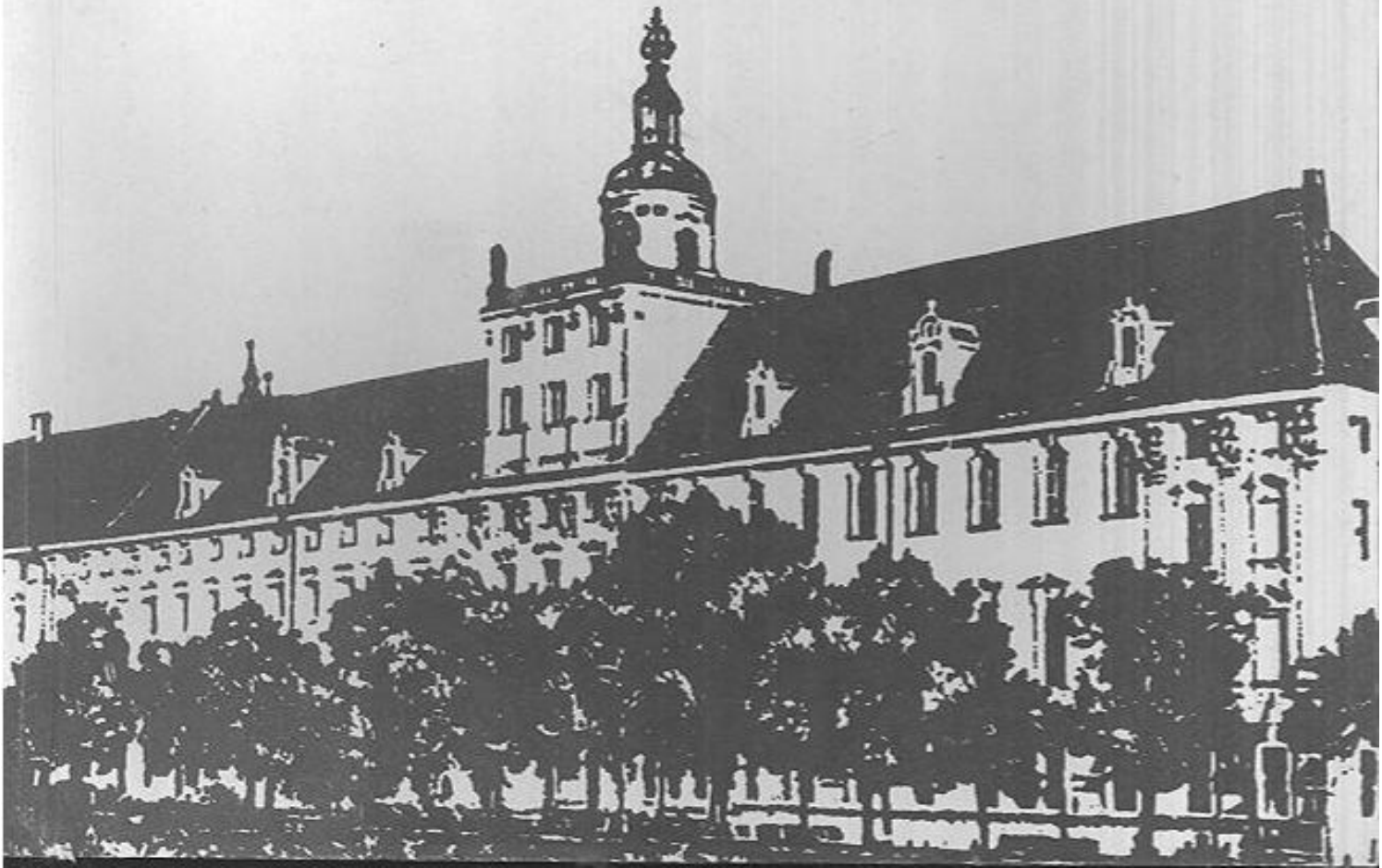
ANGLICA WRATISLAVIENSIA XIII

WROCŁAW 1984



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ACTA
UNIVERSITATIS
WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704

ANGLICA WRATISLAVIENSIA XIII

WROCŁAW 1984
WYDAWNICTWO UNIWERSYTETU WROCŁAWSKIEGO

ISBN 83-229-0096-1

WYDAWNICTWO UNIWERSYTETU WROCŁAWSKIEGO

Wydanie I. Nakład 330 + 70 egz., ark. wyd. 9,35, ark. druk. 7,375. Papier offsetowy, kl. V. g. 70, form. B-1. Oddano do produkcji w sierpniu 1983 r. Podpisano do druku w sierpniu 1984 r. Druk ukończono we wrześniu 1984 r., z. 1071 (—), Cena zł 140.—

