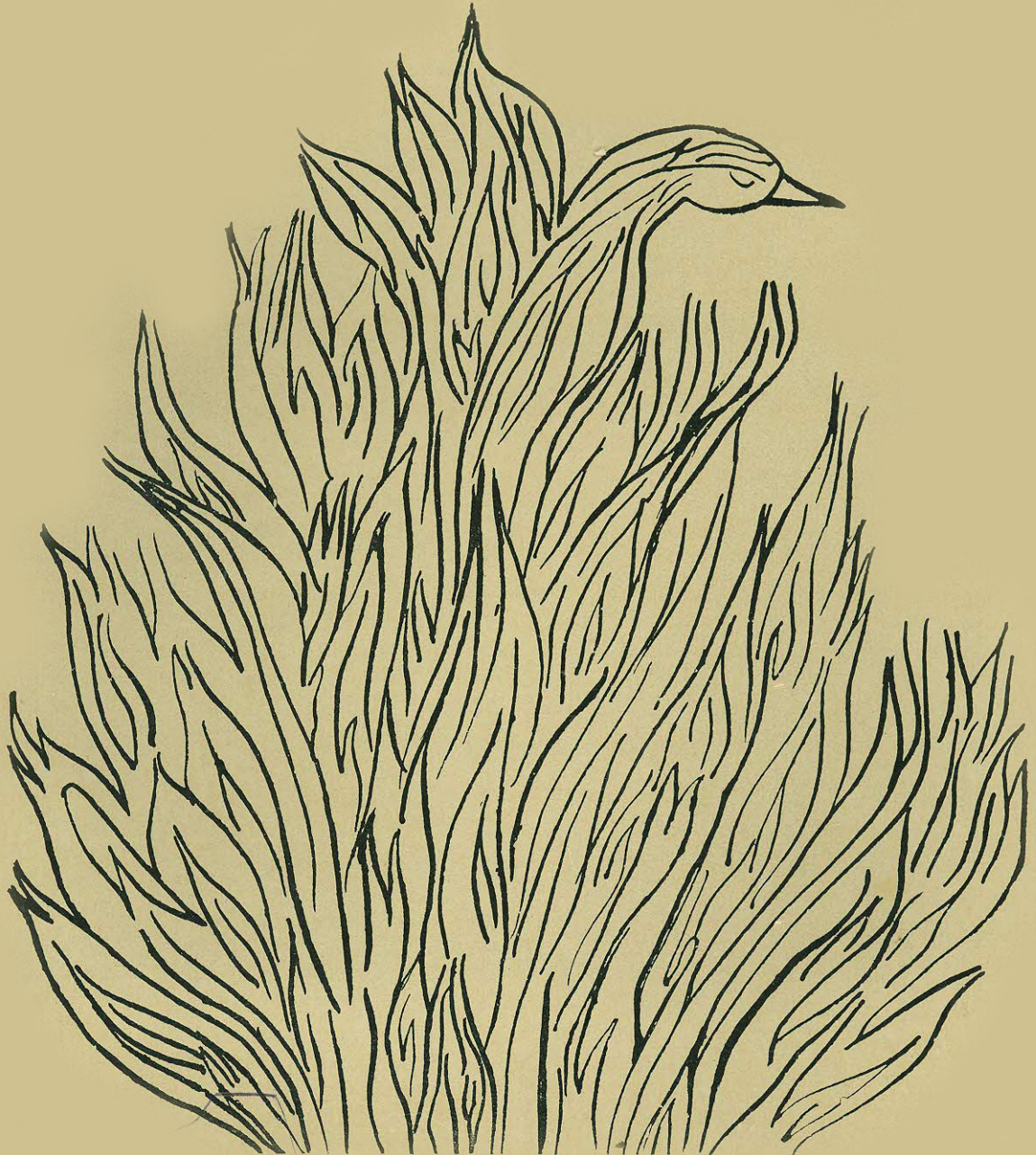


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“Spirit of the Living God  
Fall Afresh On Us”

**COVER DESIGN :**

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| M.A., Literature

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## Editorial

This year, the Literary Journal presents a harvest from many lands. Literature from every continent except the Arctic and the Antarctic are represented. In view of all this diversity, the uniting principle has been the enthusiasm of the contributors, and Christine's *Phoenix* is an apt pictorial expression of our creative endeavour.

Commemorating Patrick White's death, we have articles on *Voss* and *Fringe of Leaves*. Adopting White's vision from *The Tree of Man* we could perhaps say of him and of the Journal that, 'in the end there is no end'.

CHITHRA ARUMUGAM  
PRATHIMA

# CAMUS AND THE THEORY OF THE ABSURD

Chithra Arumugam  
(II M.A. Literature)

Albert Camus's writing developed around certain successive themes: at first, the theme of Sisyphus: absurdity; then the theme of Prometheus: revolt; followed by the theme of Nemesis: measure; and lastly, the theme of love. His first writings were essays collected as *L'Envers et L'endroit* (The Wrong side and the Right Side) and *Noces* (Nuptials). In 1942, the middle of the Second World War, Camus published two influential pieces of work: a novel *L'Étranger* (The Outsider) and an essay *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (The Myth of Sisyphus). These two works, along with the play *Caligula* formed the absurd triad.

In *The Outsider* Camus created a man who is executed because he does not 'play the game', i.e. he refuses to say more than is true, more than he feels, and so offends his community's sensibilities. He also refuses to live like a dead man by submitting himself to the useless and meaningless habits and customs of the society. This man, Meursault, perceives all people united by the same ultimate destiny - death. It is, therefore, immaterial to him what each man makes of his life on earth if it is in ignorance of this only truth. The world and its games are a huge ironical joke to Meursault, who is accused of murder but is sentenced to die for not crying at his mother's funeral.

Meursault's random consciousness, articulated into sense and pattern only at the point of execution, is an awakened acceptance of the "benign indifference of the world" (*Outsider*, 117).

Through him, Camus broke the myth that man would be unable to face a purposeless world on his own, in awareness. Meursault begins as a Christ would - a self-taught redeemer, learning and imparting first to himself the only possible wisdom

(instinct) along lines of the only possible truth (death).

In the 'final consummation' i.e. death, Meursault is neither disillusioned nor defeated. He has learnt to fraternize with nothingness - to fraternize through fighting. This odd reconciliation is the basis of his happiness, and in his last wish he seeks to replay this paradoxical fraternization: hoping for a crowd of spectators at his execution, greeting him with cries of hatred.

Meursault is the new outsider, a sacrificial Christ: because the people around him are too discomfited to understand or play the game his way.

*The Outsider* illustrates what *The Myth of Sisyphus* develops into the theory of the Absurd. Camus begins on an absorbing if startling note in *The Myth*.

Any philosophical theory has as its primary concern Man and the purpose of his existence. Of the many philosophical problems, Camus recognizes only one as 'truly serious' and that is suicide.

"Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest ... comes afterwards" (*Myth* 11). Suicide results when people judge that life is not worth living. This judgment presupposes an intensely individualised opinion of life where the ridiculous habit of "making the gestures commanded by existence for many reasons" (*Myth* 13) stands exposed, and no profound justification can root ideals and values in this world to give meaning to existence.

In the absence of a familiar world, familiar illusions, 'exile is without remedy' (*Myth*

13). Man is an outsider, an alien: his past robbed of value and the future devoid of hope. Such a "divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting is properly the feeling of absurdity" (Myth 13).

However, to refuse meaning to life is not the same as refusing life itself. As Camus emphasises, the Absurd does not denote death. The Absurd *is* as the world *is* and life *is*. What recognition of the Absurd indicates is the re-orientation taking place in the mind of the observer- the beginnings of doubt in the comfortable truisms man has used from time immemorial to fill his life with meaning, even as sawdust has been used to fill toys.

Camus's originality lies not in proposing the theory of the Absurd. For, as early as 1926, Andre Malraux had already dealt with the absurd in *La Tentation de l' Occident*. In 1928, *Les Conquerants* had its hero Garune reject society because of its absurdity. Sartre's *La Nausee* in 1938 almost entirely devoted itself to the expression of the absurdity of all existence. What Camus does, on the other hand, is to make the absurd an invitation to happiness. He finds his way by discovering the paths that lead away from those taken by the others.

Camus defines the Absurd as "the confrontation of the irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart" (Myth 26); or as "... the confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world " (Myth 32).. The confrontation materializes not in a man unconscious of his environment or in a world deliberately malicious to life, but in the presence of a conscious man and an indifferent world together. In fact, the Absurd, says Camus, is the only bond uniting the two.

The Absurd looms large when the meaning of existence is questioned. This questioning begins when the 'stagesets collapse'; when old age sets in motion the rebellion of the flesh; when faced with the

mathematical certainty of death; and even with certain operations of the mind as with the desire to comprehend the world through a unifying principle.

The dissatisfaction arising out of man's inability to know the ultimate becomes the source for the Absurd. As Bernard C. Murchland observes, "Infirmity, ignorance, irrationality, nostalgia, the impossibility of distinguishing the true from the false, our radical inability to know ourselves or others, the implacable mystery of the world....(are all) elements of the absurd as Camus envisioned it. It was the sum total of all the antinomies and contradictions man is heir to". (Bree 61). This realization could lead to ultimate despair as it does to the old man in *L' Envers et l' endroit*, when he makes the 'irremedial discovery' that every tomorrow will be the same; "Such ideas make you die. If you cannot endure them, you kill yourself" (King, quoting from 'L' Envers' 21).

In the face of such despair, Camus argues forcibly for a positive response to this state of purposelessness. He condemns suicide as escapism, for "Suicide, like the leap, is acceptance at its extreme" (Myth 54) — acceptance that life is not worth the trouble. Camus would rather have man accept that he lives in an absurd universe and then fight against that acceptance. This fight is in the nature of a revolt. This life, a rejection of suicide but a better living founded on painful awareness. Its only certainties are what Camus calls an "Odd trinity": Man's own desire, a world that cannot satisfy it, and the Absurd arising from the confrontation of the man and the world.

The existentialist's response to this paradox of existence is an outright detour of the central problem. Their philosophical search disintegrates into a search for the desirable, not for the true. Hence, in the face of the Absurd, both Leo Chestov and Kierkegaard chose to 'leap' to a God beyond reason - a cruel, irrational god who suppresses man's

desire for order and demands the sacrifice of human intellect. Similarly, Husserl's phenomenological principle seeks to explain the universe on rational terms but suppresses the incomprehensibility of reality (though reality is neither totally irrational nor totally rational). So too, Karl Jaspers asserts a Transcendent - he is powerless to realize - as "the essence of experience and the super-human significance of life" (Myth 36). Camus concludes, therefore, that the Existentialists "deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them" (Myth 35). Their religion is forced hope. Such refusal to perceive and accept every part of the paradox and hence maintain the tension between man and the world is what Camus calls "Philosophical suicide" - another form of escapism.

Camus advocates revolt instead of suicide. As Germaine Bree comments, Camus's revolt:-

"... is not directed against the romantic aspirations to transcend and destroy the limitations of the human being. It is directed against all that conspires to lessen any man's capacity for functioning with the greatest chance for happiness within these limitations" (7).

Like the surrealists, Giraudoux and Sartre, Camus rejects the primacy of reason in human life, denigrates the compromise that constitutes social existence and portrays the pursuit of ideals as impossible or dishonest. (Robinson). The Absurd becomes clear only when man is conscious of all these oppositions to habit. His growth into awareness is a revolt by itself. It should be accompanied neither by hope nor by resignation, for the one will sidestep the Absurd while the other will engulf it. The Absurd has to be preserved as the "simultaneous awareness and rejection of death" (Myth 54).

