ma, finora, curiosamente non messo in luce dalla critica, e che, dato il clima intellettuale e religioso piuttosto refrattario alla realtà descritta dal Manzoni, riveste un particolare significato nella storia della sua fortuna inglese.

Dopo l'articolo della *Dublin Review,* nel repertorio bibliografico della saggistica inglese sul Manzoni, non mi sembra risultino articoli o studi di particolare interesse sull'argomento fino alla ricerca di Barbara Reynolds, eccettuato l'articolo di Orlo Williams, apparso nel 1925.[27]

Questo studioso si sofferma genericamente su alcuni temi già acquisiti ed illustrati dalla critica italiana; come il senso innato della storia, l'armonica fusione tra gli elementi umoristici e comici, la profonda e sentita umanità del Manzoni e cosí via.[28] Nel 1950 Barbara Reynolds pubblicò il suo lavoro: *The Linguistic Writings of Manzoni.*[29] Questa italianista studia la formazione e l'evolversi delle teorie linguistiche dell'autore in vista di un'edizione critica dei suoi scritti concernenti questa materia. La sua disamina del materiale, specialmente quello epistolare, approda alla ben nota posizione del Manzoni in merito alla questione della lingua, cioè quella del primo momento, alla ricerca di una lingua basata su elementi comuni a tutti i dialetti italiani, quella del secondo momento con l'adozione del toscano. Il libro della Reynolds, per il suo aspetto ristretto e specialistico, non poteva ovviamente avere molta risonanza presso un pubblico ormai quasi dimentico del Manzoni. Dal 1950 fino ad oggi, con eccezione di alcuni riferimenti reperibili in qualche manuale di storia letteraria italiana in inglese, sono apparsi due saggi di studiosi inglesi dedicati interamente all'autore, quello di Bernard Wall[30] e l'altro del

[27] C.M. BOWEN, *Manzoni and Scott*, in 'Dublin Review' 176 (aprile-giugno 1925), pp. 239-52. Non ho potuto vedere quest'articolo.
[28] O. WILLIAMS, *art. cit.*
[29] B. REYNOLDS, *The Linguistic Writings of Alessandro Manzoni*, Cambridge 1950.
[30] B. WALL, *op. cit.*

traduttore A. Colquhoun,[31] pubblicati entrambi nel 1954.

Nel suo libretto il Walls ha rivolto la sua attenzione al romanzo senza ignorare però gli altri aspetti della vita e delle altre opere dell'autore. Tocca rapidamente la solita tematica relativa al Manzoni. La sua analisi delle opere teatrali lo porta alla ben nota conclusione che il Manzoni non aveva la stoffa del drammaturgo ma una vocazione lirica. Nella parte centrale racconta le fasi più significative del romanzo con frequenti citazioni testuali da cui cerca di mettere in evidenza le sfumature stilistiche ed il suo pensiero e, specialmente la profonda conoscenza delle psiche umana. 'Manzoni', scrive un ignoto recensore sul libro, 'emerges from this essay as a master novelist with the imaginative realist's firm grasp on a wide section of the human situation, and deserving a definite position among the great creators of the European novel'. Il lavoro del Wall non offre nessuna novità allo studioso italiano e, forse, neanche al comune lettore però funge da rapida introduzione a quello inglese che finora non poteva trovare nessun discreto commento sullo scrittore lombardo.

Lo studio più impegantivo, più serio e dettagliato fatto da un inglese rimane quello del grande innamorato del Manzoni, A. Colquhoun, *Manzoni e i suoi tempi.* Nella nota introduttiva il critico precisa lo scopo e la portata della ricerca quando, nonostante i lunghi anni di studi sul Manzoni, confessa francamente che il suo lavoro è indirizzato 'to other than specialists on Italian literature or history';[32] In questo libro, ornato di numerose e rare illustrazioni, Colquhoun descrive il clima politico-sociale contemporaneo al Manzoni ed analizza alcuni temi fondamentali della vita milanese, come quello religioso, ma più accentuamente quello letterario con particolare riferimento alla Società del Caffe. Su questo sfondo religioso, politico e intellettuale, ricostruisce dalla nascita fino alla morte le varie vicende biografiche dell'autore. In questa minuziosa ricerca biografica mette in risalto i contatti del Manzoni con i suoi amici, con la cultura illuministica francese; espande il discorso al suo pensiero religioso, alle sue teorie linguistiche e cerca d'istituire un rapporto tra queste molteplici esperienze ed i suoi scritti, illuminando cosí la sua formazione culturale e la con-

[31] A. COLQUHOUN, *Manzoni and his Times, op. cit.*
[32] *Idem,* p. ix.

seguente genesi interna della sua stagione letteraria. Cosí il dato biografico e quello letterario s'illuminano vicendevolmente in quanto la analisi biografica, oltre naturalmente a certi avvenimenti registrati dalla cronaca, si basa principalmente su un'evidenza interna emergente da una vasta ed accorta lettura dei suoi scritti, e, specialmente del ponderoso carteggio epistolare che rimane fondamentale per qualsiasi disquizione su Manzoni. Le sue osservazioni sono sempre corroborate da una precisa documentazione di riferimenti che conferiscono alle sue illazioni fondatezza ed oggettività. Con quale *animus* abbia avvicinato l'autore ce lo dice lo stesso studioso in una lettera indirizzata al suo amico, Prof. Claudio Cesare Secchi, direttore del centro studi manzoniani, che mi ha gentilmente segnalato e da cui cito testualmente: 'l'opera manzoniana è stata come un ponte tra la vecchia religione di forma ed una ritrovata in termini moderni o che sembrano modernamente più validi, di una religione dello spirito... Si è detto che ogni biografia o studio biografico del Manzoni diventa un'autobiografia dello studioso. Per me, benchè mi illudevo di aver lavorato sempre con distacco, questo mi sembra molto vero ... Pongo quindi gli anni manzoniani quasi al centro della mia vita. È un fatto del quale mi sono accorto solo guardando indietro recentemente'.[33] Questo brano, oltre ad un fugace accenno alla sua conversione (Colquhoun, scozzese di nascita e cattolico di religione, dopo un periodo di allontanamento ritrovò la sua vecchia fede nei suoi studi sul Manzoni) ci spiega con quale distacco, e, perciò lontano da preconcetti, ha avvicinato l'autore per offrire al lettore un ritratto obbiettivo dell'uomo, del pensatore, del romanziere e del poeta insieme a quello del suo ambiente. La monografia del Colquhoun ha avuto notevole risonanza e i vari recensori, inglesi e italiani ne hanno sottolineato i pregi del lavoro e gli sforzi del saggista. In questo caso, più che l'inesperta critica inglese sarebbe meglio vedere com'è stato accolto da quella italiana, più agguerrita ed aggiornata. Enzo Bottasso, dopo aver rilevato una tematica abbastanza conosciuta e rifiorente nella saggistica manzoniana, conclude che 'questa biografia, per la freschezza e la vivacità d'interessi di cui è ispirata offre anche al lettore italiano una guida utilissi-

[33] C.C. SECCHI, *Un convertito dal Manzoni* (*Sir Archibald Colquhoun*) in 'L' Osservatore Romano', 18 aprile 1964, p. 3.

ma, e quasi senza riscontro in una letteratura critica ed esegetica non precisamente scarsa nè sobria'.[34] E mentre G. Bezzola ha riscontrato il suo pregio maggiore nel suo valore introduttivo per il popolo anglosassone[35] e G. Nibbi è stato colpito dall'obbiettività, dal senso meticoloso della ricerca documentaria dovuta 'alla dovizia documentativa veramente soprendente',[36] l'autorevole studioso del Manzoni, Fiorenzo Forti, ha definito il libro, 'ben costruito, ispirato ad una sincera volontà di adesione al soggetto e mosso da una felice intuizione psicologica'.[37] Dopo questo sguardo panoramico alle versioni ed alla saggistica inglese, ci rimane da chiarire e precisare meglio un quesito: si può parlare di fortuna o sfortuna nell'avventura inglese del Manzoni? o, presentando l'interrogativo in una terminologia diversa quasi anticipativa della risposta: per quali motivi il Manzoni, tutto sommato, non è riuscito ad inserirsi vivamente nel contesto culturale inglese? Alcuni studiosi ne hanno accennato al problema, approdando a conclusioni quasi identiche, ma in fondo, forse non del tutto giustificate, come avremo modo di vedere più avanti.

Nelle risposte al quesito si possono distinguere tre atteggiamenti critici: il primo analizza le cause della sfortuna del Manzoni prima della versione del Colquhoun, il secondo ne rileva con compiacimento la riscossa dopo la sua pubblicazione mentre il terzo si riferisce ad un solitario, polemico e stimolante suggerimento dovuto a Carlo Dionisiotti.