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No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

ANGUS MACQUEEN

MUTABILITY AND ORDER IN CHAUCER'S DREAM POETRY

The appearance of the Goddess Nature to assess the claims of Alteration and Mutability in the *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie*, which are all that Spenser wrote of a „seventh" book of *The Faerie Queene*, provokes him to invoke an old master:

> So hard it is for any liuing wight,
> All her array and vestiments to tell
> That old *Dan Geffrey* (in whose gentle spright
> The pure well head of Poesie did dwell)
> In his Foules parley durst not with it mel,
> But transferd to *Alane*, who he thought
> Had in his *Plaint of kindes* describ'd it well...
> *The Faerie Queene*, VII. vii.9

Spenser was not simply acknowledging his debt[1], nor was it any superficial similarity of situation and subject matter that made him summon the authority of an old master to excuse his supposed inability to describe the Goddess. For at the core of these cantos are the same paradoxes and tensions to be found in Chaucer's early verse; tensions that are at one or more removes from the „real" life that he was to deal with in his later work, particularly *The Canterbury Tales*, but which in their ambiguity and lack of reconcilation remained with him. It is the same forces which make the final cantos of *The Faerie Queene* so disturbing, contradictions held in their very title: *Two Cantos of Mutabilitie* [...] *under the Legend of Constancie*. The

[1] This was not of course the first time that Spenser had referred to Chaucer as a guiding master. *Daphnaida* is an obvious reworking of *The Book of the Duchess*, and at the beginning of the 12th Aeglogue of *The Shepheardes Calander* Spenser wrote: „The gentle shepheard satte beside a springe, / All in the shadowe of a bushye brere, /That Colin hight, which wel could pype and singe/ For he of Tityrus his songs did leare" (1-4). In his Glos, E. K. had already identified Tityrus as Chaucer, and in his dedicatory letter to Harvey, E. K. suggested Chaucer had been a major influence in both form and language. At a time when poets were looking abroad for models, Spenser was making a definite and conscious statement of an English literary tradition; despite his own use of foreign models, it was only Chaucer he acknowledged. This debt has been well documented, but here the reference comes at a developed stage of *The Faerie Queene*, at the end of Spenser's own career, and has a wider relevance to the problems that he felt they had in common.

struggle between change and continuity, with which they deal, follows what had seemed to be the resolution that took place on Mount Acidale in Book VI, and though Nature at the end of Canto VII seems to assert her authority over Mutability and „her righteous doom areads", it is in many ways a merely semantic victory. It is more a juggling of words as opposed to a logical triumph, as Spenser makes the reader aware through the peremptory and undeveloped nature of her statement; talking about mortal things, Nature states:

> being rightly wayd
> They are not changed from their first estate;
> But by their change their being doe dilate:
> And turning to themselues at length againe,
> Doe worke their owne perfection so by fate...
> *The Faerie Queene*, VII. vii.58

This assertion of the cyclical nature of life does little to refute the arguments of Mutability; he claims that change is at the heart of life and that everything is under its control: the transistory life of man, the earth „changed in part and eke in generall", while Alteration also claims control of man's psychology, and in an ironic comment touches on the subject of *Troilus*:

> But eeke their minds (which they immortall call)
> Still change and vary thoughts, as new occasions fall.
> *The Faerie Queene*, VII. vii.19

There is an attempt to reconcile the stable and the changing in Nature's speech, and by placing „order" as Nature's „sergeant", Mutability is cast in the role of a disruptive force, a form of evil in the world. Nature at the close has to incorporate him into the cycles which dominate human life. It is an unhappy marriage that occupied writers from Chaucer's period, perhaps encapsulated in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*:

> A Yere yernes ful Yerne, and yelds never like
> The forme to the finisment foldes ful selden. [498-499]

The movements of nature and man may be circular but they never return to where they were, and in this image, the struggle between order and change lay for both Spenser and Chaucer, and the former's reference to his master at this crucial moment of the Canto, suggests his awareness of this[2].