This revolt moves beyond nihilism and elevates human pride and greatness to new

heights. Its poignance consists in its being, like the Adventurer's conquest, the actor's play-acting and Don Juan's multiple loves, a "tribute that man pays to his dignity in a campaign in which he is defeated in advance" (Myth 35). Revolt declaims transcendental values and so gets man to realize that his kingdom "is of this world - a Kingdom of the present moment, the immediate sensation" (King 24): what Camus terms 'the hell of the present'. Living in this hell is worthy only if that living is done in lucidity. The symbol of this type of behaviour is Don Juan, who refused to love rarely to love well.

To live thus within 'absurd walls' has three consequences for the Absurd man. Firstly the extreme tension which man maintains by solitary effort, for he knows that "... in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth which is defiance" (Myth 55). This defiance embodies his refusal to acquiesce in the tragic nature of the world.

Secondly, the Absurd man is aware that he lacks the freedom to be; that he is death's prisoner. The absence of a future beyond death coupled with the purposelessness of life on earth, gives him an inner liberty to be free of responsibility. This 'reasonable freedom' which can be explored and lived is the second consequence of the Absurd.

Given this reasonable freedom and solitary tensions, the Absurd man is naturally interested not in 'best living' (because the world is devoid of values) but in what Camus calls 'most living'. This is the Absurd man's accumulation of the greatest quantity of experiences in the present - his ammunition to defy both death and madness. Here 'most living' is a 'succession of presents' in which "... having started from an anguished awareness of the inhuman, the meditation on the absurd returns at the end of its itinerary to the very heart of the passionate flames of human revolt" (Myth 62). This is the third consequence.

A consciousness of these three consequences - revolt, freedom, passion - could help the Absurd man to transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death. This is Camus's Absurd inference based on his Absurd reasoning. It must be noted, as Philip Tody does, that Camus's inference is not existentialist, because, unlike Camus, the existential attitude is one which denies the competence of man to decide his own destiny.

The prototype of the Absurd man has existed even in ancient mythology. Thus, Sisyphus, whom Homer calls the wisest and most prudent of all men, is cursed by the gods to 'futile and hopeless labour'; for despising the gods and defying death in his passion for life.

To hold the gods in scorn and to hate death is to guillotine the unconscious, to nullify the purpose of submission to incomprehensible fears. It also heightens the tragic, for Sisyphus in his eternal rock rolling, is conscious that he accomplishes nothing, yet retains neither rancour nor self-pity. He confronts brutality with equanimity and in that challenge is the supreme example for all mankind. He is the first to refuse to obey the gods, to refuse a means of escape, to refuse both hope and resignation. Instead, choosing to "live without appeal" (Myth 53) he discovers happiness in his burden.

Like Don Juan, the actor, the adventurer and the artist, Sisyphus finds happiness because he chooses to live in the present, with no regrets for the past and no hope for the future. He is accumulating experiences. Like Don Juan he values immediate sensations; like the actor, he is ruler of a perishable world; like the adventurer, he is dedicated to justice and immediate happiness, accepting the provisional nature of his conquest; like the artist, he is engrossed in clarifying his revolt. Hence, concludes Camus, "The struggle toward the summit itself suffices to fill a man's heart....One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (Myth 111)

It is not incidental either that Sisyphus appears to be threatened with everlasting punishment. For mortals, death marks the end of both the conscious and the unconscious. However, in the jolt from the unconscious to the conscious, death becomes a potential means of escape. Sisyphus is symbolic of the refusal to die. He who refuses this means of escape, and in awareness chooses to experience and explore the Absurd chooses also a certain happiness in the burden. This man alone by virtue of his confrontation with the Absurd can boldly stand up to say, "All is well", for the "all" is contained within him, and the "well" is the state of his own mind. Like Don Juan, Oedipus, Sisyphus, he too makes "a fate of human matter" (Myth 110).

This is also the link between Sisyphus and Meursault, the ancient potential redeemer and the modern. Both are Christs who bring us truth; as Camus writing in an 'afterword' to 'The Outsider' in 1955 would say - they are the "only Christ(s) we deserve". This understanding is the Absurd Victory.

Responses to Camus's theory have been varied. In 1946 Prof. Ayer wrote to say that the theory proved nothing at all. English philosophers dismissed it as 'a pointless lament'. Others like Prof. Hanna saw in Camus's conclusions "the grounds for rejuvenating Christian theology" (Thody 57). Yet the fact remains that it is unjustified to abandon reason entirely, simply because it cannot give all the answers, and instead plunge headlong into an equally dangerous, rationally unjustifiable mystical explanation. It was on this premise that Camus created his essay. It has paved the way for the 'demystification' of the Absurd from the appendages and prejudices of scepticism. Camus's perspective has a freshness that takes the reader to nihilism and beyond. Above all it is fascinating that the theory of the Absurd should paradoxically embody a positive philosophy, which is as sensible as it is startling.



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# POEMS OF HERMANN HESSE : CERTAIN PERCEPTIONS

—R. Venila  
(II M.A. Literature)

What is most, striking about Hesse's poetry is its powerful strain of Romanticism. Perceptions of 'reality' of 'things as they are' give way to imaginative insights that form, in his poetry, a new plane of increased awareness.

In *Holiday Music in the Evening*, his perception of Nature, and the world at large, in relation to his position as an individual inhabitant is described with pantheistic conviction:-

"Again, every time, comforting  
And, every time, new in the gleam of endless  
creation,  
The world laughs in my eyes,  
Comes alone and stirs into a thousand breath-  
ing forms.  
Butterflies fumble in the wind straining with  
sunlight  
Swallows Sail into the blessing...."

Such a romantic insight may recall the Wordsworthian conviction of "A motion and a spirit, that impels/All thinking things, all objects of all thought/and rolls through all things". (Tintern Abbey)

But, Hesse's romantic insights into the nature of things is, only, a step towards intellectualization of convictions as a part of the poetic psyche.

"The world and myself, every thing  
within and without me, grows into  
One.  
Clouds drift through my heart,  
Woods dream my dream".

Objective reality and subjective reality merge as the identities of the perceived object and the perceiver "grow into one". - Fragmented Consciousness is repaired - And through such wholistic vision Hesse can

acquire the ultimate knowledge, ie. self-knowledge (knowledge about one's own soul, which for Hesse is the seat of spiritual reality). This view is expressed, quite explicitly in the poem *Departure from the Jungle*.

The poet as we find in this poem, is horrified by the knowledge the jungle affords him. Though he had been, earlier, lured by the "night of the forests", "the jungle stream", "The wild fermenting garden of the earliest world", and "gleaming wildernesses", he cannot bear the self-knowledge he acquires when he realises that "I never saw so close and so clearly" that the wildernesses which "horrify me with its magnificence" is "The image in the mirror of my own soul".

Hesse does not describe the image of truth: He only says that there is something called the soul. He does not startle the seeker of knowledge and aesthetics with any kind of 'Outlandish' answer. He only philosophizes in a manner that Mr. Koch has bravely recognized as "boringly correct".

However, it is unjust to identify the whole of the poetic expressions of his romantic imagination as boringly correct philosophies. His poetic moods vary. In poems like *To a chinese Girl singing*, *A Swarm of Gnats* and *Mountains at Night* Hesse is not pre-occupied with the idea of his 'Self' or soul or philosophical visions about them. He only observes, perhaps self-consciously. In *To a Chinese Girl Singing* (that recalls Woodsworths *Solitary Reaper*), he, generously permits his introverted mind an outward movement - "to give into those gleaming eyes, over and over. To listen to the song for ever in blessed pain". In *A Swarm of Gnats*, he marvels at the mystery of the gnats' "joy against death" as they perform "the deteriorious dance" around the burning light.

Narcissism is definitely not a characteristic feature of Hesse's poetry, though 'Innerlichkeit' (roughly equivalent to the English words 'Inwardness' and 'Subjectivity') is fundamental to his poetic art.

Hesse's 'innerlichkeit' trembles on the verge of Solipsism (but is never equivalent to Solipsism). Self "alone" does not suffice – however much of ultimate knowledge it might afford. Such knowledge is too much for the poet's romantic sensibilities to cope with. 'That is why in *Departure from the Jungle*, he escapes the image of his soul to the noisy world of "Knick-Knacks". To escape from the horrifying truth about oneself, especially from that reflected by the wilderness on the soul, conscious effort has to be made, to mark the subjective being as a distinct entity, different from the objective reality of the existing jungle. Once the self is cautiously extricated from the harmonious co-existence with the external world of things, the subsequent experience is primarily one of loneliness.

The lonely (poetic) psyche needs company and a home. From the poetic phenomenon of innerlichkeit the poet desperately wants to be transported to the world of 'bondage' – of friendship and love. In *Lonesome Night* the poet demands "You brothers, who are nine" to "Give me welcome back". But his personal phenomenon of innerlichkeit, his private grace, seems to, habitually, engage his poetic sensibilities. As a result, there seems to be a poetic tension between innerlichkeit and the psychic need for another's company, for love, for sharing. At *Night on the High Seas* dramatizes this tension.

In this poem the sea acts as 'mother' and "cradles" him. Instead of surrendering to the bondage of love of Nature of the Cradling mother, instead of 'giving in' or merging with Nature's identity, the poet delves deep into the recess of his own psyche. Yet, even as he tastes his own solitary being, he cannot fully

extricate his sensibilities from the cradling sea, his worldly niche.

"At night, when the sea cradles me  
And the pale star gleam  
Lies down on its broad wane  
Then I free myself wholly

From all activity and all the love  
And stand silent and breathe purely,  
Alone, alone cradled by the sea  
that lies there, cold and silent, with a  
thousand lights".

Experience of loneliness forwards the desire for  
Companionship:

"Then I have to think of my friends  
And my gaze sinks into their gazes  
And I ask each one, silent, alone,  
'Are you still mine?  
Is my sorrow a sorrow to you, my death a  
death to you?  
Do you feel from my love, my grief,  
Just a breath, just an echo?"

To the psyche that experiences  
revolving desires and stubborn innerlichkeit, yet  
cannot strike a balance, nor find a uniting link,

"No greeting and no answer comes from  
any where".

It is not surprising, therefore, that Hesse  
typifies a poet in the Poem *The Poet*, as the  
acknowledged "lovely one". The lonely one,  
however, is not a misanthrope. In fact, he is a  
seeker – "Often in full flight of longing", his  
"soul storms upwards", and "Across the fields",  
".....far away,

My home must be, "is the hope that  
sustains the poet - seeker, and ironically, even  
the innerlichkeit of his romantic imagination.  
Nature, alone, does not become the lonely,  
homesick poet's anchor and guide in life.  
Home for him, is both the soul and the place  
where comforting mother lives. In other words  
Home is the place of security. Once in his  
childhood, he had experienced 'home' – that

had "charmed the horrifying world/Away from me and brightened me new" (*Uneasiness in the Night*). For a similar experience the poet seeks through innerlichkeit, in his own memories of his security. But new insights in new times of the ticking clock, that afford an increased awareness of reality negate the sense of stability and destroy the certainty of security. So the poet, intense with his new, newer and newest perceptions wanders to only feel that the seemingly static world of things is only "Caught in a wasting passion".