Sulla prima fase della fortuna registriamo qui le affermazioni di Orlo Willaims e di Umberto Calosso a cui si rifanno i giudizi di altri critici con sfumature diverse ma sostanzialmente identici, come quelli del *Times Literary Supplement*[38] e del Colquhoun.[39] Il Williams cerca le cause della fredda accoglienza in varie direzioni. Osserva che il romanzo del Manzoni e la sua produzione poetica vennero a coincidere con un momento particolare del romanticismo inglese, che maturato con l'intervento di Burns, Wordsworth,

[34] E. BOTTASSO, in 'Lo Spettatore Italiano', VIII (1955), p. 32.
[35] G. BEZZOLA, in 'Paideia', 1956, pp. 49-53.
[36] G. NIBBI, in 'Idea', 11 luglio 1954.
[37] F. FORTI, in 'Giornale Storico della Letteratura Italiana', CXXXIII (1956), pp. 135-6.
[38] *Times Literary Supplement*, 3 agosto 1951.
[39] A. COLQUHOUN, *The Betrothed*... p. 576.

Shelley, Keats, Byron e Scott aveva raggiunto la piena saturazione e, non poteva suggerire od offrire nulla di nuovo al pubblico inglese. Inoltre, prima del secolo decimonono, l'interesse per la lingua italiana, dopo una rifioritura nella seconda metà del settecento, cominciò a declinare. Lo studioso soggiunge che il contenuto del romanzo manzoniano, caratterizzato da una spiccata ed incisiva atmosfera religiosa cattolica non poteva trovare molta simpatia in un clima dominato fortemente da una mentalità protestante. In fine, quella umile gente, protagonista del romanzo, costituiva un soggetto già molto familiare al pubblico inglese con il *Pamela* del Richardson, il *Tom Jones* del Fielding ed i romanzi dello Scott: 'Alla nostra letteratura non mancava nulla, o quasi, di ciò che il Manzoni donava alla letteratura italiana, laddove difettava, ad esempio, in epoche remote, di quel che le donavano Dante, Petrarca e Boccaccio'.[40]

Più espliciti e completi sono i motivi addotti da Umberto Calosso in un capitolo, intitolato 'Manzoni e gli inglesi' nel suo libro, *Colloqui col Manzoni.* Dopo aver detto che il romanzo manzoniano conteneva tutti i requisiti per una buona recezione in Inghilterra – intimità di coscienza religiosa, spirito antirettorico, stile smorzato, notevole *sense of humour* – Calosso passa all'elenco delle cause del mancato successo. Ritiene che la sua prima sventura fosse lo scambio con lo Scott; che gli inglesi non potessero gradire un 'libro autunnale tutto a toni grigi come il paesaggio lombardo'; che fossero delusi nel trovare nel romanzo 'gente prosaica', come il contadino Renzo e non dei 'poeti'; che quel titolo cosí promettente dovesse trarli in inganno perchè gli amori dei due promessi sposi non abbondano in effusioni sentimentali e cosí venne a mancare 'la canzonetta d'amore, la serenata al lume'. Continuando nel suo solito stile, tra l'arguto ed il faceto, Calosso ne addita la moralità pessimistica del peccato originale presente nel romanzo, ispirata a quella agostiniana e pascaliana, che contrasta con quella mentalità pelagiana inglese, basata su un concetto della innata bontà dell'uomo da cui proviene, ripeto testualmente 'quella gentilezza della vita inglese, quel rispetto verso il fanciullo, quella filantropia che offre un aiuto ad ogni dolore e si spinge al regno degli animali e dei fiori'. Anche l'idea del *gentleman* che si ispira al-

[40] O. WILLIAMS, *art. cit.*, p. 453.

la mistica borghese esiste nel Manzoni ma 'nascosta, negata e sostituita con l'ideale del povero diavolo, dell'uomo comune'. Ed, in fine, lo stesso *humour* manzoniano differisce nella sua raffinata e maliziosa sfumatura da quello inglese che è sociale, superficiale ed ingenuo.[41]

L'atteggiamento riscontrato nel registro di questi giudizi che spiegano le reazioni letterarie, psicologiche e religiose per cui venne meno il successo del Manzoni ha una validità storica per quell'arco di tempo che va press'a poco dal 1830 fino al 1950. In fatti con la pubblicazione della versione del Colquhoun, con le sue successive ristampe, con quella più recente del Penman nonchè con i due saggi esaminati prima, si può dire che in quest'ultimo ventennio il Manzoni ha cominciato ad accattivare il favore e la simpatia del pubblico inglese. La critica più recente, come, ad esempio, Cecchi e Praz, ha sottolineato unanime questa nuova scoperta del Manzoni perchè, secondo quest'ultimo, il più autorevole studioso della letteratura comparatistica anglo-italiana, finalmente gli inglesi hanno ritrovato il vero volto dello scrittore, quello del 'romanzo umano',[42] che non conosce limiti storici o geografici e coglie l'eterno fluire di quella vita che Goethe ha chiamato 'interiore'.

Vorrei prima di finire accennare all'acuta e rivoluzionaria affermazione sull'argomento del Dionisiotti, secondo cui si potrebbe istituire un rapporto di continuità tra i due momenti della vicenda inglese manzoniana, com'è venuta delineandosi nel nostro discorso. Il Dionisiotti, in una conferenza sul 'Manzoni e la cultura inglese dell'800,' tenuta nel mese di maggio a Milano, in occasione delle celebrazioni del centinario manzoniano, ha esposto una tesi che contraddirebbe con le conclusioni di quegli studiosi che hanno rilevato una scarsa fortuna nel secolo decimonono, in quanto come detto prima, lo scrittore milanese non poteva interessarli anzi si presentava con un romanzo dal contenuto religioso piuttosto inappetibile ai loro gusti ed alla loro *forma mentis*. Questo elemento religioso, ostacolo principale per un vivo inserimento nel contesto culturale inglese, diventa, invece per il Dionisiotti la sua maggior forza attrattiva. Lo spunto di questo eminente ed acuto

[41] U. CALOSSO, *Colloqui col Manzoni*, Laterza, Bari 1948, pp. 12-23.
[42] M. PRAZ, *l. c.*

studioso esige un lungo discorso per comprendere il suo significato e dev'essere inserito e lumeggiato in un'ampia prospettiva storico-culturale europea. Qui dobbiamo accontentarci di una rapida e breve esposizione riassuntiva legata strettamente all'argomento. Nella politica interna inglese si avverava una svolta decisiva per la libertà religiosa con la *Restoration of Hierarchy;* si stava cercando un pacifico *modus vivendi* tra chiesa e stato per superare l'ormai secolare attrito religioso. Dionisiotti ha osservato che la comparsa del romanzo manzoniano coincise con questo momento storico ed il suo contenuto religioso non poteva passare inosservato. In fatti l'opera del Manzoni conteneva un messaggio religioso che poteva trovare una sua attuale applicazione in quelle circostanze politico-sociali. Questo messaggio va ritrovato nei rapporti tra chiesa e stato descritti dal Manzoni e riguardanti un ambiente regionale italiano. Questi rapporti si svolgono in perfetta armonia senza nessun pesante intervento da parte della chiesa romana, che sarebbe insopportabile per gli intellettuali inglesi dell'800. Nel romanzo potevano trovare in atto un modello di funzionamento pacifico di questi rapporti. Il Dionisiotti ha aggiunto pure, che mentre in Italia il Manzoni non era più ascoltato e in Francia non trovava più seguito; l'Inghilterra, per ironia del destino, fù quel paese che recepí meglio il suo messaggio religioso. Questa tesi, a mio modesto parere, potrebbe essere suffragata e rafforzata da altre considerazioni. Che gli inglesi abbiano ammirato e sentito questo contenuto religioso è fuori dubbio; le numerose ristampe delle sue versioni fin dal 1828 avallano questo interessamento. Che questa popolarità non sia dovuta ad un immagine byroniana, risorgimentale dell'Italia lo rivelano lo stesso contenuto del romanzo e le affermazioni di Calosso. L'unica spiegazione plausibile ed accettabile rimane quella fornita dal Dionisiotti. In fatti, tanto i commentatori come i traduttori hanno sempre lodato l'elemento religioso, nonostante il loro dichiarato distacco dalle sue sfumature cattoliche. Charles Swan, malgrado le sue riserve riformistiche sull'intervento della chiesa nello scioglimento del voto di Lucia, nella prefazione alla traduzione sottolinea l'importanza del ruolo della religione; nell'introduzione della versione del 1844, il traduttore è rimasto colpito dalle 'masterly pictures of religious truth and beauty'. E in merito alla validità della tesi del Dionisiotti vorrei aggiun-

gere anche le impressioni di un versatile e noto personaggio della scena politica inglese dell'800 Lord Macaulay, che condannò severamente l'amministrazione papale di Roma[43] ma ebbe parole di lode per la religione de *I Promessi Sposi:* 'I finished Manzoni's novel, not without tears. The scene between the Archbishop and Don Abbondio is one of the noblest that I know. The parting scene between the lovers and Father Cristoforo is most touching. If the Church of Rome really were what Manzoni represents her to be, I should be tempted to follow Newman's example'.[44]

Dal quadro che abbiamo delineato per *summa capita* ci sembra che emerga una visione più organica e precisa sulla presenza del Manzoni in Inghilterra. Mentre in un primo momento è affiorata l'impressione che il Manzoni fosse scartato nell'800 (il che storicamente risulta errato, perchè una cosa è tradurlo e interpretarlo male, un'altra ignorarlo), l'affermazione del Dionisiotti ha colmato quell'iato intravisto prima. Resta però il fatto che l'adesione al messaggio del Manzoni nel secolo scorso era motivata da contingenti circostanze storico-sociali e, in quanto tale, esaurita la sua funzione, questo messaggio non avrebbe più nessun significato e perciò destinato a scomparire, mentre il suo recente successo è dovuto all'apprezzamento dei valori intrinseci della sua opera e, per questo, destinato a durare per sempre.