Indeed cycles were one of the structural features of Chaucer's verse from *The Parliament of Foules* to *Troilus*. In *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, D. R. Howard suggests that the tales were structurally based on the rose window, which dominated the cathedrals of the period, with tales connecting not merely sequentially but also in complex patterns. In *Troilus*, cycles layer the background of the poem as well as

[2] Chaucer was certainly not alone in treating this theme. Much of the intellectual thought of the period concerned the subject, though Chaucer was the first person to introduce the terms „mutability" and „mutable" to English in his translations of Boethius's *De Consolatione Philosophiae* and *Le Roman de la Rose*. See J. J. Morgan, chapters I and II. Chaucer's early poems are less stating the problem, and more exploring forms of stability to be found within this transience, and not only that of eternal salvation.

inform the story itself; thus the fall of Troy is seen in the complex of history, the wheel of fortune is consistently blamed by Troilus and imagery of growth and decay is pervasive. Chaucer even introduces his tale in cyclical terms:

> how his adventures fellen
> Fro wo to wele, and after out of joie.
> *Troilus*, Ii, 3-4

And though it is perhaps in *Troilus* that Chaucer makes his most profound study of the role of cycles, fate and change, the early poetry reveals that these subjects were always with him; it is there that he made his first attempts to articulate the problems in terms of individual fate, the relation of the past to the changing world and the role of Art itself in providing reconciliation. His was not merely an awareness of mutability but a consistent struggle to find modes of living and structures of order.

In *The Book of the Duchess* the reader, the dreamer and the narrator all experience the cycle of „wo to wele, and after out of joie" that is also the subject of *Troilus*; the initial sorrow of the Black Knight is tempered during his description of his lost lady, indeed it is almost forgotten, but then there is a return to the tragic reality when the Knight's remembrances finish. This is not a simple return to the point of departure, however, for the experience of cycle has brought change, and the Black Knight seems almost purged of his melancholia by the opportunity he has had to retell his story, „and with that word they gan strike forth" (1312). There has been movement within the cycle, a reassessment caused by the simple art of telling his story; art is seen as a way of organising experience, and telling the story has provided momentary stability. The purpose of the expedition in *The House of Fame* is to break up the cycle of the Dreamer's daily routine:

> For when thy labour doon al ys,
> And hast mad alle thy rekenynges,
> In stede of reste and newe thynges,
> Thou goost hom to thy haus anoon;
> And also domb as any stoon,
> Thou sittest at another book...
> *The House of Fame*, 652-657

Here the conflict lies in the stability and order of his reliance on study and the past and the terror and chaos of „newe thynges". *The Parliament of Foules* celebrates the yearly Festival of St. Valentine's Day, and the formel eagle's decision at the end of the poem is put off for another year, until another cycle has brought its change with it. And in this poem such mutability is deliberately contrasted with the eternal harmony of the spheres. These different cycles, from those of nature and man's daily routine to artistic ones, inform the poems with a constant sense of movement which brings with it images of decay and growth, spring and winter. Even in the formal courtly backgrounds there is rarely a sense of stasis, with conformity broken by tiny detail.

The forces of order are set against those of transience, incoherance and loss. This mutabilitie is never chaotic or should not be; as has often been noted, these poems are conventional in execution and tradition, often based on previous works. Their whole approach is decorous, not only because Chaucer was writing for his courtly audience, but also because art in itself is a search for decorum. Decorum can

be seen as a social statement of stability and order, a set of rules and relationships which try to organise a potentially chaotic society. Its value is exemplified by the discussion between the dreamer and master in *The Book of the Duchess*, where the reader is made aware of the difference in social rank, and the dreamer has to be very careful in the way he gives consolation. Thus though he has had his own problems with love, the dreamer always couches his comments in the safe figures of the past; this not only flatters his patron, but also generalises the experience and puts it in context. The whole conversation is controlled and conventional; the social situation requires the Knight to react in a decorous way as well, and it is this need which provides him with a response to his tragedy, to the disorder and chaos of his world resulting from the loss of his wife. Initially the Knight is out of control; his laments are piteous to hear:

> Hit was great wonder that Nature
> Might suffre any creature
> To have such sorriwe, and be not ded.
> *The Book of the Duchess*, 467-469

The excess is seen as outside natural bounds; it is „unkynde":

> For he had wel nygh lost his mynde
> Though Pan, that men clepe god of Kynde
> Were for his sorwes never so wroth.
> *The Book of the Duchess*, 511-513

When the Knight notices the dreamer, he must control himself, and it is the social literary conventions that he uses to do so. When encouraged to tell his tale, by using the stock forms he generalises his tragedy; he can then relate himself to the world, to the order and social norms which had seemingly been snatched away from him. Thus his discription of the Duchess is not simply a classic example of courtly convention; its art and distance help him cope with disintegration. Chaucer uses his description of nature to make a similar point about the Knight's tragedy and sense of separation. The description of the copse in which the Knight is standing seems to be a conventional courtly paradise, but Chaucer adds:

> Hyt had forgete the povertee
> That wynter, through hys cold morwes
> Had mad hyt suffre, and his sorwes,
> All was forgeten and that was sene
> *The Book of the Duchess*, 410-413

This functions in two ways; first it associates the Black Knight's grief with nature, and so the emotions can be seen not only as personal, but basic and elementally connected to everything around him. Secondly the present order and joy in the wood subtly remind the reader and the patron that the sorrow will pass, with the same transience as did his wife.