*(Mountains at Night)*

Nevertheless the wasting passion of forces of life, as Hesse observes in *All Deaths*, is the process of living. 'Living' to the Romantic is a creative act. And unable to reconcile to the destruction of war, in the poems like "Thinking of a Friend at Night" (September 1914) and "To Children" (at the end of 1914). Hesse attacks

the very idea of military glory and broods on the transient nature of the moment and of human life. To the poet, longing for life is a longing for creativity. To live by art, by breath, and by suffering means to be 'hunted'.

".....down from death to birth  
On the painful track of the Creations,  
The glorious track of the Creations".

On such a track of Creation, Hesse seeks and concretizes in rhythmic verses his romantic and imaginative insights into the nature of things. On the track of Creation, Hesse's romanticism avoids celebration of personal emotions. Spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings is not his poetic style. Emotional, sensual and psychic experiences are self - consciously intellectualised to give birth to a new idea (as the older reality fades). Hesse's poems are, in fact, ideas of the Poetic Consciousness<sup>2</sup>.

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### Notes

Hesse's poems referred to in this essay are taken from Herman Hesse!

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\*<sup>1</sup> P8-8 Herman Hesse : Poems - Jonathan Cape, London 1971

\*<sup>2</sup> Based on Mr. Koch's phrase "Great Ideas Chasing Terrific Experiences" – P 88, Ibid.

# THE ARTIST IN EMERGENT AFRICAN SOCIETY

## A study of Soyinka's *The Interpreters*

Priyadharshini  
(II M.A. Literature)

Experience is chaos and it is the artist who gives order to this chaotic reality, re-ordering and recreating reality through his creative and imaginative abilities. But when the artist himself is caught up in this chaos of experience, unable to sufficiently extricate himself to view it objectively, his creative faculty is stultified and he remains merely an interpreter. This is demonstrated in Soyinka's novel *The Interpreters*.

As Soyinka explains in his introduction to 'Six Plays' the novel was "an attempt to capture a particular moment in the lives of a generation which was trying to find its feet after the independence" (P. XIV) it is a moment when the myth of the "superhero has already been exploded" (Dhawan P. 80) and the single hero of the traditional novel has given place to the multiple protagonists, none of whom can claim to be heroic or perfect. *The Interpreters* is about young University graduates - Egbo (a civil servant), Sagoe (a journalist), Sekoni (an engineer turned sculptor), Bandele (a teacher) Kola (an artist and teacher of art) and Lasunwon (a lawyer), who stand at the periphery of existence, trying to understand and find meaning for themselves amidst the "raucous toads of the sewage ridden ports (12).

Each of the characters find representation and identification in the 'Pantheon' of traditional Yoruba gods that Kola is painting. Egbo's identification is with 'Ogun', the Yoruba god of creativity, hunting and war. But as he himself recognises, he is represented as "a damned, blood thirsty maniac from some maximum security zoo (234). Egbo has the temperament of an artist, but his creative impulses are suppressed by his constant and almost mystical relationship with the past and his fear of commitment. In spite of his constant rejection of the past "Memories do not hold

me. If the dead are not strong enough to be ever present in our being, should they not be as they are - dead? (7) he is unable to shake off the burden of his ancestors and is incessantly drawn to the pattern of the idea, "unable to deny its dark vitality" (9). This growing need for independence being frustrated by the past's demanding dependence is also seen in Dehinwa's conflict with her mother.

But Egbo's problem is his inability to choose and to commit himself to his choice. Right in the beginning of the novel, he recognises this and gives expression to it in terms of the water imagery which governs much of his action

"All right, let's go."

"Which way, man? You haven't said."

Perhaps he had hoped they would simply move and take the burden of a choice from him, but it was like Bandele to insist although motiveless. So, leaving it at that, Egbo simply said, "With the tide. (12).

And this choice of neutrality, though conscious, is "existential" (Dhawan P. 80) in nature. There is no goal set for him, unlike his other friends who are busy doing something or the other. Life, for him is nothing but "moving from one event to another". He is aware of his inadequacy and recognises his opposite in the young student he is attracted to, "Yes, I believe I sense that (self reliance) in you. Like coming out with me. You chose so willfully, damning your natural suspicion and uneasiness" (135).

The contrast between Simi and the young university student is almost symbolic in nature. Simi is identified with "the Queen Bee"

who initiates Egbo into experience. But as Radhamani Gopalakrishnan points out, it is the young girl who can "carry Egbo forward into the next stage of existence - that of the unborn", (Dhawan P. 80) by bearing his child. It is she who can help him sever his binding relationship with the past, who can say, like Lyoloja in *'Death and the King's horseman'*. "Now forget the dead, forget even the living. Turn your mind only to the unborn" (76).

Sagoe, the journalist working for the ironically named 'Independent Viewpoint' is the protagonist in the novel in terms of action. He is witness to all major developments in the novel. A young man of ideas endowed with "a kind of creative antenna", his efforts are frustrated by the editorial policy of his paper and by the depressing reality around him. All his dreams about the ideal reporter are shattered when his editor-in-chief tells him that journalism is a business like any other, where loyalty and friendship hold no good, for "it's each man for himself".

This disillusionment, along with his addiction to liquor, render his perceptions of reality highly subjective and grotesque. He formulates a philosophy - "Viodanta" (a play on vedanta?), or the Philosophy of Shit, the "most" inward philosophy in human existence.

"The lavatory was not so much a physiological necessity as a psychological and religious urge. I experienced self communion a resolution, peace attainment, I evolved a spiritual reapproachment with a world of stresses and discords." (70).

If Sagoe is limited by the circumstances around him, Kola is limited by the fear of fulfilment. He is the only 'artist' among them, but by the end of the novel, he comes to realise that he is the least artistic of them all. His keenness of perception is blunted by cynicism and as he confesses to Monica, his perceptions come in disjointed fragments, "killing spontaneity and making a fumbler of the artist". (229).

"He understood that the medium was of little importance, that the act on canvas or on human material was the process of living and brought him the intense fear of fulfilment. And this was another paradox - that he dared not, truly be fulfilled" (220)

Kola is not yet ready to surrender his self for artistic fulfilment. Hence, at the most, he can only be an interpreter of art, and not one of his works, in his fifteen years as a painter would he dare place beside Sekoni's freak piece of sculpture - 'The Wrestler'.

Sekoni, is in fact the only true artist in the novel. He is a creator in every sense of the word. A qualified engineer, Sekoni "seeks the hands of kindered spirits for the flare of static electricity but it slips with ease and points to his desk". (25). Sekoni's potential is not recognised by the bureaucrats, who give him nothing to do but sign bicycle allowances and vouchers. When Sekoni objects to this, he is termed a "too-know", and the power station that is constructed by him is written off as "junk" even before it has been tested. Sekoni's righteous anger is mocked and the episode is brushed off as the "escapade of the mad engineer" (26).

Sekoni is the embodiment of power, the power to which Kola is afraid to commit himself. When the bureaucrats reject his concrete and brilliant schemes for the developing country, the agony of the overflow of power in him find expression in one first and last work of art, 'The Wrestler'. The failure of science paves the way for the triumph of art.

But the live spark that is Sekoni is extinguished as soon as it is lit. As the lightning with which he is identified, the power he wields is momentary. (But Sekoni's death forms the sacrificial altar where each of the other protagonists find their identity). As Gerald Moore suggests, Sekoni may be said to act as the group's pathfinder or pioneer to the frontiers of experience - a role comparable to that of the professor in *'The Road'*.

Bandele, who is the model for Sekoni's sculpture remains an interpreter to the end. He is a witness to all the moral agonies of the intellectuals and sits like a "timeless image brooding on lesser beings"<sup>1</sup>(246). It is Bandele who questions the intellectual pretensions of the others. He diagnoses cynicism as the result of the frustration of creative energy. He understands that each man makes meaning for himself out of the given circumstance - be it A Sago and his philosophy of shit, kola and his art or Lazarus with his faith in a new church where murderers are made martyrs. Therefore, when Kola and Sago are cynical of Lazarus' death experience, Bandele hits out against them:

"This man did go through some critical experience. If he has chosen to interpret it in a way that would bring some kind of meaning into people's lives, who are you to scoff at it, to rip it up in your dirty pages with cheap cynicism" (180)

This brings into direct question the status of the artist in emergent African society. Kola, Egbo and Sago have their claims to be an 'artist' - a person endowed with 'imagination'. Sekoni, the only one who could be called a true artist perishes half way through. Set against them, we have Lasunwon, the lawyer, the most 'unimaginative' of them all; and the questions of Lasunwon, though sparked by a trace of envy, come to question the very place of the artist in society. Lasunwon is totally disgusted with Kola's air of superiority. He brands the whole lot of them as "religious gawfers" and "time wasters", "the most useless members of society".

"Everyday, somewhere in the papers, they are shouting off their mouths about culture and art and imagination. And their attitude is so superior as if they are talking to the common illiterate barbarians of society"...."But they don't say anything. Gibberish, nothing but gibberish." (163)

It is the same criticism that is levelled against Sago by the politician who complains that "young men are always criticising", and have no concrete proposals for improving the country.

Conceding the fact that Sekoni's brilliant projects for Nigeria are dismissed as Junk, we notice that all that the intellectuals do in the novel is contemplate and reflect. They are aware of the moral and social problems their country faces and recognise that they have a contribution to make, but how or when, they have no clue to. They are too confused by their own personal identities and are too busy, though they have "never discovered doing what" (11). As Egbo says, their lives are just "creek surfaces bearing the burdens of fools, a mere passage, a mere reflecting medium of sheer mass controlled by ferments beyond them" (11).

For Soyinka, the heroic and artistic gesture is an "assertion of will" (Moore, P. 218) which has value<sup>7</sup>, but the intellectuals are too afraid of "the awful daring of a moment's surrender". They dare not break away from the repetitive cycle of corruption and indecision, and are drawn into the vicious cycle, as the end of the novel demonstrates. The interval in the concert is a symbolic and highly charged moment, it is the moment when Egbo has to make his final and conscious choice between Simi and the Student, but as always, Egbo is impotent, confused and unable to decide. And the moment passes - "end of interval and the bell recalled them, distant and shrill like a leper's peal"<sup>1</sup>(253). and Soyinka's interpreters will go back to the concert - nothing has really ever changed.

Lewis Nkosi, commenting on this, says,

"The interpreters are meant to be standard bearers for a new modernist culture within which the relationship of the traditional to the new values can be defined and clarified. However, their failure to even raise the right questions, let alone participate in

ameliorative action, casts them in the role of noisy dilettantes. Talk is all they do...The questions we are left with in the end is - in what does their salvation consist? the only answer the novel provides is Good Taste. This may be consolation for character but is not unfortunately the kind of solution that a novelist can give without discomfiture" (P. 68)

In his failure to give concrete solutions to the complex moral and social problems of his society, does Soyinka also share the nature of his characters? Does he also remain merely an idle interpreter, instead of a creative artist? These are questions for which readers have to find answers for themselves.

But one cannot totally dismiss the novel as one of "disillusion, lacking ultimate design". The artistic design of the novel, with its focus upon the technique of flashback and introspection, its complex network of imagery, strained artificiality of language, and deliberate obscurantism, lays bare, as Lewis Nkosi points out, the "new strains of African society".

"The current shift towards modernist techniques in African fiction, though disguised as mere stylistic innovation, is in reality... occurring against a background of chronic instability in African society; the

basis of a close organic relationship between the individual and the rest of the community is being seriously undermined by new economic and social forces; anxiety alienation and the emergence of an anguished pessimistic vision are indices of widespread location and loss of equilibrium in modern African society". (P. 54).