[43] G. OTTO TREVELYAN, *The Life and Letters of Lord Macaulay,* Harper, New York 1876, vol. II pp. 35-6.
[44] *Idem,* p. 344.

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LE JARDIN DE L'ALLELIK DE L. ROPA

Commentaire de *Mon Coeur au Vent*

par F. CUNEN

EN ce triple sonnet, le poète comprend le sens double et la double finalité de ce souffle, symbole de l'inspiration humaine du poète et de la grâce divine du chrétien. Il a la voix 'tempêtueuse', 'sifflante', 'menant un troupeau d'ombres pathétique'. 'Orgueilleux fils de l'Aurore', il est signe d''Apocalypse'. Mais soudain, le poète écoute mieux le Vent. Il croit percevoir en son coeur un doute.

'Ou plutôt n'est-tu pas le souffle de Celui
Pour qui tout l'Univers est un vivant cantique?'

Ce vent n'est-il pas bénéfique? Dès lors, l'âme du chantre est déchirée par l'angoisse de l'incertitude, autre source du *Carmen*. Le vent est-il gémissant ou triomphant? Doit-il nous inspirer de son 'charme invincible' ou nous apparaître comme le 'Magicien'? Est-il Seth-Typhon ou Zéphyr? 'Feuille d'âme divine attentive et sensible', le poète se livrera-t-il, 'rêvant, à son charme invincible'? Ou ne cède-t-il pas au vertige du Malin tentateur, du Typhon destructeur, en aspirant 'à l'immobile et, ivre,' ne veut-il pas néanmoins 'détaché de lui-même, le suivre'? Ecartèlement vital, existentiel entre l'Immobile et le Mouvement, entre le havre sûr et l'errance éperdue. L'auteur consacre la bonne part de ses quatrains à dépeindre un vent pernicieux, suppôt d'enfer, et la meilleure part de ses tercets à esquisser le croquis d'un vent bénin et propice. Le sonnet 2 exprimera toute l'angoisse de l'homme qu'avait annoncée la première partie du sonnet I, tandis que le sonnet III montre l'homme qui maîtrise de mieux en mieux son anxiété, tandis que le vent lui paraîtra de plus en plus serein, paisible et bienfaisant. Au terme de son Pélerinage, l'homme en quête de la paix aura gagné l''eau calme du port' en cette mer natale du poète, la Méditerranée, à l'abri de l'île de son enfance, Malte, celle qu'immortalise précisément le vent tempêtueux décrit dans les *Actes des Apôtres*, et apaisé par Saint Paul, puissant maître des flots. Melita était un havre providentiel s'il en fut, pour un Ropa, fier de ses origines

maltaises, au terme de la tempête que dépeint ce *Mon Coeur au Vent.*

Le second sonnet marque le pessimisme du poète, peu confiant 'qui gémit dans la nuit, pauvre âme fugitive'; ce souffle poursuivant sa quête 'à la dérive', dont 'la voix longue et plaintive', dont la lamentation 'clame aux cieux étoilés sa détresse pensive'. Cette voix est celle des coeurs errants qui 'promènent leur angoisse ou leur désespérance', celle que déchire le doute, celle d'Adam, 'maudit, exilé du Jardin'. En d'autres poèmes de ce *Jardin de l'Allélik* éclate le chant douloureux, nostalgique du poète 'égaré dans le doute et détaché de Dieu'. Mais le meilleur Moi du Chantre s'exprime à son tour, et nous voici au troisième sonnet. Le *Carmen* a d'autres visées et origines que chthoniennes; il est aussi finalisé vers l'Olympe, si loin que le chantre croie s'en trouver isolé.

Aussi le sonnet III se souvient du second terme de cette alternative qui avait déchiré l'âme du poète dans le sonnet I. C'est ainsi qu'à partir du distique de I: 'Ou plutôt n'es-tu pas le souffle de Celui pour qui tout l'Univers est un vivant cantique?', distique tant soit peu hésitant, le pélerin de la Voie débouche à pas timides et lents sur la certitude presque totale du dernier vers de III: 'O Vent, que me veux-tu? Que me veux-tu, Seigneur?' Mais longue est encore la route à parcourir. Avant de se laisser réduire en ses derniers retranchements, l'âme tergiverse, pèse, soupèse, analyse. Elle tente d'interpréter les signes qui jalonnent à présent sa route de militant, battant le sol de la voie pénible de Damas, celle qui résonne de l'appel du Seigneur, du Sonneur, et rend en écho fidèle la réponse de Paul de Tarse: 'Que me veux-tu, Seigneur?' La question finale correspond donc en fait à une réponse, celle de l'appelé, écoutant et tressaillant 'à l'appel du Sonneur'. Dès le premier quatrain, le vent apparaît maintenant impérieux et contraignant. 'Sa trompe mystique au tonnerre émouvant' va 'souffler le feu divin qui couve dans mon âme'. Partout, ce vent poursuit le pélerin 'dans le sublime drame' qui se joue, le combat du Chasseur et du gibier humain aux abois, l'âme acculée en ses derniers retranchements, biche aux abois traquée qui sent venir la fin de sa fuite éperdue. L'âme de plus en plus aveuglée par la lumière se pose alors les questions qui vont rendre vie à sa foi morte, questions salvatrices, sorte de maieutique providentielle, où Ropa rejoint Platon ou le roman initiatique ismaélien.

M'a-t-il pas visité dans le désert qui clame?
Dans le troupeau conduit par le Bélier rêvant?
Dans le Jardin en fleurs où m'attendait la Femme?
Devant tes flots, ô Mer, où je songeais enfant?

Cet Esprit 'qui souffle où il veut' suscita la vocation de Jean le Baptiste, qui, pénétré de l'Esprit devient à son tour *Vox clamans in deserto*, Voix porteuse de l'Esprit (*Math*, 3, 3: *Jean*, 1,23) L'Image d'un Jean prêchant dans le désert, ce 'Désert qui clame', par une saisissante figure d'hypallage, rappelle à l'Auteur la suite du passage de Jean l'Evangéliste. Le verset 29 de ce même chapitre I décrit en effet le Christ comme l'Agneau de Dieu. Or l'Esprit est descendu sur cet Agneau lors du baptême de Jean, ce qui donne à présent au Christ le privilège de baptiser dans l'Esprit-Saint (I,33). Ropa a donc raison d'associer en sa pensée le Désert qui clame, Jean le Baptiste, et le Souffle divin dont traite le poème. Il peut tout aussi légitimement unir en pensée Jean et son Désert qui clame, et l'Agneau ou Bélier, investi à son tour de ce même Esprit, comme il le fait en ce second quatrain, vers 1-2.

Mais quel est ensuite le lien entre le vers 2 et le vers 3? Comment le Désert et son Agneau peuvent-ils évoquer l'image du Jardin où la Femme attend le poète? Le lien n'est plus logique cette fois, mais visuel. Le vers 2 annonçait la vision nouvelle. Rassurons-nous. Le poète ne s'est pas égaré. Il s'est transposé. Dès le vers II, il songe, au-delà du passage de Jean l'Evangéliste, à un autre 'Agneau', l'Agneau Adulte, que présente en visionnaire un autre texte de Jean, non l'Evangile, mais l'Apocalypse. L'hypallage du vers I trouve une réplique dans la fin, correspondante, de II. Le Bélier *'Rêvant'* est celui *dont rêve* le narrateur des Visions. En chacune des images, la voix active est donc substituée à la passive. Ce 'Rêve' est la vision *'in Spiritu'*, ce qui la rend à nouveau éminemment propre à visiter l'imagination du poète en ce passage. Nous arrivons à présent au vers 3. Cet Agneau dont il est question depuis le chapitre V de l'Apocalypse évoque à son tour l'Etre essentiel peuplant le Livre mystique, la Femme, couverte du soleil, ayant la Lune à ses pieds, et coiffée des douze étoiles, d'*Apoc.*, chap 12, la Femme Enceinte, l'éternelle Genitrix, où Ropa semble voir, et très légitimement, l'Eve du Paradis, ce Jardin 'en fleurs où l'attendait la Femme'.