Seen against this picture, one cannot class '*The Interpreters*' as a 'Novel of disillusion',<sup>10</sup> and neither can one dismiss the intellectuals as mere babblers. Though a victim of indecision, each character is acutely aware of the "apostasy" - the "absolute neutrality" (11) from which he wants to break away. But an artist can never be divorced from his setting and the emergent Africa is still caught in the throes of materialism, corruption and religious quackery. As long as Africa remains in this State of lost idealism, lacking a finer sensitivity, the African intellectual will remain an 'interpreter' instead of a creator, trying to restore faith and idealism, first to himself and then to his society. And the young university student stands as a powerful and potent symbol of this hope:

"This is the new woman of my generation, proud of the gift of mind and guarding her person from violation". (236).

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## ELLEN ROXBURGH : SEARCH & REVELATION

— Gayatri  
(III B.A. Literature)

'Others have clothed and fed you since what all of us see as your miraculous escape. I would offer you the Gospels,' Mr Cottle patted his pocket to give his statement shape and substance, 'and an invitation from your fellow believers to join them in bearing witness this Sunday, and any other on which you find yourself at Moreton Bay'. 'Oh', Mrs. Roxburgh moaned, 'I don't know what I any longer believe'. 'I can't accept that your lapse in faith is more than a temporary backsliding', Mr. Cottle asserted, and ventured to add, 'that of a truly christian soul'. 'I do not know, Mr. Cottle whether I am true, leave alone Christian,' Mrs. Roxburgh murmured. The chaplain was halted. 'If I was given a soul, I think it is possibly lost,' she said (White 347-8).

Prayer is the only experience which failed Ellen Roxburgh, or rather, she failed prayer. Life in all its extremes extracted every ounce of fortitude, courage, fear, love, hate, perversion, cunning and bestiality out of Ellen but not prayer. The distancing of prayer from her "lost" soul holds the key to Mrs. Roxburgh's mystery and her survival without it throws doubts on the most faithful.

Mrs. Roxburgh, nee Ellen Gluyas, genteel, sophisticated wife of scholarly Austin Roxburgh, a Cornish hoyden by roots, believer in mysterious spirits and aware of an hidden evil, picked and polished by the earnest and blameless aristocratic family of Roxburghs is the heroine of Patrick White's *A fringe of Leaves*. She circumnavigates her soul through an experience that would leave lesser and cultured people as dead as Mr. Austin Roxburgh found himself on the sands of an unexplored island, inhabited by savages whose harsh living is exceeded in comparison by the harsher and sub-human treatment of

prisoners in the last outpost of the British Empire - Australia.

Mrs. Roxburgh strikes one as being different from the others. In the words and judgement of Miss. Scrimshaw, "'Mrs. Roxburgh is something of a mystery, ... she reminded me of a clean sheet of paper which might disclose an invisible writing - if breathed upon...I only had the impression that Mrs. Roxburgh could feel life has cheated her out of some ultimate in experience. For which she would be prepared to suffer if need be'" (White 17). Even as she stands out by her remoteness, her untouchability, the air of impregnable politeness which revealed only one of the many roles she played in life, that of nurse, protector, wife, failed mother, sophisticated lady, and of which she had tired of playing even as fate willed her to be free at last — free to undertake the process of 'becoming', free to encounter her own will to survive and free to face and accept at last the hidden evil which she had always sensed in herself.

From the Mrs. Roxburgh, of the polite, oppressively well-furnished drawing room at Cheltenham, recording as much of her life as she dared to expose in her faint-hearted journal maintained on the insistence of the elder Mrs. Roxburgh, Ellen evolves into a woman who has the confidence of life's knowledge to reject entirely the frivolous trappings of the 'gentry'. Having been initiated into a polite, higher society, Ellen Gluyas was buried under several feet of earth, to make way for the birth of Mrs. Ellen Roxburgh whose constant aim was "to please and protect... to be accepted by her husband's friends and thus earn his approbation, to show the Roxburghs her gratitude in undemonstrative and undemeaning ways". (White 67)

Her journal was her only companion, in which she recorded her feelings during the phase of transition. "I sit with my books more often than I read, and look at the toe of my shoe, or watch the wasps trying to get at the pears through the muslin bags, or my little pug to catch her tail. I wish I would dare go inside the kitchen to make some jam, I may yet.." (White 65-6). The journal, far from being "a source of self-knowledge and an instrument for self-correction" becomes a symbol of the hypocrisy she is forced to adopt when faced with a masculine form of her own restless soul - her brother-in-law, Garnet Roxburgh. A secretive, very brief, passionate affair does take place despite Mrs. Roxburgh's revulsion of an evil she sensed in him betrayed later by the inhuman slaughter of a mare at his hands, because of his frustration at her rejection of him.

The brief attraction which shocked Mrs. Roxburgh was only the beginning of her explorations into herself which was afforded later by the unexpected shipwreck, the traumatic murder of her husband at the hands of the aboriginal savages and the enforced life she led as their slave - prisoner.

Mrs. Roxburgh lived life in it's most rudimentary basics, where survival was a daily task which ended only with nightfall. She pursued an existence as primitive as the earliest inhabitants, naked, but for a fringe of leaves which she wore out of a tribute to modesty and a remote civilization. She became a frightened and hungry 'hound' hunting after opossums, climbing up trees to grab the poor, wilting and shivering creatures and hurl them out to be clubbed to death by the savages. Her heart wrenching sorrow and pity for them was superceded only by her own battle for survival from the 'fire sticks' which were held under her as an effective force.

Her only solace was afforded by the children placed under her care. It was to these children that she exercised her garbled English

such as she could remember. "The black children laughed to hear her. They were growing to love their nurse, and initiated her into their games, one in particular which resembled cat's - cradle, with a string spun from hair or fibre...she indulged in their every caprice, and received their hugs and their tantrums with an equanimity..." (White 247).

For the moment she experiences a sense of oneness with them. "...halfway down a slope, she caught her foot in a vine which had escaped her notice, and tumbled like a sack off a cart. Imitating her fall, the children rolled downhill and landed in the same heap. They all lay laughing... The young children might have been hers.. the two black little bodies united in the sun with her own blackened skin-and-bones (White 230).

Captivity under the aborigines helped her search within herself to find the inner freedom which she experienced in a mystical and spiritual way after partaking of a cannibalistic feast. It was an ephiphanic moment when the act of consuming human flesh seemed blessed, a "Communion" with powers she had not related to before and would never relate to again.

Mrs. Roxburgh becomes Ellen as she discovers a truth which could be experienced only in a life which is lived as it was originally meant to be, shorn of excessive and claustrophobic rules and conventions. Juxtaposed to the primitive life of the savages is the civilised world of human beings. With profound irony White exposes the most inhuman and life-negating manifestations of physical torture in a civilized world. Ellen, shorn of her tutored gentility, even as she is stripped of her clothes, returns to the state of her girlhood as she struggles against fears inspired by the primitive savages and finds hope of freedom and free love with Jack Chance, the escaped convict, who deals the final blow to 'civilized' life when he returns to the forest and to a life with the savages instead of

accompanying Ellen back into the world of whites. This repudiation contributes to the overwhelming grief which consumes Ellen, whose unprecedented experience leaves her an irrevocably changed woman, harbouring

the quintessential answers to life, having achieved an enlightenment which removes her from ordinary, god-fearing folk as she resumes her role of Mrs. Roxburgh, forever.

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# A FRAIL GOD UPON A RICKETY THRONE: VOSS

— Madhavi M  
(II M.A. Literature)

"I will cross the continent from one end to the other. I have every intention to know it with my heart" (V 33).

The journey motif is central to the technique of Patrick White's novel 'Voss'. A major part of the novel records the journey undertaken by its protagonist, to explore and understand the alien Australian landscape. The German explorer Voss is driven by a compelling force within him to Australia, which is not his country but, as another character Laura remarks, is his, "by right of vision" (V 29) what starts as an exploration of outer space, soon proves to be an exploration of inner space. Voss is an explorer not only of the hitherto untrammelled terrains of Australia, but also of the human mind and spirit.

White's reading of the Australian explorer Edward John Eyre's 'Journal', and the story of Leichhardt's disastrous last expedition in A.H. Chisholm's 'Strange New World' contributed to the genesis of the novel.

"It was conceived during the London blitz, was 'influenced by the arch-megalomaniac of the day' Hitler, and developed during months spent trapesing backwards and forwards across the Egyptian and Cyrenaican deserts" (Walsh 41).

Very early in the novel, one is made aware of the fact that Voss is one whose powers are concentrated upon an inner life.

"All that was external to himself he mistrusted and was happiest in silence which is immeasurable, like distance, and the potentialities of the self" (V 21-22).

The compulsion he feels to cross the continent is more a result of his desire of his 'will' to discover his 'genius'. As he tells, Le Mesurier, a fellow-companion in the expedition,

"Every man has a genius though it is not always discernable. Least of all when choked by the trivialities of daily existence. But in this disturbing country, so far as I have become acquainted with it already it is possible more easily to discard the inessential and to attempt the infinite. You will be burnt up most likely, you will have the flesh torn from your bones, you will be tortured probably in many horrible and primitive ways, but you will realize that genius of which you sometimes suspect you are possessed and of which you will not tell me you are afraid" (V 35).

The exploration thus assumes the shape of a confrontation between the landscape and the will of man.

"Deserts prefer to resist history, and develop along their own lines." (V 62) - therein lies the reason for "being compelled into this country". This natural hostility towards any form of submission to man's will makes it a fit target for his pride.

"His fateful expedition is the means of exploring the strengths and limitations of the Nietzschean 'Superman' whose task it is to fill the void that arises from the idea that 'God is dead' (Colmer 37).

The only person who seems to understand him, Laura Trevelyan realizes that this expedition of Voss is pure will. Voss fervently believes that "Your future is what you will make it. Future is will" (V 68) Laura's fears that Voss's will would destroy him, are dispelled by Voss's belief that.

"To make yourself, it is also necessary to destroy yourself" (V 34) indicating the underlying theme of a metaphysical quest. "What Voss is dedicated to is the Self-deification of man, to be achieved in his own

person, through boundless will and pride and daring" (Mc Auley 38).

As for Voss, if he were to leave that name on the land irrevocably, his material body swallowed by what it had named, it would be rather on some desert place, a perfect abstraction that would rouse no feeling of tenderness in poetry. He had no more need for sentimental admiration than he had for love. He was complete (V 41).

The nurture of faith is to him a feminine pre-occupation and a surrendering of one's own will. Voss is scornful of Le Mesurier's humility because it denies the royal supremacy of the will. Palfreyman who accompanies the expedition is the exact anti-thesis of Voss. He personifies the Christian virtues of Charity, patience and humility, which the egoistic German finds disgusting, yet exploits when he knowingly, sends Palfreyman to his death, at the hands of the aborigines. Palfreyman's death reveals the assertion of Voss's will over another's humility.

His resentment at the celebration of Christmas by the rest of the team is because, enclosed within his proud selfhood, he cannot acknowledge the presence of a superior will or force. Brother Miller, with penetrative insight tells him. "Mr. Voss, you have a contempt for God, because He is not in your own image" (V 50).

To be self-sufficient implies for Voss, a detestation of humility and to need no one. Therefore he rejects social relations and all gestures indicating brotherhood.

"Left alone, Voss groaned. He would not, could not learn, nor accept humility, even though this was amongst the conditions she (Laura) had made in the letter that was now lying in him" (V 199).

As he tells Palfreyman on another occasion, "You are humble and humility is humiliating in men. I am humiliated for you" (V 339).

While the focus in the first half of the narrative is on the 'physical' progress of the expedition, and the world of reality, in the second half it shifts to the progress of the self, and the spirit and the world of 'dream'. In this context, the Voss-Laura relationship gains significance. The few physical meetings of the two before the expedition starts, become the foundation which triggers off an endless series of meetings between the two, in their respective imaginations. Laura identifies 'pride' as the quality which is common to both of them and which binds them together in a strange way. The strong affinity with Voss is indicated, when in their very first meeting she 'could hear her own voice' in his. It is again reinforced when this sense of a silent communion re-emerges at a social gathering; "both man and woman were lulled into living inwardly, without shame or need of protection" (V 69).

Their relationship which is based more on absence, on a kind of mental telepathy, and communion, is foreshadowed, when Voss, remarks to Laura, "Your interest is touching Miss Trevelyan I shall appreciate it in many desert places" (V 69).

As Voss, moving into the more hostile areas of the desert, is deserted by some of his companions, he increasingly and intensely feels the presence of Laura,

"She must be at his side, and in fact, he heard a second horse blowing out its nostrils" (V 392).

It is under her influence that he explores the nature and possibilities of the human spirit. He becomes actively aware of the power which compassion bestows on the giver. "His own strength he felt, could not decrease with physical debility. But was Judd's power increased by compassion?" (V 212)

He harbours thoughts of achieving salvation by renouncing "the crown of life for the ring of gentle gold" (V 213).

His communion with Laura born out of an emotional hunger, makes him sensitive to the needs and cares of others. He feels the better, after "dispensing love" to the sick Le Mesurier. He also moves into a better understanding of himself. Much as he likes Judd the emancipist, for exhibiting the same confidence in his own strength, he is aware that, It is tempting to love such a man but I cannot kill myself quite off even though you would wish it, my dearest Laura. I am reserved for further struggles, to wrestle with rocks, to bleed if necessary to ascend. Yes, I do not intend to stop short of the Throne for the pleasure of grovelling on lacerated knees in company with Judd and Palfreyman. (V 217).

John Colmer remarks that "Voss represents the Nietzschean 'Superman' whose confidence in his own powers and willingness to sacrifice others borders on megalomania" (V 37).

It is this confidence in his own strength, that urges him onward even in the face of impossible situations. It is reinforced, when unable to bear the hardships involved, many in the team start the journey back home. It is his pride in his own will, (which initially sparks off the expedition), which prevents him from seeing the disastrous end they are heading to. He continues to believe that, "I do meet scarcely a man here, who does not suspect he will be unmade by his country. Instead of knowing that he will make it into what he wishes" (V 40).

In the midst of the hot and unrelenting landscape, Laura's appearance or rather presence in his meditations gives him moral strength and support. "We do not meet but in distances and dreams are the distances brought close" (V 295).

It is on one of these occasions that Laura, tells Voss, "Do you see now? Man is God decapitated. That is why you are bleeding" (V ).

And it is amidst the brutal country and its people, that Voss, tells his ardent devotee, Harry Roberts, "I am no longer your Lord, Harry" (V 364).

We suffer to learn. The above line marks the renouncing of the strong assertive will of Voss in the face of uncompromising reality. And the first impression of selfless love is felt, when after the suicide of Le Mesurier, Voss feels a strong bond with his only remaining companion Harry Roberts.

As the two fell into sleep, or such a numb physical state, as approximated to it, Voss believe what he loved this boy and with him all men, even those he hated, which is the most difficult act of love to accomplish because of one's own fault (V 382).

In Patrick white's fiction, sickness always precedes spiritual illumination, Laura's fever reaches a alarming state, at the moment when she states the three stages of, "Of God into Man. Man and Man returning into God".

John and Rose Married Beston explain the novel in terms of Laura's doctrine. They explain the first stage of God into man as the act of creation, the second stage of man, as that of man who owing to a sense of pride assumes the role of God and the last stage marking the renunciation of man's belief that he stands alone and in control. The attainment of humility is necessary before man can be drawn back into God. And humility is reached through the embracing of suffering and the experience of failure. In its extreme form, the attainment of humility would mean a total dissolution of the self.

Voss's death at the hands of the aborigine Jackie, follows his realization that he was a "frail God upon a rickety throne" (390) and that, "only he was left, only he could endure it, and that because at last he was truly humbled" (389)

William Walsh observes that White uses the psychology of the explorer as a metaphor of man.

"The explorer lives at extremes, on borders and edges. He is always pushing back the frontiers of suffering and suffering is the universal experience of extremity uniting man. Voss is the purest example of the explorer's psychology, but he is saved from unconvincing super-humanity by a scrubby stain of backsliding man... only the sinful man can become the redeemed man.

'Voss' embodies the belief, or rather perception of the novelist that simplicity and suffering are the conditions for the re-marking of man. The suffering is sustained and terrible; the simplicity only barely and painfully achieved at the point of dissolution". As Laura Trevelyan observes at the conclusion of the novel, "Knowledge was never a matter of geography. Quite the reverse, it overflows all maps that exist. Perhaps true knowledge only comes of death by torture in the country of the mind" (V 446).

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## AN INTERVIEW WITH TOM PAULIN

—Prathima W.B.  
(I M A Literature)

Tom Paulin the poet and critic was in Madras during December 1990. A guest of the British Council, he was scheduled to give two lectures—on Ted Hughes and Philip Larkin, and a Poetry Reading as well in two days. It was therefore very kind of Mr. Paulin to agree to, and make time for an interview, I must also add that he was patient and tolerant. When asked if he had ever been told that he looked like T.S. Eliot, he merely looked amused, and he checked to see if the Department's temperamental tape recorder was working.

Mr. Paulin teaches English at the University of Nottingham, but he is chiefly known for his poetry. The titles of his published volumes are *A State of Justice*, *Personal Column*, *The Strange Museum*, *The Book of Juniper*, *Liberty Tree*, *Fivemile Town*. He is the Editor of *The Faber Book of Political Verse* and *The Faber Book of Vernacular Verse*. He has written two plays *Riot Act*, a version of *Antigone*, and *Seize the Fire*, an adaptation of *Prometheus Unbound*. Apart from several essays, his critical work comprises the full length books *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception* and *Ireland and the English Crisis*. Mr. Paulin is often classed as an 'Irish Poet' with Seamus Heaney, Paul Muldoon, Michael Longley and Derek Mahon. They have in common a writing that seems to form, or originate out of Ireland's political and social turbulence.

**WBP :**

One tends to think of writers as a group who know each other socially, the Coffee House intellectuals or Bloomsbury. Is the present generation of poets connected in this way?

**TP :**

We actually meet rather infrequently, at Poetry Readings, and parties. But there is a

case of fellow feeling, of unspoken tribalism or Freemasonry. What has happened in the last 25 years is that reviewers and critics have perceived the poets of North Ireland, as the ULSTER poets. Poets whose writing seems to do with the political violence in North Ireland, and a prolonged identity crisis. But this is purely accidental. In a real sense, I belong to a theatre group called *Field Day*. Also on the Board of Directors are Seamus Heaney the poet, Brian Friel the play Wright, Seamus Deane, a well known critic, Stephen Rea, an Irish actor, a folk singer and film maker - David Hammond, and Tom Kilroy. We are going to bring out, may be this year, a very big anthology of perhaps 2000 pages of Irish literature from AD 550 to 1970.

**WBP :**

Do your poems come out of personal experience? Do you see the terrorism, violence, death and disappointment of your poems around you? Do you live in Belfast for example.

**TP :**

Actually I have lived in England for many, many years. But I grew up in the North of Ireland. I go back to Ireland a lot. I was in Ireland last week. I go back every two months for a couple of days, but I wouldn't claim to be part of the situation, I come into it, and go out of it. I have seen that society move from an uneasy peacefulness to a terrible violence. You keep wondering why it happened and what's going to happen in the future --- Why do people behave the way they do behave? Why do they kill other people, and risk even their own lives for the sake of their beliefs?



**WBP :**

Then what would be your National identity. Would you claim an Irish identity, or an English identity? A dual identity perhaps?

**TP :**

In the North of Ireland, people have a dual even triple identity. They identify with Ulster. Some Protestants see themselves as British and also Ulster. The Catholics see themselves as Irish and Ulster. You get layers of different identity. This is officially recognised by the Anglo Irish Agreement of 1985.

**WBP :**

This is the question one would have asked of Matthew Arnold and T.S. Eliot. What is it like to be both poet and critic. Is it symbiotic or is it a paradox?

**TP :**

I would be very nervous of describing myself as a poet. I write things that I hope might be poems. But I think of myself simply as a writer. I am very worried about the division you got in the nineteenth century between so called imaginative writing and critical writing. Some of the poets – The writers I admire are figures like Dr. Johnson who wrote poetry, plays, dictionaries, and who saw writing not as something sacral, and didn't present themselves as heroic figures. Really, that comes out of Romanticism, and societies tend to want to mythologise artists - film stars, actors, painters, musicians, poets ...

**WBP :**

Does it help to do both?

**TP :**

It depends on how you're driven. I write because I am fascinated by the nature of art. I'm driven to do that. Sometimes when I look back over a review I've written, I see how it started the idea of a poem, but it's a very unconscious thing.

**WBP :**

How do you work? Do you use supernatural machinery, the way Ted Hughes uses the Ouija board?

**TP :**

No! Never! Its purely an accidental thing. I'll give an example. Last week I was in Dublin and I was looking at The Irish Times, its equivalent to the Times of India or The London Times. In the small ads, there was someone who wanted to buy a house by the sea, a derelict or period house. I was struck by the advertisement, there seemed something strange about it? I tore it out of the paper, and I find myself writing - trying to write a poem. If I hadn't been in Dublin that day, if I hadn't bought The Irish Times, if my eye hadn't been caught by the small ad, then I would never have written the poem. I can't tell, its as if you've got the ideas in your head, but something activates them.

**WBP :**

What are your beliefs - philosophical and religious? In your poetry, there is a conflict between bloodiness, beastliness and belief and hope. You also have a very visible conscience, is this due to your beliefs?

**TP :**

I don't know. I never knew what my beliefs are. I find that I was brought up in the Protestant community and I tend to find myself interested in other cultures, because they express life and imagination differently. I have a kind of uncertainty about these things.

**BP :**

You seem to believe in innocence and optimism, in your later work like *The Book of Juniper*, but you seem to have grown into this belief, because it isn't there in your early poems. In "College Newsletter", the old dons are made to look ridiculous and you won't contribute to the

building fund. In "Arthur" you say that even if your great uncle Arthur came back, like the once and future king, you would "want him away".

**TP :**

Well, I think that, yes, *The Book of Juniper* was written out of a mood believing things were going to change, but I subsequently began to doubt that. Certainly when I began writing. I didn't have any optimism. No I didn't.

**WBP :**

Your poetry has been compared to Marvell, Yeats and Pound, apart from being equated with that of Heaney, Muldoon and Derek Mahon. Whom do you think, you are influenced by?

**TP :**

There are very many poets I probably have been over influenced by. Contemporary poets in the North of Ireland, contemporary scottish poets like Douglas Dunn ... No, There are too many to remember.

**WBP :**

Please, just name a few.

**TP :**

I greatly admire the poetry of John Clare the nineteenth century nature poet, and I like Emily Dickinson, Christina Rossetti, and Elizabeth Bishop very much.

**WBP :**

How much of poetry is to be experienced and how much is to be analysed? I'm asking specifically because of the title of your book *Thomas Hardy: The Poetry of Perception*, are you 'against interpretation'?