Les deux vers centraux sont donc le signe de l'Apocalypse et

débouchent sur une vision de l'Eden, du Jardin, qui permet au poète de revenir, comme en la plupart des poèmes du Jardin de l'Allélik, à l'objet essentiel de sa méditation poétique, le Jardin, origine et finalité de son inspiration. Une fois entré dans le Jardin, le chantre est de plain-pied en sa terre algéro-maltaise, et au-delà de ce Paradis relativement concret et proche, songe à la Terre-Mère, la Métropole de ces Maltais d'Algérie, la terre inconnue pour lui, et source éminente d'idéalisation et de rêve qu'est Malte. Il n'a pas néanmoins fermé les Ecritures, et de l'Apocalypse, dernier livre néo-testamentaire, il revient presque à l'endroit dont il était parti, l'Evangile de Jean voisinant en effet avec les Actes des Apôtres. C'est là que le mène le souffle de l'Esprit, au spectacle intérieur des flots de cette mer où il songeait enfant.

Les hésitations des quatre questions du second quatrain se muent maintenant en douces, émouvantes et berçantes affirmations. Celles d'une foi morte et renaissante, dont le poète sent le premier baiser. La bonace succède à la tourmente. Le vent apocalyptique s'est mué en douce brise, celle dont Paul vint bercer l'enfant gozitain 'dans l'eau calme du port'; celle qui effleura sa joue d'un premier baiser. Ainsi le poème I, le *Signe*, et III se rejoignent. Le Signe dont le Poète est marqué est celui du doux Amour, celui de la Vie comme de l'Art, de Dieu comme de son Jardin. L'âme est à présent réceptive, et répondra vibrante à l'appel du Sonneur. Le doute est apaisé en ce chiasme final: 'O Vent, que me veux-tu? Que me veux-tu, Seigneur?' Vent et Seigneur, aux extrémités du vers, s'identifient dans l'identité de leur fonction d'apposition.

Le poème 'Mon Coeur au Vent', un des plus profonds que Ropa ait écrits, nous laisse sur une note d'expectative, mais joyeuse, confiante. A chacun des Elus de répondre constamment à l'appel, une fois qu'il l'a discerné.

MON COEUR AU VENT

LAURENT ROPA

1

Le Vent, voici le Vent, le beau Vent dramatique!
Il se lève et d'un bond il envahit la nuit;
Sa voix tempêtueuse et sifflante conduit
Un troupeau de silence et d'ombres pathétique.

O Vent, quel est ton nom, Vent apocalyptique?
Es-tu l'orgueilleux fils de l'Aurore qui fuit?
Ou plutôt n'es-tu pas le souffle de Celui
Pour qui tout l'Univers est un vivant cantique?

Souffle, Vent gémissant, souffle, Vent triomphant!
Feuille d'âme divine attentive et sensible,
Je me livre, rêvant, à ton charme invincible;

Bercé sur l'océan de tes vagues, ô Vent
Magicien, j'aspire à l'Immobile et, ivre,
Je voudrais, détaché de moi-même, te suivre.

2

Ecoutez, écoutez cette douleur si vive
Qui gémit dans la nuit, pauvre âme fugitive!
Elle quête on ne sait quel accueil, à la dérive,
Des pierres de Palmyre aux tombeaux de Ninive.

C'est le Vent. Ecoutez: sa voix longue et plaintive
S'arrête un peu, puis aussitôt repart, s'avive:
La lamentation, dans le désert sans rive
Clame aux cieux étoilés sa détresse pensive.

C'est le gémissement des coeurs qui, en tout lieu,
Promènent leur angoisse ou leur désespérance,
Egarés dans le doute et détachés de Dieu;

C'est le soupir qu'Adam, naissant à la souffrance
Et à la mort, maudit, exilé du Jardin,
Exhala en partant vers son nouveau destin.

3

C'est lui, c'est encor lui! Le Vent, encor le Vent!
Il me poursuit partout dans le sublime drame,
Et sa trompe mystique au tonnerre émouvant
Souffle le feu divin qui couve dans mon âme.

M'a-t-il pas visité dans le désert qui clame?
Dans le troupeau conduit par le Bélier rêvant?
Dans le Jardin en fleurs où m'attendait la Femme?
Devant tes flots, ô mer, où je songeais enfant?

De son premier baiser je sens toujours la trace:
C'était dans l'île sainte où, endormi encor,
Saint Paul vint me bercer dans l'eau calme du port.

Réveillé, maintenant, tout affamé de grâce,
J'écoute et je tressaille à l'appel du Sonneur:
O Vent, que me veux-tu? Que me veux-tu, Seigneur?

POEMS

By J. AQUILINA

OBITUARY

No more shoe-banging scenes. Kruschev is dead;
Left the U.S.S.R. and his hospital bed
To join a new world, after having shed
The insignia that made him a prominent Red.
It did him good to look up God instead,
Beyond where astronauts and missiles sped.

12.ix.71 – Balzan

A WIDOW'S SORROW

A sorrowing widow kissed for the last time
Kruschev's pale forehead, folded arms at rest.
How many sorrowing widows kissed the foreheads
Of their dead husbands killed in Budapest?

25.ix.71 – Balzan

WESTWARD HO!

As the time for packing up gets near,
The time for going back home,
I pray the Captain of the boat
To steer us clear of doubt and fear,
The fear of the hazards of the trip
That has sunk many a ship.

Oh, Captain, Steerman of the Boat,
As you call us all aboard
And count us one by one,
We pray you steer the Shadow Ship
Westward ho!
Towards the rising sun.

1.xi.72

LEPTIS MAGNA

Ruins of Sabratha
The thud of the centuries by the Blue Glass Sea
Fill me with admiration
Awed by the dread of the Vulture,
Man-chasing cormorant,
For the architects that designed the city,
The Forum and the Temple,
The *hamamat* by the blue
Warm sea – ever the same
Warm blue sea.
(Hello, ghostland! Who goes there?)
The dead city, the shadow city,
Fills me with tearful pity
For what the unearthed city
Was once and is now
No more – the Dead City, the Shadow City.
Hawks overhead –
Solitude and pity
Time, the grave-Digger, dangling his feet
On the broken colonnades.

15.xii.72 – Tripoli

TIME'S CLOWN

I have long been gliding,
Gliding down, gliding down,
Turning somersaults like a clown
In Time's circus (Time's Clown)
Sliding down, always down
The slippery back of a Bear,
Bear Black, Bear Brown, Bear White,
Bear of the North Pole.
Gliding down every moment of my life
I have now reached the bottom of its spine
Right at the beginning of its tail

From the beginning to the end of the story –
Tip end of the spine
(How it hurts!)
A laugh, a whimper, a whine.
Pray you be ready to collect me
On your arms, on your lap,
When I slide off the last vertebra
Of the Spine of Time.
Collect me kindly on my way back
Lest I break my neck on the Rock of Time;
Collect me as the midwife
Collected me on her arms
Before I was put astride
The slippery back of the Big, Big Bear –
Wandering Bear
That is Time –
This World its Den.

16.xii.72 – Tripoli

ATHENS

This is Athena's City, proud, unique,
Belovèd of the gods that made her great,
From where Olympus ruled her warriors' fate,
Launching the Ulyssean Odyssey of the Greek.
'Tis here that Mind and Vision touched the peak,
And Phidias' luminous statues re-create
The epic of the Body, bards narrate
Battles at sea and shipwrecks in the creek.

From where the Parthenon guards its ancient glory,
Poseidon's temple dominates on high
Like an eagle's eerie, I espy the City
With its *stora* and *agora* near by,
Haunted by myths that people Homer's story:
These broken columns wrench my heart with pity.

Athens – 27.iii.73

FAME

What would not a man do to attain immortality!
I think he would not mind a little vulgarity.
Lord Byron, for instance, did not scruple to scratch his name
On a column of Poseidon's temple to win a double fame.
Now with Poseidon he shares the limelight and the glory,
Not less the banter of American tourists amused by the story.

Athens – 28.iii.73

THE STORM

God, help me weather the storm
Before my boat reaches
The far-off harbour
With tattered sails and broken masts.
The oars are not broken yet;
But the arms are tired.

20.iv.73

SHIPWRECK

Will it not be very cruel
If the ship, with all its cargo,
Sinks in the harbour
Swallowed up by the deep shark sea,
As if nothing ever really mattered
Good and bad all pushed
Down the throat of the shark
Blue sea?

20.iv.73

DEDICATION

Mary, Dawn of Joy,
I instal you Queen
Of my Heart and Mind.
Govern me by the regality of your love,
Mother most kind.

20.iv.73

QUESTIONS

How long must I stretch my arm
To catch and remove the dark cloud
That conceals you from my immediate sight,
God invisible, yet unmistakable?
How long and how often must I push back
The attacks of the Bear
That claws me from behind?
How long, O God, will you remain invisible
To my inward searching
Behind the dark cloud?
How long and how tortuous is the road back
Through the Dark Tunnel?