**TP :**

Oh! not at all. I've been trying to interpret poems all my life. The Hardy title was an attempt to explore the obsession with sight

and observation. An obsession with the EYES, coming out of Victorian doubt and scepticism, you only believe what you see. That's why I chose that title.

I am fascinated by the interpretation of poetry. Then you start to see, how condensed and ironical poetic statement can be, apart from being beautiful.

**WBP :**

How do you react when a critic like Martin Booth says that you are over-rated, because you are not always easy to understand.

**TP :**

I could certainly see that various critics would find my work (sighs) opaque, and I regret that. I understand that sort of criticism...

**WBP :**

It seems as if one doesn't try hard enough with a contemporary poet -

**TP :**

Perhaps I'm not trying hard enough to be clear? (laughs)

**WBP :**

Shall we move on to other writers? Is it 'unfashionable' to like Ted Hughes just now? John Wain thinks Dryden is more meaningful, and there was a cartoon in *Punch* showing Ted Hughes reading *River* and prefixing it with "This is brought to you by Bio-Tex" almost as if it were a sponsored programme on T.V.

**TP :**

That's very funny. I can see their point. But I'm very fascinated by Hughes, because he's writing on a subject very difficult to approach - British History. Its disguised as him writing about nature and natural violence.

I think he has been seen as one of the dominant poets for the last 20 to 30 years. There was a lot of suspicion among the intelligentsia about the role of Poet Laureate. It was seen as a sort of joke position. Then it made absolute sense, his poetry represents the contradictory pull of monarchical belief and a commitment to the free market, in Britain.

**WBP :**

There seems to be a new classicism. Most poetry that gets published now tends to rhyme. And Paul Muldoon who is often teamed with you, has the habit of scansion and rhyme.

**TP :**

Muldoon of course is a most wonderful poet with extraordinary gifts. He is able to draw on the intricate rhyme schemes you get in Irish Poetry. Unfortunately since I don't know Irish, I'm locked off from that way of writing. I'm more drawn to a more informal kind of verse. I wish I could write formally but I rarely do so. I think its got to do with the culture and religion you're brought up in. In a way you're stuck with what you're given and you have to make the best of it.

**WBP :**

What do you think about what is happening over *Salman Rushdie* and *The Satanic Verses*?

**TP :**

I think its tragic. He's a martyr for the principal of free speech, I think. What would you think?

\* \* \* \* \*

**WBP :**

You edited *The Faber Book of Political Verse*. Just how political or polemical can you get? If there is too much of topical politics, won't the work lose its universality and its interest ?

**TP :**

I think that's true of a certain kind of political or polemical writing. I don't think Milton's *Aeropagatica* has lost its topicality, as you can see in the Rushdie case. When you look at a lot of writing, it is topical, and the political relevance can get ignored to the detriment of our appreciation of the poem. Example, Milton's *Paradise Lost*, parts of which I put with the anthology. Certain critics were puzzled. But it is Milton's account of the English Revolution, and the failure of that Revolution. It is written from the point of view of a radical puritan, and a supporter of Cromwell. It is a republican epic.

In the anthology, I wanted to broaden the definition of political writing, so that it wasn't only satiric or polemic, but also included the ideology and the writer's imagination. Another example is Frost's 'Mending Wall'

**WBP :**

Is that political?

**TP :**

Certainly, it is a poem about laws, and very subtly presents a white Americans view of manifest destiny, because it absolutely obliterates Nature and American Indians.

**WBP :**

Have you written anything since you came to India this time?

**TP :**

No, I haven't. I tend not, to write when I'm travelling.

**WBP :**

It is difficult to believe that you haven't even brought two words together.

**TP :**

Oh, I have written a few notes, but quite boring really. . . . .

# STOPPING AT "STOPPING BY WOODS ON A SNOWY EVENING"

*Sunethra Doss*  
(III B.A. Literature)

A poet's love of the earth and its ways, his roots dug deep into the rocky Vermont country side...For part of the year, this is the world of Robert Frost. Frost was born in a climatic opposite - California, but it is the environment of New England that is reflected in his verse. At heart he considers himself a farmer, though it is only an occasional avocation. His interests range across and above land - philosophy, education, politics and all people.

Each Frost poem is an adventure, a competition of ideas, images, sounds and rhymes springing forth from the seasons and elements that surround his solitary mountain cabin. As a general rule Frost writes two kinds of poems. The first is a personal statement, in which the poet is identified as the speaker. The poem involves an action, thought, or aspect of his immediate world, and the reader enters into the poet's world and his mind. The second kind is usually lengthy and narrates an incidental story by means of dramatic dialogue.

It is in the shorter poems, that the reader is closest to Frost. He works with two themes. One has to do with man's 'limitedness', the fact that he lives in a world made not just for him, and he hence cannot be sure of absolute and final answers. The other theme follows naturally from them: if man cannot be sure of absolute answers, he must do what needs to be done in a spirit of love.

'Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening' is overtly simple: A man driving by dark woods, stops to admire the scene, to watch the snow falling into the special darkness. He remembers the name of the man who owns the woods, and knows that this man, snug his house in the village cannot be-gudge him a look. He is certainly not trespassing. The

little horse is restive and shakes his harness bells. The man decides to drive on because he says he has "promises to keep" - he has to get home to deliver the groceries for supper, he has miles to go before he can afford to stop, to dream, to sleep.

With the first stanza we have a simple contrast between the man in the village snug at his hearth side, and the man who stops by the woods. The sane practical man has shut himself up against the weather.

But being a practical man he does not mind if some fool stops by his woods, so long as the fool merely looks and does not do any practical damage. Does not steal firewood, does not break down fences. With this stanza we seem to have a contrast between the sensitive and the insensitive man, The man who uses the world and the man who contemplates the world, and the contrast seems to be in favour of the gazer and not the owner. For the purposes of the poem atleast. In fact we may even have the question - who is the owner, the man who is miles away or the man who can really see the woods?

In the second stanza we have the horse man contrast. The horse is practical too. He can see no good reason for stopping, not a farm house near, no oats available. The horse becomes an extension as it were of the man in the village - both at the practical level, the level of the beast which cannot understand why a man would stop, on the darkest evening of the year to stare into the darker darkness of these snowy woods. In other words the act of stopping is the specially human act, the thing that differentiates the man from the beast. The same contrast between the impatient shake of the harness bells and the soothing of easy wind and downy flake. In the poem, the poet actually

wrote, the fourth and last stanza brings a very definite turn, a refusal to accept either term of contrast developed.

The first line proclaims the beauty, the attraction of the scene but with this statement concerning the attraction the statement merely gives us what we have already dramatically arrived at by the fact of the stopping. We find the repudiation of the attraction. The beauty of the place is a sinister beauty, a sinister peace. It is the beauty and peace of surrender, the repudiation of action and obligation. The darkness of this woods is delicious but treacherous. The beauty which cuts itself off from action is sterile, the peace which is a peace of escape is a meaningless end, therefore a suicidal peace. There will be beauty and peace at the end of the journey in the terms of the fulfilment of the promises but that will be an earned beauty stemming from action. In other words we have a new contrast. The fact of the capacity to stop by the road side and contemplate the woods sets man off from the beast, but in so far as such contemplation involves a repudiation of man which it has

seemed to establish, so the poem leaves us with that paradox.

The theme of the poem is one which appears over and over in Frost's poems. The relation, to state the issue a little differently, between the fact and the dream. So the poem which is supposed to celebrate nature may really be a poem about man defining himself by resisting the pull into nature. Some poems make a pretense of living only in terms of actuality. "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening" is perfectly consistent at the level of actuality- a man stops by the woods looks into the wood which he finds lovely dark and deep and then goes on for he has promises to keep.

It can be left at that level.

But I have promises to keep.

And miles to go before I sleep.

And miles to go before I sleep.

# The Concept of Accommodation in Margaret Drabble's 'The Waterfall'

—Mrs. Mridula Jose  
Faculty

"Look into your heart and write" seems to be Drabble's way with the novel. Yet she is no mere perpetrator of "bourgeois feminism". Beneath the seeming trivia of her characters' daily round Drabble subtly exposes the vacuity of the traditional avenues of middle - class female self - fulfilment.

It was her work, along with that of Doris Lessing that opened a door on women's experience. She was among the first to show the oppressiveness in the lives of "the house-wife heroine". In her early novels *The Summer Bird Cage* (1963), *The Garrick Year* (1964), *The Millstone* (1965) and *The Waterfall* (1969), Drabble explores the bird-cage of female identity, the bird-cage of female possibilities, the bird-cage of marriage. The main problem Drabble's women have to contend with is the struggle to reach out of the confining space of self, of one's own private consciousness. This psychological problem ultimately assumes moral dimensions.

Ellaine Showalter's comment on Virginia Woolf's use of space is illuminating. In her fictions, but supremely in *A Room of One's Own* "Woolf is the architect of female space, a space that is both sanctuary and prison. Through their windows her women observe a more violent masculine world in which their own anger, rebellion and sexuality can be articulated at a safe remove....In one sense Woolf's female aesthetic is an extension of her view of women's social role, receptivity to the point of self-destruction, creative synthesis to the point of exhaustion and sterility...Woolf's vision of womanhood is as deadly as it is disembodied. The ultimate room of one's own is the grave". (Showalter 264-67).

Drabble's early fiction especially *The Waterfall* can be seen as exposures of this "sanctuary and prison" as well as "struggles towards her own right to larger fictional space" (Creighton 32).

Drabble's women are general narcissistic, educated, intelligent using language fluently but which acts as a kind of mask. Their explanations are fragmentary sometimes deliberately so. Her fiction thus attains that "double-voiced discourse" created by the tension experienced by contemporary women struggling to find their voice in a patriarchal frame of reference.

Although she writes of women's experience Drabble denies being a radical feminist. Nowhere does she advocate the overthrow of the patriarchal order. In fact her women come to realizations of their identity through their relationship with men. Drabble's fiction is a mediation between the "male" and "female". It reflects the realistic heritage. In fact much of the vitality of her fiction lies in her own unresolved questioning of her living experiences in what she terms the "unresolved world" of modern female identity.

We do not want to resemble the women of the past, but where is our own future? This is precisely the question that many novels written by women are trying to answer: some in cosmic terms, some in tragic, some in speculative. We live in an unchartered world, as far as manners and morals are concerned, we are having to make up our own morality as we go. Our subject matter is enormous, there are whole new patterns to create. (A Woman Writer 6)

Drabble has depicted precisely and most sensitively the texture of the lives of complex women facing the problems of marriage, motherhood and self-identity. Drabble's celebration of maternity was misinterpreted and she was described as "the novelist of maternity" whose work was devoted to "coping with frigidity and nappies". These critics overlooked the real thrust of her work - that she was engaged in creating "a new blue print". Drabble defends herself most ably. "There is no point in sneering at women writers for writing of problems of sexual behaviour, of maternity or gynaecology - those who feel the need to do it are actively engaged in creating a new pattern, a new blue print. This area of personal relationships verges constantly on the political: it is not a narrow backwater of introversion, it is the main current which is changing the daily quality of our lives. The truest advantage of being a woman writer now is that never before, perhaps, have women had so much to say, and so great a hope of speaking to some effect" (A Woman Writer 6).

*The Waterfall* marks an important phase in Drabble's career as a novelist. Technically it is the most innovative of her novels. The shifting narration makes for thematic and structural ambiguity. Jane Gray, (reminiscent of Jane Eyre to whom she compares herself) a young mother is separated from her husband and finds release from personal isolation and sexual frigidity when she has an affair with her cousin's husband right after she has had her second baby. Jane and James have an accident while they are on vocation. James is nearly killed and during the period of recovery Jane's wife Lucy learns of the affair. At the end of the novel Jane has learnt to accept herself and her own responsibility, she has learnt "accommodation". Her emotional crisis has led her to acceptance of her own self-image. What makes *The Waterfall* extra ordinary though is the alternate first and third person narration. Jane in effect, both writes and reads her own story. Gradually the reader becomes aware that this is no authentic narrator, Jane tends

to indulge in excuses or evasion. It is up to the reader to make up for the gaps in the narration.

Jane swings from lyrical romanticism to ironic cynicism, she tends to see herself either as the heroine of a melodrama or as an aggressive character. For instance while describing her ordeal during labour she writes "She lay on her bed, thinking of a true story she had read once, many years ago, in a woman's magazine; a story of a pregnant woman, stranded by some unmemorable and unimaginable stroke of fate in a hut in the snowy wastes of Alaska. The woman had lived there alone, and had survived, and had indeed lived to sell the story of her ordeal. This tale had always haunted her, and as she lay there and felt the ebb and flow of pain she wondered if she had remembered it so well because she was called upon to emulate such brave isolation. Although of course, she did not: common sense prevailed, as she had always known it would, and after a while she got up and rang the midwife and then her cousin Lucy" (Waterfall 8-9).

This shows precisely the conflict in the character and the novel, commonsense will always prevail preventing Jane from going to extremes, but nevertheless melodrama has an attraction for Jane and this colours her perceptions and her style of narrative. The fictional style tends to get sentimental.

On the fourth night James arrives without Lucy's knowledge and then suddenly they declare their passion for each other.

There was a long silence, and then he said, across the whole distance of the large room - and with such intention, as though each foot of that space had been measured and ordained, ... 'I want to be in that bed, The only place in the room is in that bed'. She had known it, of course: hearing it, she knew that she had known it. 'You must come then', she said, 'Could I?' he asked politely as though unable to trust her generosity and she said amazed to find

herself suddenly no longer bankrupt, amazed to find herself in the possession of such gifts, replied gently. 'Yes, of course'. (Waterfall 33)

This is Drabble's subtle way of showing Jane fictionalising herself as the heroine of her own true story and she achieves this by the distance she maintains between herself and Jane. Drabble lets Jane commit another fault of the clumsy writer by making her end this chapter in neatly arranged, imagery. The image of drowning with which this section begins is also used by Jane at the end, "drowned in a willing sea" (Waterfall 46). It is the tone of trite romances. "Clearly it is Jane who is the bad writer not Drabble" (Fuoroli 114).

In the very next section Jane wakes up from this mood as it were and becomes aware of her own limitations as a writer, In the first person mode she expresses her dissatisfaction with her work:

It won't of course do; as an account, I mean of what took place, I tried for so long to reconcile, to find a style that would express it, to find a system that would excuse me, to construct a new meaning, having kicked the old one out, but I couldn't do it, so here I am resorting to that old broken medium. Don't let me deceive myself, I see no virtue in confusions. I see virtue in clarity, in consistency, in communication, in honesty, or is that too no longer true?... What can I make that will admit me and encompass me? Nothing it seems, but a broken and fragmented piece, an event seen from angles, where there used to be one event and one way only of enduring it. (Waterfall 47)

Jane emerges as a complex character through this troubled search for the "truth". She strives to fill the gaps in the fictionalised account by resorting to first person narrative, But here she becomes compulsively confessional and presents herself as guilty aggressor. She swings from the totally victimized passive

heroine of her third person narrative to this anti-heroine aggressor stance.

In this first person section she thinks about her past – her family, her relationship with Lucy, her marriage. Her account of her relations with her husband reveals her lack of self- knowledge, where in the third person account she had projected herself as deserted in a most discreet and simple manner, here she takes all the blame, "I neglected him, I abandoned him, I drove him away" (Waterfall 50).

What makes *The Waterfall* more than just another feminist tract is this interesting post-structural view of reality. The novel profoundly questions the very stability of character and the ability to know one's self and the world with any degree of certainty. It is the essence of post structuralism to place language at the centre of reality. In fact they believe that different "codes" create different discourses. It is this realisation that dawns on Jane Gray. "The ways of regarding an event, so different, don't add up to a whole; they are mutually exclusive; the social view, the sexual view, the circumstantial view, the moral view, these visions contradict each other, they do not supplement one another, they cancel one another, they destroy one another, they cannot co-exist...I have lied but only by omission" (Waterfall 46).

As Jane V Creighton puts it "Traditional liberal morality and traditional realistic fiction are both shaken by this observation" (63). When Jane puts down her third person account as "lies lies, it's all lies. A pack of lies. I've even told lies of fact, which I had meant not to do. O! I meant to deceive, I meant to draw analogies, but I've done worse than that, I've misrepresented.....Reader I loved him: as Charlotte Bronte said, which was Charlotte Bronte's man, the one she created and wept for and longed for, or the pure curate that had her and killed her, her sexual measure, her sexual match? I had James...the world that I lived in with him...was some foreign country to me, Some Brussels of the mind, where I trembled and



sighed for my desires. I, a married woman, a mother of two children, with as much desperation as that lovely virgin in her parsonage. Reader I loved him" (Waterfall 89).

Jane Gray has moved on from melodrama to the passionate heroines of the literary past, she sees herself as a Brontian heroine realising her long suppressed emotions and sexuality. We can read this as the Sleeping Beauty Myth. The benumbed Jane Gray released from her isolation by her affair with James – though it's not exactly a kiss but sexual contact that awakens this modern sleeping beauty.

Jane can be understood in terms of her literary past, she examines her need for James and the inevitability of their relationship.

Perhaps, I'll go mad with guilt like Sue Bridehead or drown myself in an effort to reclaim lost renunciations, like Maggie Tulliver. Those fictitious heroines, how they haunt me, Maggie Tulliver had a cousin called Lucy, as I had and like me she fell in love with her cousin's man. She drifted off down the river with him, abandoning herself to the water, but in the end she lost him. She let him go. Nobly she regained her ruined honour, and oh, we admire her for it...Maggie Tulliver never slept with her man: She did all the damage that was to be done to Lucy, to herself, to the two men who loved her, and then like a woman of another age, she refrained. In this age, what is to be done? We drown in the first chapter. I worry about the sexual doom of womanhood, its sad inheritance. (Waterfall 161-62).

Maggie Tulliver's pattern of renunciation is used to understand her own situation. "In the summer James went on his summer holidays with his family" (Waterfall 161-62). She like Maggie makes this sacrifice - if only for a short period. The use of water imagery makes it fairly obvious that the novel could be read as a rewriting of *The Mill on the Floss*. Jane struggles between fact and fiction, and the paradox of accepting fantasy as being more real than fact itself. It is her fantasy world that brings about her

first real emotional and sexual communion of her life. The climax of the experience is the metaphoric waterfall, in which she falls "drenched and drowned, down there at last in the water not high in her lonely place" (Waterfall 150).

On the one hand this is reminiscent of Lawrence's "baptism of fire in passion", at the same time the language verges on self-parody. Jane carefully maintains this sense of distances from the reader as a defence mechanism, she keeps editing her story and states that because she cannot find coherence in her experience she attempts to impose order or pattern on the flux of experience.

One of the remarkable ways she does this is by discussing the various endings to the story. She tells us she toyed with the idea of killing James in the car accident, she also admits toying with the idea of ending the narrative with James' impotence, "the little twentieth century death" (Waterfall 238). But instead she settles for the feminine ending which is open-ended, "irresolute, inconclusive. There isn't any conclusion" (Waterfall 230).

Jane feels she has got away with very little punishment. In fact she has her cake and eats it too in a sense. Traditionally in earlier fiction the wages of sin is death, definitely, Maggie Tulliver is uppermost in her mind. "One shouldn't get away with such things...We should have died, I suppose, James and I. It isn't artistic to linger on like this. It isn't moral either" (Waterfall 230). But life goes on with Jane taking up publication of her poems and James going on with his driving. As Jane puts it, "It is all so different from what I had expected. It is all so much more cheerful". Again, Jane can accept reality more readily because of her experience with literature. She recalls Galsworthy and his affair with his cousin's wife Ada which ran smoothly because of their shared sur name. Similarly her family likeness to Lucy helps her get over embarrassing situations where she encounters other friends with James. She draws a moral from this not that "one can get away with anything but that one can survive anything" (Waterfall 235). Lucy whom she has recognised as her "Schizoid double" her role model, is one person

she chooses to evade, even in her inner most thoughts. She faces the implications of this in the course of the story only to evade the deeper tones of her admission.

Jane and James actually visit a waterfall. Significantly enough it is her response to the natural setting that reveals her growth as a person. She had always considered herself a "disaster area, a landscape given to....upheavals" (Waterfall 229). But James and their mutual feeling for each other had changed her. "He changed me forever, and I am now what he made. I doubt at times, I panic, I lose faith, but doubt, as they say, is not accessible to unbelievers" (Waterfall 229). "I was hoping that in the end I would manage to find some kind of unity. I seem to be no nearer to it. But at the beginning I identified myself with distrust; and now I cannot articulate my suspicions....I identify myself with love and I repudiate those nightmare thoughts" (Waterfall 229).

Wordsworthian landscape "Murmuring water premonitions" (Waterfall 236) recall, "These waters rolling from their mountain - springs with a soft inland murmur" (Tintern Abbey). What impresses her significantly enough is not the size but the form, "a lovely organic balance of shapes and curves, a wildness contained within a bodily limit". This becomes in turn a subtle metaphor of her own growth in her relationship with James. "We

were alone. There was nobody else there" (Waterfall 237). During their descent she observed "on the opposite hillside...there was a man with a sheep dog. I suppose he must have been a shepherd". The pastoral harmony is established.

She concludes with the realisation that women do have a price to pay and in the twentieth century it is either thrombosis caused by taking birth control pills or neurosis. "The price that modern woman must pay for love". Jane is glad she does not escape scot free, "I prefer to suffer, I think".

Jane Gray prefers to see her life in the context of literary heroines before her but more or less she is aware the pattern is broken. Jane Gray learns accomodation, she can now reasonably accept her self-image, her role in the society around her, at the same time Drabble has attempted to accomodate the theme of identity within a realistic tradition while using modernist and post-modernist techniques.

Malcom Bradbury's comment in the Preface to John Fowles' *The French Lieutenant's Woman* is appropriate here. "An exemplary book of the 1960's for its attempt "to reconcile a modern, self- skeptical, post-existential modern text with a traditional one" (13).

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## “The Country beneath the earth” Drowning and Surfacing in Atwood’s SURFACING

—Miss Sharon D’Monte  
Faculty

The country beneath  
the earth has a green sun  
and the rivers flow backwards;  
  
the trees and rocks are the same  
as they are here, but shifted,  
Those who live there are always hungry;

From them you can learn  
wisdom and great power,  
if you can descend and return safely.

*“Procedures from Underground”*

The nameless protagonist in Margaret Atwood’s *Surfacing* finds herself on the road again “twisting along past the lake where the white birches are dying” (Atwood 1). She is on home ground which paradoxically for her is foreign territory. Her journey home becomes a quest for an integrated self.

While the traditional image of the journey underlies the novel, Atwood introduces motifs of drowning and surfacing, central to her theme. The lake is the focal point in Atwood’s landscape. Floating under the surface are old pieces of tree and other partly decaying objects. It symbolises the inner psyche of the protagonist who has ceased to exist as an autonomous, complete self and can be pronounced as “psychologically dead”. Nevertheless, like the lake with its submerged forces the protagonist possesses the potential to heal the division within and arrive at a reintegrated vision of the self.