6.v.73

ACADEMIC BOREDOM

The lecture was scholarly, the lecturer precise
and deep,
The Chairman, after having sung his praises, fell
asleep
Enjoying the snooze till the end of the learned
communication
When he joined the clapping of hands to express
his approbation.

29th International Congress of Orientalists, J. AQUILINA
Paris – July 1973

THE PEOPLE'S FESTIVAL OF FUN AND MIRTH*

Make room for King Carnival! Blow the trumpets loud!
Cry his subjects today that swell the motley crowd.
We greet His Majesty with cheers for three Days' Fun,
Salute him our Monarch and crown him with our Sun!
Come, stand up and salute! King Carnival passes by –
Take your place on his chariot for tomorrow you die!

*Originally published in the Carnival programme of 1958.

POEMS

by JOE FRIGGIERI

(*translations by Fr. Peter Serracino-Inglott*)

STEDINA

Il-mitħna li żżaqżaq fuq rasna
taf kliemna bħal kredu
taf ruħna minn ġewwa
u taf il-litanija
ta' l-immijiet qabel ma troxx id-dalma

meta jiqfilna l-kliem
u ruħna tinxef qoxqox
ibqa' ejja miegħi taħt il-mitħna l-kbira
u ssemma' sewwa.

FAIRE-PART

En grinçant sur nos têtes
le grand moulin n'aurait-il apprit
nos redites comme le récit
d'un credo, ne pourrait-il
les dédales de nos dedans
parcourir, s'il voulait, à l'aveuglette,
et aussi les litanies de oui-mais
dont nous faisons litière dans la brume
qui tombe tout autour de nous
en attendant la totale obscurité.

Lorsque les mots ne couleront plus
et nos âmes écorchées se dessèchent
fréquentions encore cet endroit sous le grand moulin
et alors écoute bien.

GĦALIEX?

Għaliex il-qiegħ tal-baħar
illum mhux ibeżżagħni
u l-krib tal-gawwi fuq il-blat
inħossu bħal stedina?
għaliex ir-riħ tax-xitwa
qisu tmellisa ħelwa f'xagħri mħabbla
u l-qtar tax-xita f'wiċċi
jaħraq bħal omm qed tibki?

Tgħid qed tistrieħ il-mewt
fuq l-alga sewda
u nista' llum sa fl-aħħar
nistejqer bl-arja tfuħ
u bl-ilma mielaħ?
Tgħid nista' nimxi 'l bogħod
illum u għada
mingħajr ma nħossu jċedi
ir-ramel taħt riġlejja?

Imqar li jkun dan biss
illum u għada
umbagħad ħa tiġi l-mewt bil-mingel f'idha,
ħa tagħmel festa bija, ħa tifnini,
laqwa li nkun mxejt
illum u għada
qabel immur nistrieħ
fuq l-alga sewda.

IT-TIENI DARBA

Il-bebbuxu trekken f'xaqq fil-blat
ma' l-eku ta' leħinna
mal-passi ta' riġlejna

illum ersaqna kisnijiet
la int la jien ma wrejna
la kelma la ċaqliqa
u l-bebbuxu ma raniex

u baqa' jilgħab fuq ir-ramla bajda.

LA DEUXIÈME FOIS

L'escargot s'enfonça dans une crevasse du rocher
à l'écho de nos voix
au piétinement de nos pattes.

Mais aujourd'hui nous sommes arrivés à la sourdine
toi et moi nous voici
sans un mot sans un geste
et l'escargot ne s'est aperçu de rien
et il continua le jeu sur la plage blanche.

EPIGRAMM A

Iġbor ċagħqa
aqta' kewkba
tiġrix ħafna
inti u ġejja

hekk għallinqas
qabel tasal
nilħaq noħlom
l'inti ħdejja.

EPIGRAMM B

Jien naqta' drieġhi
għas-sbieħ għajnejk
u naqsam baħar
biex niġi ħdejk

imma kemm taħseb
li int sabiħa
biex wara kollox
nibqa' bir-riħa?

LOGĦBA

Is-surmast dawwama tond ma' ħofra kbira
u l-oħrajn kollha qabżu minn tarf sa tarf
imma meta mess lili
kejjilt l-ixbar b'għajnejja
u bqajt imwaħħal
f'xifer il-ħofra l-kbira.

GĦID

Dan għalmin ħarġu t-tfal
bil-palm u l-liedna?
u għalmin l-orgni
fawwar ħnejjiet il-katidral
b'noti qabbieża?

Mhux għalina
is-sliem tal-flawt u l-arpa
u l-għanja raqqadija tal-flejguta.

In-nisa tagħna xuxthom maħlula
iraħħmu f'nofs l-indiema;
qarset ix-xema' wiċċ il-bniet imgeżwra
fl-imnatar vjola;
u fuq ras il-bhejjem tagħna
għadna rroxxu l-irmied.

POEMS

by JOE FRIGGIERI

(translations by Theresa Micallef)

VJAĠĠ

Tfajjel agħtini idek
u ħudni 'l bogħod sakemm jagħjew riġlejna
sakemm ma jidhrux iżjed il-kampnari
u l-qniepen ma jdoqqux is-seba' moti
ta' l-erwieħ midinba

ħudni fejn ma tasalx
il-bikja tan-newwieħa
u qabel tarani rieqed
tħallinix.

Umbagħad meta tismagħhom
ir-russinjoli fl-arja kaħlanija
meta tarah il-lewż ifur bil-bjuda
u x-xefaq qed ibexbex
umbagħad ejja qajjimni.

A VOYAGE

Boy, give me your hand
and take me far until we're tired out
until the steeples fade
and the bells stop tolling
for the souls of the lost.

Take me where the song of mourning cannot be heard
stay until I've fallen asleep.

Only then, when you can hear the nightingales in the blue air,
when the almond tree overflows with white
and the horizon is streaked with light,
only then, you must come and call me.

QUDDIESA

Int taf
armaj ruħi xrafet bid-dnubiet il-mejta
kull platt li ġie laqqattu
u meta stajt billejt subgħajja sew
fiż-żejt u l-balzmu tal-passjoni l-kbira
u talli la qerrejt u la sogħbieni
il-ħanin Alla nsieni.

Da' x'kien illejla m'intx tobroxli moħħi
bis-seba' sjuf tas-sagramenti l-ġodda?
lanqas tikwi f'ġenbejja
karattri ħomor b'tarf dufrejk misnuna?
x'inhi dir-riħa ta' ġismek sħun
bħal qamħ Awissu mxarrab?
u x'inhu jsib il-baħar f'għajnejk rotob?

Mhux sewwa troxx il-melħ fuq il-ferita,
imma jekk trid, għal-lejla biss,
ninsew li ħell l-inbid u l-ħmira qraset,
u mqar għal-lejla biss,
la hawn dal-plejju jfuħ, la haw' l-urieżaq,
inqaddsu taħt il-qamar.

GĦEDEN

Tħallihx jixref rasu d-dudu
tad-dubju seksiek
tħallihx is-serp isefsef f'widintek
kliem għasli bħal ta' Eva
iżd' isħqu bla ma tħares

ma tmurx illejla
meta ma tkunx tistenna
toħroġ minn ġot-tuffieħa
il-qrusa tal-misteru
u llejla wkoll
bir-riħ li jmelles wiċċna
jaqsam id-dlam raġġ 'Adonajs
u ssir taf kollox.

BIDLA

Hekk meta jiħmar is-sħab
u l-palm jitbandal waħdu
fuq ġbini tinżel fwieħa rqiqa
u minn ġor-ramel titla' s-sinfonija
ta' l-ilmijiet ħadrana.

Imma meta jiswied is-sħab
u l-palm jissara ma' l-irwiefen
u r-ramel isir ċagħaq iniggeż

l-arja timtela bit-twerżiq ta' l-isqra
u jekk ma jkunx xi ħadd li jżommli jdejja
f'tarf l-irdum inħossni qed nistordi
u l-baħar ma jridx wisq
biex jitla' għalija.

AWRIKARJA

Tiftakar il-baħar
tiftakar il-blat
tiftakar ix-xemx u l-qamar
tiftakar ir-riħ
tiftakar is-sajf inkaljat u x-xitwa
tiftakar il-lejl u n-nhar
tiftakar il-kwiekeb

tliet mitt sajf tiftakar
tliet mitt xitwa qalila
tliet mitt rebbiegħa bi tliet mitt tqala ġdida
tliet mitt ħarifa bla ma toħrof darba

u l-blat inkaljat taħt riġlejha
u s-silġ ma' kuxtejha
u l-beraq li jfellel ġenbejha
u r-riħ bħal azzar ġol-qurriegħa

bil-karba tal-ħlas dejjiema
bil-ħorħara li ddakkar u terġa'
fi tliet mitt sajf li ġej
tliet mitt xitwa qalila
tliet mitt rebbiegħa għajjiena

ma jkunx id-dudu li jnawrilha qalbha
ma tkunx is-sħana li tnixxfilha għeruqha
ma jkunx is-silġ li jinġazzalha demmha.