Somewhat reminiscent of Marlow’s symbolic journey in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* the story is told from the first person point of view, in a flat emotionless voice that echoes her spiritual numbness. The search for her father and mother in the Canadian backwoods where there was “nothing but deer

track, no sign of anyone...the searchers didn’t make it this far” (Atwood 40-43) is an allegorical journey into the innermost recesses of her psyche, an exploration of a mysterious world that must be felt and experienced intuitively and instinctively. A world which defies the powers of reason and logic.

*Surfacing* juxtaposes two inner worlds. The world of rationality and logic which is often one of cruelty and destruction, what Rigney calls “the world of the male principle” (93) and the world beyond realm, one of primitive nature, where it is possible to perceive connections between life and death, suffering and joy, madness and sanity. This is “the world of the female principle”, where the discordant and disparate are resolved into wholes.

If one fails to perceive these connections, one is refusing to recognise the “female” part of one’s self. The result is a “catastrophic splitting of the self” (Rigney 93). The surfer admits that she has denied herself this perception and allowed herself to be cut into two, “a woman sawn apart”. What remained was “the wrong half, detached, terminal. I was nothing but a head, or, no, something minor like a severed thumb” (Atwood 124-25).

Mirrors have dominated Atwood’s consciousness and figure recurrently in her poetry and fiction. “Mirrors are crafty” says Atwood, in the poem “Tricks with Mirrors” and there are dangers of perceiving one’s reflection. For Atwood, what one sees in a mirror is not the reflection of the self but the split self, a distorted image of the real self. The protagonist decides that the mirror must be turned to the wall, she must “stop being in the mirror”. This is precisely what happens to Anna, a character in *Surfacing*. In her preoccupation with make-up she continually

projects a mask, a falsely made-up self and has imprisoned her real self "closed in the gold compact".

Similarly, cameras for Atwood is yet another treacherous device, for photographs only serve to shut one in "behind the paper". In *Surfacing* the camera becomes a means of victimising the individual. David and Joe force Anna into revealing her naked body before their "strange instrument of torture". The protagonist feels compelled to avenge what she considers to be a "rape" and empties the film into the lake. Existing on a higher plane of awareness she is in contrast to David and Joe who perceive reality only through the lens of a camera, "themselves victims of a faulty vision" (Rigney 95). Their vision of life, David's in particular, is bound to be cloudy, distorted.

Likewise, the protagonist's father who had become hooked on rock paintings would scour the countryside collecting them with his camera, "an old man's delusion of usefulness" but also symbolic of his lack of vision. He was fished out of the lake by some Americans. The police and game wardens report that "he had a camera around his neck, big one...the weight kept him down or he would've been found sooner" (Atwood 151). The drowned body could not surface.

For Atwood cameras and mirrors emphasise the "not me, but the missing part of me". Looking into a mirror can make the self more vulnerable. One recalls the wicked stepmother in "Snow White and the seven Dwarfs", trembling with rage and jealousy as she asks,

Oh, mirror, mirror on the wall,  
Who is the fairest of us all?

Atwood's preoccupation with the missing part of the self or "doppelganger" is also revealed through the palm reading incident at the beginning of the novel. Anna reads the protagonist's palm and observes "Do you have a twin..Some of your lines are

double" (Atwood 2). This twin is the alienated part of the surfer's self, that is lost, but must surface if she is to survive. Atwood's comment on the Canadian psyche is relevant here:

We speak of isolated people as being "cut off" but in fact something is cut off from them; as artists, deprived of audience and cultural tradition, they are mutilated.... Artists have suffered emotional and artistic death at the hands of an indifferent or hostile audience. (Survival 184)

The protagonist is essentially an artist, but that part of her self has been sometime dead, ever since she had become "what they call a commercial artist...an illustrator". Mr. Percival the publisher has warned her "It isn't the children who buy the books it's their parents" (Atwood 47). Misguided into believing that there have never been any important woman artists, she has compromised. "Now I compromise before I take the work in, it saves time" (Atwood 47).

Living in a fairy tale world of princesses, kings and giants she has become that world, creating fairy tales of her own life, "That's a lie, my own voice says out loud." Caught between memories and lies she realises that once she starts inventing "there will be no way of correcting it" (Atwood 67).

Running quickly over her version of her life, checking it like an alibi, she fears facing up to the truth, but more important is her fear of losing the truth. "I force my eyes open, my hand, life etched on it...in my mouth tongue forming my name, repeating it like a chant...." (Atwood 67). The ghosts of the past now surface – her unsuccessful marriage and a child birth she invented as a necessary reprieve for the abortion she was forced to undergo. Images of amputation, slicing and cancelling re-enact the abortion which becomes a powerful symbol of her split psyche. Had she been whole this would not have occurred.

In order to become whole she has to resolve that age-old conflict within, between the forces of good and evil. One agrees with Atwood, that the protagonist's problem cannot be summarily dismissed as one of female innocence. The woman here is both a victim and a participant in her victimisation. She wants to escape being human because being human inevitably means being guilty as well. "I couldn't accept it, that mutilation, ruin I'd made, I needed a different version" (Atwood 137).

In *Survival* Atwood emphasises that responsibility lies finally and inevitably in the self. In all of us there is the "Self-hater" that part of us which victimises both the self and other people. The need to confront evil rather than suppress it becomes a necessity. She feels a "sickening complicity, blood on my hands as though I had been there and watched without saying" (Atwood 124).

Hitler's bomber planes, pollution, depersonalised sex, slaughtered birds hanging from trees are all reminders that we are "eaters of death, dead christ - flesh resurrecting inside us, granting us life" (Atwood 134).

Atwood's surfer also shares much in common with Anna Wulf, the protagonist of Lessing's *The Golden Note Book*. Both suffer from the "Writer's Block". Language only serves to heighten the sense of fragmentation. True communication can begin once she finds a language of her own. "I was seeing poorly, translating badly, a dialect problem I should have used my own" (Atwood 70).

The protagonist's descent into the lake is central to the novel. Drowning becomes a procedure for finding the self. Her search underwater for the cave paintings is symbolic of her descent into her own psyche. Now there is hope, a resurrection is possible. She surfaces with the thought "whatever it is part of myself or a separate creature, I killed it. It wasn't a child but it could have been one, I

didn't allow it (Atwood 137). This immersion in the lake is a mythic enactment of rebirth. Feeling begins to seep back into her. She begins to understand her father better, his need to protect his children from evil by retreating into the Canadian wilderness. This logic failed because the protagonist and her brother, feet wrapped in blankets, often pretended that "Germans shot our feet off".

The drawing left to her by mother, the picture of a woman with a round moon stomach, the baby inside sitting up and gazing out is a message of new life. Through the sexual encounter with Joe on the shores of the lake she feels her "lost child surfacing with in me, forgiving me, rising from the lake where it had been prisoned so long" (Atwood 155-56). Images of division and fragmentation are now replaced by images of unity and completion, "two halves clasp, interlocking like fingers" (Atwood 156).

The division is healed, she has re-discovered her parents, reconciled within her the male and female principles, life, death, good, evil, all co-exist within her, within all women, just as they co-exist in Nature. She feels this oneness with nature lying at the bottom of the canoe looking through the trees and experiences "the energy of decay turning to growth, green fire" (Atwood 162).

She must completely eliminate her fake past and performs the ritual of burning and destroying every article of clothing, books, her wedding ring, everything man-made. Naked, she enters the forest only with a blanket. She will need it "Until the fur grows". She returns to a state of "nymphhood". In pastoral myth nymphs were the consorts of fauns and satyrs. Joe is thus transformed into "shaggy buffalo" to father her own "furry" child. In her descent in to myth she has been able to "slough off the morally debilitating aspects of the back-street affair" (Hinz 230). Atwood's preoccupation with the spiritual connection between the human and animal world can be discerned here. It is

distinctly marked by the influence of the 'Indian' tradition on the Canadian consciousness.

Having completed this cleansing act Nature grants her a boon, a series of visions through which she enters a mysterious union with Nature having surrendered her individual identity. "I am not an animal or a tree, I am the thing in which the trees and animals move and grow, I am a place" (Atwood 175). The surfer now returns to the primeval time before the Fall when man was unconscious of his separate, divided self.

But the journey will be complete only after the descent into the chasm of madness and so she turns the mirror around. Looking into it, she realises that society would only see her as a mad woman in a dirty blanket. In reality

she is "only a natural woman, State of nature" (Atwood 184). She loses her social identity, a tenuous one at best, and gains a firmer deeper one.

The pervading atmosphere at the close of the novel is one of peace and quiet, that speaks of an inner poise. "The lake is quiet, the trees surround me, asking and giving nothing" (Atwood 186).

Atwood's vision is decidedly affirmative for at the end of the novel her protagonist can say, with a new power, born from within:

I re-enter my own time...This above all, to refuse to be a victim...withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death" (Atwood 185).

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## SELF-DENIAL

An uncomplaining abandoned wife....  
Resigning to her position as a forsaken woman  
The gods must have pitied her  
For he returned to her, after all.  
He had squandered his gold and her jewels  
Yet, an offering of her last possession, her anklets she made.  
When the Pandiya King had her Lord beheaded.  
Her grief cursed his capital ablaze.  
In a shrine built later on in the same city  
Devotees flock to worship her idol; an ideal image of chastity  
A Pathivritha ! A noble wife !  
Literature too has kept her alive in a great epic  
Her memory is still raging,  
Like the fire of her curse  
In many homes like  
A revered, continuing tradition of conduct  
A woman called Kannagi,  
A picture of unhappiness, a cry for justice  
Those were pearls spilt by her eyes  
Glorified above others flooding their days with tears unnoticed.

*K. SHUBASREE*  
(I M.A. Literature)

## A Spark

Is one  
colour a rainbow?  
note a song?  
word a poem?

Yet all together  
colours, notes, words  
create  
rainbows, songs, poems  
setting  
all-a-flame, aflame.

Words untimely unsaid,  
Alter the story of a landscape, their  
Reverberations  
setting  
all-a-flame, aflame.

The claw of a war  
the glow of a sparkler  
alive in the sky —  
like candles and a Christmas tree  
— Toys of a generation  
setting  
all-a-flame, aflame.

Is this  
the win of the Dead?  
the win of the Dying? or  
a win of the Dying over the Dead?  
the Victor-Victim  
setting  
all-a-flame, aflame.



Moments of silence,  
Moments of wonder  
Create  
Momentous changes :  
The Word of God –  
like life in a seed  
like love in a heart  
a glow in CREATION  
Recreates –  
setting  
all - a - flame, aflame.

*Maria Theresa Gregory*  
Faculty

The afternoon sighs away on the grass  
I am in the second cycle of my birth  
Those endless hours I filled with words  
and dreams that shifted and swayed  
In the shadows of trees  
I felt your kindness  
flowing into me -  
and my limbs were like the breeze.  
These are not flowers that I offer you,  
But the gatherings of my heart.  
Take them before they wither and die  
and I will tell you again -  
We are not the same  
from what we are.

*Padma Prasad*  
Faculty

For whom the feverish moment  
the excitement in a secret touch of hands?  
Gently I watch the birds come down  
and loosen themselves upon the grass  
you search for answers in my eyes  
which reflect another day,  
Unborn, unknown to both of us.  
For a while now, I have been as two men  
Living together as Siamese twins,  
aching half heartedly,  
to know what parts are only mine.

*Padma Prasad*  
Faculty

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