Tiftakar il-baħar
tiftakar il-blat
tiftakar ix-xemx u l-qamar
tiftakar ir-riħ
tiftakar is-sajf inkaljat u x-xitwa
tiftakar il-lejl u n-nhar
tiftakar il-kwiekeb.

IT-TIENI DARBA

Il-bebbuxu trekken f'xaqq fil-blat
ma' l-eku ta' leħinna
mal-passi ta' riġlejna

illum ersaqna kisnijiet
la int la jien ma wrejna
la kelma la ċaqliqa
u l-bebbuxu ma raniex

u baqa' jilgħab fuq ir-ramla bajda.

THE SECOND TIME

The snail squeezed itself into a crevice
to the echo of our voices, to the sound of our footsteps.

Today we came stealthily
both you and I came
without a word without a move
and the snail never saw us
and went on playing on the white beach.

IX-XIĦ U JIEN

Meta staqsejt lix-xwejjaħ
li jaf jaqra l-ġrajja
"Xwejjaħ aqrali jdejja",
ix-xemx għamietu 'x-xwejjaħ
u minn xufftejh imfella
waqa' bħal ħaġar jaqta'
kliem li ma jifhmu ħadd

u telaq waħdu biex imiss il-kwiekeb.

THE OLD MAN AND I

When I asked the old man who reads fortunes
'Old man, read my hand',
the sun blinded the old man
and from his furrowed lips
cryptic words fell like pointed stones.

And he set off to touch the stars.

THE TWO HOUSES

by MAIRE A. QUINN

(A study of the house image in the past-orientated writings of Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas).

THE house is one of the most pervasive images used by both Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas in their writings on the past. Edward Thomas remarks in a letter to Gordon Bottomley: 'So far the best things I have done have been about houses. I have quite a long series – I discover, tho I did not design it.'[1] Although this remark refers only to the prevalence of the house image in his prose his later poetry was to be equally prolific in the use of such imagery. Hardy has not noted this tendency in his work yet he, too, frequently resorts to the use of house imagery in his poetry. Both Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas share a mutual concern with the persistence of the past and in the work of both writers the image of the house plays a significant role in this regard. It is a nodal point upon which several of their different views on the interrelatedness of past and present inevitably converge.

Houses are invoked by both Hardy and Thomas, but more especially by Thomas, to indicate that functional continuity of human life which bridges the temporal gulf separating the thoughts and mores of different generations. For Edward Thomas functional continuity is represented most powerfully by the farmhouse and most of the houses in his prose writings, especially, are farmsteads. In London he is conscious of 'people living in no ancient way'[2] but the farmer's life is fundamentally no different from that of his ancestors. In *The South Country* he describes a farmer whose 'fathers must have been in this land when Wolf Hanger was not a strange name for beeches over the hill' and goes on to comment on the functional continuity of farm life that imparts a solidity to all the farmer's actions:

[1] R.G. Thomas (ed), *Letters from Edward Thomas to Gordon Bottomley*, London, 1968, p. 194

[2] *The Heart of England*, London, 1906, p. 7

> Life is a dark simple matter for him; three quarters of his living is done for him by the dead; merely to look at him is to see a man five generations thick, so to speak, and neither nature nor the trumpery modern man can disturb a human character of that density.[3]

A ploughman with his plough and three horses in *The Heart of England* is associated with 'primitive forces'. The plough is said to reveal 'ancient simplicity' and the ploughman's purpose is 'to make odours fume richly from the ancient altar'.[4] The unchanging rituals of farm life, then, serve as a channel of communication between the remote past, the recent past and the present for Thomas and the farmstead presents itself to his view as the locus of this functional continuity. Having described a farmhouse with its alders and walnut tree, its ponds, orchard, grassy plot and elm-lined laneway he goes on to note the material and atmospheric evidence of its association with the past: 'In the overhanging elms flicker the straws of the long past harvest, and the spirits of summers and autumns long past cling to grass and ponds and tree.'[5] Another farmstead in *The Heart of England* is an amalgam of the contributions of several generations, testifying to the fact that these 'long dead generations' like their present day counterparts 'lived and worked and enjoyed'. The house is 'dark with panelling and heavy furniture of every age since it was built'. One member of the 'long dead generations' 'planted the spreading oak . . . that added the knolled pasture and cut the deep, stony lane that leads to it through the brook; another built the fruit wall and bought the copy of *Tristam Shandy* that stands with a hundred other books in the dining-room'.[6] So each past owner of the farmhouse has his share in the continuing life of the place and the farmstead therefore serves as a living witness to the confluence of past and present. Even a 'deserted farm' with 'decaying house' and 'doorless stables' still retains 'something of life' for Thomas and this he also attributes in part to the fact that 'the buildings bore upon their

[3] *The South Country*, London, 1932, p. 215
[4] *The Heart of England*, pp. 21-5
[5] Ibid., pp. 107-8
[6] Ibid., pp. 74-5

surface the marks of many generations of life, all harmoniously continuous'. Because of this, even such a derelict ruin of a former habitation 'could speak to a human spirit' and was 'capable of inspiring afresh the idea of immortality, to one who desired it'.[7] Finally, it must be noted that the farmhouse for Edward Thomas participates in a temporal continuum that includes the future as well as the past and the present. The farmer in *The Heart of England* when he takes up his stance amid the ancestral heirlooms of his farmhouse is aware not only of the 'long-dead generations' who 'lived and worked and enjoyed' here but also of the 'long tracts of time ahead and his farm and strangers of his own blood working in its fields'.[8]

Thomas's preoccupation with the continuity of the farmer's lifestyle and with the farmhouse as the locus of such continuity is that of the modern rootless city-dweller, 'living in no ancient way'. Thomas's awareness of continuity is always a spectatorial awareness. His recognition of the temporal dimension is usually conveyed through the externalities of a house's structure and outward appearance, e.g. 'No other one/So pleasant *to look at*/ And remember, for many miles...'. It is interesting to note, in this connection, that when he does write about a house he once owned in 'Wind and Mist' he tells us that even when he lived there he looked on it with a stranger's eye:

> I have seen that house
> Through mist look lovely as a castle in Spain
> And airier. And I have thought 'Twere happy there
> To live'. And I have laughed at that
> Because I lived there then...
> Yes with my furniture and family
> Still in it, I, knowing every nook of it
> And loving none, and in fact hating it.

The farmhouse with its generations of continual contact with the soil is an image of rural rootedness for Thomas, ever conscious of

[7] Ibid., p. 77
[8] Ibid., pp. 74-5
[9] 'Two Houses', *Collected Poems* by Edward Thomas, London, 1969

a rupture of continuity in his own personal past. One of the qualities he attributes to an 'antique red' farmhouse in *The Heart of England* is 'solidity'[10] and he envies a farmer the 'solidity' imparted by generations of rooted ancestry: '... three quarters of his living is done for him by the dead, merely to look at him is to see a man five generations thick ... I feel but a wraith as I pass by'.[11]

Hardy's treatment of functional continuity as represented by the house, on the other hand, is that of a writer who is himself 'generations thick' and who is aware of a personal link with the preceding generations. The traversing of an 'ancient thoroughfare' recalls to his mind the memory of his 'mother's form' or the hardships endured by his own 'sires...now perished and forgot'.[12] When he chronicles the fall of an old Norman family in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* the subject is revealed to have a personal interest for he mentions that his own family, the Hardys, among others, suffered a fate similar to that of the fictional D'Ubervilles. 'The Alarm' is written 'In memory of one of the writer's family who was a Volunteer during the War with Napoleon'. Thomas Hardy, therefore, consciously participates in familial and racial traditions of which Edward Thomas, a generation later, is merely an envious observer. For this reason in his treatment of the house motif the past is evoked in an intimate domestic setting. The 'relics of house-holdry' which restore the presence of the dead in 'Old Furniture', for instance, date from the days of his mother's mother.

In Hardy's writing the persistence of the past in the present scene frequently takes the form of spectral manifestation. As is only to be expected, then, in Hardy's poetry houses are often transformed into haunts. This view of the house as a haunt may also arise from Hardy's participation in a rooted rural society where houses were family shrines passed on from father to son and were, therefore, redolent of the lives of many generations. An entire poem on the abiding presence of the 'bygone' is couched in the metaphor of 'spectral housekeeping':

[10] p. 111
[11] *The South Country*, p. 215
[12] 'The Roman Road', 'A Wet Night', *The Collected Poems of Thomas Hardy*, London, 1968

We two kept house, the Past and I,
The Past and I;
Through all my tasks it hovered nigh
Leaving me never alone
.....
As daily I went up the stair
And down the stair,
I did not mind the bygone there –
The present once to me.

('The Ghost of the Past')

This use of the image of a haunted house as a general metaphor for the theme of temporal concurrence is supported by Hardy's frequent recourse to the particular treatment of this motif in his poetry. In 'The House of Hospitalities' the speaker returning to a house which was the scene of former revels encounters the ghosts of his dead companions:

Yet at midnight if here walking
When the moon sheets wall and tree,
I see forms of old time talking,
Who smile on me.

'Night in the Old Home' also depicts the return of the dead to their old abode:

When the wasting embers redden the chimney-breast,
And Life's bare pathway looms like a desert track to me,
And from hall and parlour the living have gone to their rest,
My perished people who housed them here come back to me.

They come and seat them around in their mouldy places . . .

The revenants of another poem likewise 'seat them around in their mouldy places', resuming their old positions on 'The Garden Seat':

At night when reddest flowers are black
Those who once sat thereon come back;
Quite a row of them sitting there

All human habitations continue to be tenanted by their dead occupants in Hardy's verse. On rare occasions the past of a house, although tangible, remains inaccessible. In the poem 'Silence' the

withdrawal of the past is conveyed by the emphasis on 'silence', the auditory equivalent of the lack of communication implied by the absence of haunting:

> But the rapt silence of an empty house
> Where oneself was born,
> Dwelt, held carouse
> With friends, is of all silences most forlorn.
> .....
> It seems no power on earth can waken it
> Or rouse its rooms,
> Or its past permit
> The present to stir a torpor like a tomb's.

Despite its stubborn silence, the house of the poem is, nevertheless, visualized as a reliquary of the past, concealing it as does a tomb, forbidding the present to dispel its retrospective trance.

An interesting development of the theme of the persistence of the past, closely related to the haunting motif, is also to be encountered in Hardy's use of house imagery. Hardy is greatly concerned with the impression made by human life on the environment, considering that the impact of human persons and happenings on their surroundings is such that these life haunts retain the indelible stamp of personalities and events. Applying this principle on a national scale he describes Britain as a land

> Enchased and lettered as a tomb
> And scored with prints of perished hands[13]

Such a vision of the engraving of a nation's history on the landscape has a correlative and perhaps even a basis in the domestic sphere. Over and over again Hardy's poems treat of the inscription of a human drama on the house that enshrines it. That interaction between people and house which results in so close an identification that the human, long after its demise, continues to subsist in the physical surroundings is adumbrated in the poem 'The Ageing House'. Here the house shares the 'slow effacement' of its owner, its bright 'red' walls corresponding to the 'fresh fair head' of its youthful possessor just as, later, the fact the walls are 'overspread

[13] 'On an Invitation to the United States'.

with a mouldy green' reflects the decline of the proprietor whose 'head has aged'. Both human occupant and house have succumbed equally to the ravages of life's 'storms'. The importance which Hardy attaches to the house as a major material recipient of human influence is evident from the frequency with which he turns to this subject in his verse. Sometimes it is the 'mighty passion' of two lovers whose intensity imparts itself to the very walls that witness it, crowding out all later feebler romance. Such is the experience of the speaker in 'The Re-enactment'

> That here some mighty passion
> Once had burned,
> Which still the walls enghosted,
> I discerned
> And that by its strong spell mine might be overturned.
>
> I sat depressed; till, later,
> My Love came;
> But something in the Chamber
> Dimmed our flame –
> An emanation making our due words fall tame.
>
> As if the intenser drama
> Shown me there
> Of what the walls had witnessed
> Filled the air,
> And left no room for later passions anywhere.

Similarly for one who has 'some vision/Of showings beyond our sphere' 'The Strange House' is filled with emanations of the past because of the 'mighty passion' once enacted within its precincts:

> The house is old; they've hinted
> It once held two love-thralls,
> And they may have imprinted
> Their dreams on its walls.

The theme which in these poems is approached from a personal angle is treated from the house's viewpoint in 'A House with a History' where the 'memoried face' of the house is contrasted with the 'tabula rasa' of the owners' visages:

> Mere freshlings are they, blank of brow

Their 'raw equipment, scenes and says' grate on the old house's sense of the past. The process of impressing human presence on the physical environment of the house is the subject of the first stanza of this poem:

> There is a house in a city street
> Some past ones made their own
> Its floors were criss-crossed by their feet
> And their babblings beat
> From ceiling to white hearthstone.

The indentation of human footprints on a floor and the impact of the sound waves of human speech on the enclosed area of a room are acceptable facts of human penetration of the environment which help to render credible the idea of the persistence of the human personality in the scene. Again just as in the two previous poems cited the house is redolent of a 'larger phase /Of human ways' to the detriment of pettier lives which may not 'impress' but only 'afflict' it: 'Its prime has passed before'.

Hardy tends to use the language of script and engraving in describing the persistence of the past:

> And *print* on thee their Presence as on me
>
> ('The Two Houses')

> And they may have *imprinted*
> Their dreams on its walls
>
> ('The Strange House')

> *Enchased* and *lettered* as a tomb
> And *scored* with *prints* of perished hands.
>
> ('On an Invitation to the United States')

The phrase, 'prints of perished hands', actually effects a striking fusion of the imagery of human contact and of the permanence of that contact. The 'memoried face' of the 'House with a History' as opposed to the 'blank' brow of its owners suggests facial lines while the face of the old house in 'The Two Houses' 'wears furrows untold'. By the use of such phrases Hardy creates the impression of a hieroglyphic language which may be interpreted only by the initiated, by those who have 'some vision / Of showings beyond our sphere' and also likens this preservation of the past

which results from human pressures on the physical setting with the written chronicles in which history is stored up and made available to later ages. In 'At Castle Boterel' the landscape is actually regarded as a chronicler, its function being to 'record in colour and cast that we two passed'.

Although he rarely manifests any interest in the subject of man's influence on his surroundings, Thomas refers to the phenomenon in very similar terms. Commenting on this aspect of the enshrining of the past in a house he makes the following Hardyesque observation regarding an old Vicarage:

> Of how many lives the house has voicelessly chronicled
> the days and nights. It is aware of birth, marriage,
> death; into the wall is kneaded a record more
> pleasing than brass.[14]

Here the Vicarage is viewed as a chronicler and as a keeper of records and the reference to brass also conjures up a monumental inscription. The fact of its being a Vicarage even suggests that in its awareness of 'birth, marriage and death' its role is equivalent to that of the parish registers. The use of the haunting motif, however, implies a too positive acceptance of the incursions of the past into the contemporary scene for Thomas. The recovery of the past is usually, for him, a more tentative, uncertain and exploratory process, accounted for by such factors as the equation of spatial and temporal distance. Such is the functional continuity of the farmhouse, for instance, that, from a distance at which the eye is not distracted by any modern contrivance, it may foster the illusion of the recovery of past time:

> ... the house half a mile off seems to have been restored by this fair and early light to the seeming happy age in which it was built. The long, tearing crow of the cock, the click of dairy pans, the palpitating, groaning shout of the shepherds, Ho! ho! ho! ho!, now and then, even the whirr of the mowing machines, sound as if the distance that sweetens them were the distance of time and not only of space.[15]

[14] *The Heart of England* p. 118
[15] Ibid., pp. 74-5

For a final appraisal of the divergent viewpoints of Hardy and Thomas in their application of similar imagery to a similar temporal theme we turn to two poems with remarkably similar titles: 'Two Houses' by Edward Thomas and 'The Two Houses' by Thomas Hardy. The resemblance is soon seen to be titular only.

Edward Thomas's two houses symbolize the present and the past respectively and the poem revolves the theme of tradition and change and the persistence of the old in the new. Characteristically where the subject of continuity is in question Thomas's house is a farmhouse. The poem, in fact, seems to embody the quintessence of Thomas's meditations on the farmhouse in his prose works. In appearance, it recalls a farmstead in *The Heart of England.* The description of the farmhouse in the opening verse, for instance, has several features in common with the farmhouse of the following prose passage:

> Between the pool and the road is a house built squarely of stone. A tiled roof, where the light is always mellow as sunset in the various hues that sometimes mix and make old gold... Four large windows frame a cool and velvety and impenetrable gloom.[16]

Both the house of the poem and of the prose are situated by the water's edge, both are roofed with tiles, and, although bathed in mellow sunlight, both have also a cool and velvety aspect.

On one level, too, the comparison of the farmhouse of the poem to a 'muslined peach' with its connotations of harvest plenty and yellow peach tones picking up the colour of tiles and sun recalls another farmhouse in *The Heart of England,* 'a farmhouse on whose walls and roofs the hues of fruit and flower all meet harmoniously'.[17] Not only is the simile of 'the wasp' and the 'muslined peach' used as being redolent of harvest days, however. It is invoked as a symbol of the preservation of rural English riches from destructive contact with a predatory modern civilization. In *The Heart of England* Thomas refers to 'yellow wasps that give a touch of horror to the excellent and abounding life of perfect Summer'[18] and 'passersby' and 'wasp' are metaphorically equated in the poem. 'Muslined' as

[16]Ibid., p. 81
[17]Ibid., p. 103
[18]Ibid., p. 186

applied to the farmhouse/peach suggests the protective function of inaccessibility and is thus linked with the situation of the farmhouse which is

> Far out of reach
> Of the road's dust
> And the dusty thought
> Of passersby...

One recalls, in this connection, that the 'farms and byres' and hamlets of 'Lob' are also situated 'far out of reach / Of the road's dust':

> Ages ago the road
> Approached. The people stood and looked and turned
> Nor asked it to come nearer, nor yet learned
> To move out there and dwell in all men's dust.

The threat which is overtly suggested in the 'wasp' simile is implied in the image of the 'road's dust' and the 'dusty thought of passersby' as well. It would seem that there is a certain similarity between Thomas's conception of the role of the farmhouse vis-a-vis contemporary life and that of E.M. Forster. In *Howards End* Forster refers to modern civilization in terms of travel and dust which are for him the images of a rootless society:

> But the Wilcoxes have no part in the place, nor in any place. It is not their names that recur in the parish register. It is not their ghosts that sigh among the alders at evening. They have swept into the valley and swept out of it, leaving a little dust and a little money behind.[19]

On the other hand the country dwelling for Forster, as for Thomas, represents rootedness, continual contact with the soil. When the Wilcox motor kills a cottager's cat, Margaret, Forster's mouth-piece in the novel, views the occurrence as an injury inflicted by a lethal modernity, living only superficially because of its rootlessness, on the deeper, more stable way of life of rural England, a life which participates in the earth and its emotions:

> ... she felt their whole journey from London had been unreal.

[19] *Howards End*, (Penguin), p. 233

> They had no part with the earth and its emotions. They were dust and stink and cosmopolitan chatter, and the girl whose cat had been killed had lived more deeply than they.[20]

The titular farmhouse of *Howards End* emerges as a symbol of stability and continuity in the novel: 'it is the future as well as the past'.[21] Forster's thematic opposition between this stability and continuity of the rural dwelling and the dust and traffic of a rootless modern civilization would seem to offer an amplification of the tensions hinted at in the second verse of Thomas's poem.

The first two verses of 'Two Houses' are concerned with the continuation of the rituals of rural life into the modern age. The latter half of the poem, on the other hand, is devoted to a portrayal of the farmhouse's perpetuation of the past. The present is depicted as an edifice built on the ruins of the past. The stones of the old house are seen as the tombstones of its occupants, the humps of turf resembling graveyard mounds, but 'heaves' with its connotations of 'sighing' and 'laboured breathing' suggests that the dead are somehow still living, that the life of the past continues on. The place is, to quote a phrase used earlier by Thomas, 'alive with death'.[22] The mysterious, all-pervading presence of the past is finely rendered by Thomas's use of light and shade, which distinguishes the known from the unknown and at the same time points to the inextricability of their relationship. The house of the present is associated with sunlight. It is situated 'between a sunny bank and the sun'. Its tiles are 'warm'. The house of the past belongs to a land of darkness like 'the Combe', which was 'ever dark, ancient and dark'. The shadows of the sunlit scene are therefore used to suggest the pastness inherent in the present, the implication being that the past is as inevitable a part of the present as shadows are of sunshine. The use of sunlight and shadow to render the dual temporal aspect of the farmhouse seems an extension of a similar expression of duality by means of light and shade effects in *The Heart of England:* 'The red house was clear and hard in the grey air; yet with a richness and implicated shadow as of things sub-

[20] Ibid., p. 200
[21] Ibid., p. 316
[22] *The Heart of England,* p. 95

merged'.[23] Due to the sudden evocation of darkness after sunlight the kennel and the dog in the shadow of the sycamore tree are invested with an air of strangeness and otherness that distinguishes them from the 'pleasant' serenity of the present scene. The interplay of light and shadow to represent the interconnectedness of past and present is continued into the final verse. The river glints with light: 'flashing fast'. The echoes aroused by the barking of the dog, however, are 'dark echoes', the impalpability of the spectral past being evoked by this combination of negative olfactory and aural imagery. The phrase, the 'hollow past', with its acoustic and sepulchral connotations effects a fusion of the poem's horizontal and vertical approach to the past, suggesting both the spatial pervasiveness of the past through which the dog's barking resounds and recalling, too, the 'graves' already mentioned, the hollows in the earth where the dead generations lie buried. The epithet 'hollow' also evokes a sense of thinness and insubstantiality, setting the scene for the ghostly visitants of the final line. 'Half-yields' is pitted against its opposite 'half-hidden' and these motions of approach and withdrawal are re-enacted in the concluding line 'And out they creep and back again forever'. 'The dead that never / More than half-hidden lie' looks back to the 'graves' of the penultimate verse where the turf heaving above the stones offers a similar suggestion of the protrusion of the past into the present. The 'forever' with which the poem concludes projects the process of temporal overlapping to the limits of prospective time, uniting past, present and future in one continuum.

Hardy's poem 'The Two Houses' also treats of an old house and a new but here the new house is not a continuation of the old but rather its rival. An old house 'gray of gear' is contrasted with a 'smart newcomer' and the poem moves from the reckoning of a house's worth in material terms to a valuation of it in terms of the amount of human living it has experienced. Both Hardy and Thomas share a common recognition of the tangible presence of the past in the here and now as opposed to an antiquarian sense of its mysterious distance. Nevertheless they differ greatly in their method of rendering such an awareness of the availability of the past.

[23] Ibid., p. 112

Thomas's strategy, as his poem 'Two Houses' reveals, is to draw on natural phenomena to both symbolize and support his thesis. Accordingly as we have seen he illustrates his theme of temporal concurrence by comparison with the co-presence of light and shadow, sound and echo, by suggesting an analogy between gravemounds and the grass-covered foundations of an old house, both of which point to the protrusion of the dead into the living world, and also by verbal dexterity in the case of 'heaves'. Haunting in his poem is, at most, a tentative compromise between life and death. The dead are half-yielded to the living world, half-hidden from it. By contrast Hardy's 'The Two Houses' offers us the most lengthy poetic statement of his confidence in the survival of the dead through their incarnation in the physical setting. For one to whom no natural feature could compare in importance with the 'wear on a threshold' or the 'print of a hand'[24] a house is significant solely as a reliquary of human living. A 'cracked old hide / Loose casements, wormy beams and doors that jam' are defects more than compensated for by 'Presences from aforetime', while modern wood, fair hangings and good plumbing are worthless amenities in a house that 'has no sense of the have-beens'. The new house is scornfully dismissed as a 'heap of stick and stone', 'void as a drum'. The influence of human personalities and events on their environment has seldom been spelt out more clearly in Hardy's writing than in this poem:

> Where such inbe
> A dwelling's character
> Takes theirs, and a vague semblancy
> To them in all its limbs, and light and atmosphere.

This statement of the assimilation of the material to the human in physical 'semblancy' complements the earlier suggestion of the house's mental absorption with the past, preoccupation being skilfully rendered in terms of occupation by the attribution of the verb 'obsess' to the ghostly tenants' presence:

> Babes new-brought-forth
> *Obsess* my rooms; straight stretched
> Lank corpses, ere outborne to earth;
> Yea, throng as when first from the Byss upfetched.

[24] F.E. Hardy, *The Life of Thomas Hardy*, London, 1933, vol. I, p. 153

This theme of the imprint of human presence on the environment ('And print on thee their presence as on me') is here combined with the second most Hardyesque expression of the past's permeation of the present, the theme of haunting. The dead generations of 'The Two Houses' are not only perpetuated in the old house's 'semblancy to them in all its limbs and light and atmosphere' but they are also present as 'spectral guests'. In Thomas's poem the past is sub-ordinate to the present as shadows are to sunshine, the house of the past being but a 'half-hidden' ruin while the house of the present dominates the landscape ('No other one / So pleasant to look at and remember for many miles'). In Hardy's 'The Two Houses', however, the past almost overwhelms the present. The old house is 'packed' with 'Presences of aforetime', they 'obsess' and 'throng' its rooms. The recollection of past revels, of 'dancers and singers' and of bridal festivities, also suggests a crowded scene. The 'phantoms', too, are described as 'thin elbowers' which once more conjures up an image of a jostling multitude. By these means Hardy creates the impression that the past is crowding out the present. Again, the 'shades dim and dumb' are visualized as the permanent tenants of the old house while its 'tenants... in the flesh' merely 'come and go', another factor which contributes to the ascendancy of the phantom world. The present tenants, too, are scorned as 'blind folk... with souls unwoke' unaware of their 'sylph-like surrounders' so that once more the superiority of the latter is implied. Whereas Thomas in 'Two Houses' sees the past, present and future as one continuum, Hardy's poem focuses on the present only as a means of access to the past.

The house as an image of the persistence of the past is ubiquitous in the writings of Thomas Hardy and Edward Thomas. Their use of this common image, as we have seen, highlights several significant differences in their approach to their temporal theme. Hardy participates in the rooted familial life of which the younger writer is merely an observer. Hardy's approach to the past, founded in this 'solidity' which Thomas envied, is positive and assertive where Thomas's tends to be exploratory and diffident. Finally Hardy's is a backward look, completely absorbed in the contemplation of the past, whereas Thomas is concerned with past, present and future as one continuum.

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