To find the Black Knight, the Dreamer was led by a whelp down a „littel used" trail, away from the noise and bustle of the hunt and society, all of which stresses the lonliness of the mourner. Even here, the precision of the description demonstrates that this is a false position, for:

> Every tree stood by hymeselve
> Fro other wel ten foot or twelve...
> *The Book of the Duchess*, 419-420

Despite this distance at the base, the tops of the trees were so entwined that

> They were not an ynche asonder —
> That hit was shadewe overal under.
> *The Book of the Duchess*, 425-426

Thus though he is going through a private tragedy, he remains a part of the social whole. From his position of unnatural lonliness and despair, the conventions of literature and decorum provide him with a method of return and control. It is not that his sadness necessarily disappears, rather that his experience is ordered and he can return to society: he „gan homewards/Forth to ride" (1315). Though he has coped with his experience at the close of the poem, he has not, openly at least, answered his own „complaint". There remains to him the unanswerable Why? and that „fals Fortune" which grows flowers on rubbish. He makes no open comparison between the mutability of life and the permanence of heaven, though as shall be suggested later, the Poet may do so. It is not the explicit contrast that is drawn in *The Parliament of Foules or Troilus*[3]. There is however an obvious tensions betwenn the static idealised portrait of Blanche the Duchess, the fact of her death and the

The suggestion that Chaucer presents art and decorum as one of the ways in which order can be maintained, is carried further in his employment of the „auctoritee" of past authors. There is no need to stress the conventionality of most of the early verse; much was either straight translation or adaption from French verse. What is important is the use he made of these forms and images, manipulating them to his own ends. In this context, however, this sort of imitative art can be seen as using established forms to order and establish decorum in his own artistic work and experience. Note when the dreamer wakes up in his dream in *The Book of the Duchess*, and hears the birds singing outside, he is in a room which has scenes from *Le Roman de la Rose* on the wall, and the windows through which he looks at the outside world are wrought with the story of Troy. Such authorities are as stable and permanent as anything he can find, though his image of Fame as a castle built on ice reveals that even

---

[3] Cf. Spenser's *Daphnaida*, which is an obvious imitation of the *Book of the Duchess*. The idiom has shifted from the courtly to the pastoral, and Nature, 'stepdame, cruele, mercilesse', takes on the role of Fortune. There is no reconciliation even at a social level; the looser relationship between writer and mourner, and the lack of social as opposed to literary convention between them, all underline the crucial role they play in Chaucer's poem. The shepherd Alcyon is a servant of Nature, seen in and out of harmony, and it is to her that he addresses his complaint. Compare this with the complex iconographic role nature plays in the *Book of the Duchess* where cyclical nature is seen as a mediator between humanity and the cruel transience of Fortune. Note in *The Mutability Cantos*, Nature's role has shifted again, and Spenser was not averse to using nature in an iconographic way: *The Faerie Queene*, I. i. 13f.

these figures can disappear, their names can melt away. „Auctoritee" did, nevertheless, give Chaucer some basic reference points from which to work and he used them in extremely complex and subtle ways, often as a technique for distancing himself as author. It has been noted how little Chaucer tended to generalise or pass didactic comments in his verse; within his world things tend to remain ambiguous and non-commital. But when he is retelling old tales, the stories of the masters, he often allowed himself to generalise as if time had approved. Thus in *The House of Fame* during his retelling, in fact revamping, of the Aenied:

> For this shall every woman finde
> That some man, of hys pure kynde
> Wol shewen outward of the fayreste
> Tyl he have caught that what hym leste.
>
> *The House of Fame*, 279-282

Despite the fact he had totally reworked the story, and despite the fact that the original version was not making the same point at all, its authority allows him to make larger comments through its texture. He rarely does so in his own material. Such use of authority and sources is further developed in *Troilus*. There, his constant assertion that statements and actions were the responsibility of his source, „myn auctor called Lollius" (i. 394) even when patently untrue, allowed him to retain the ambiguous pose which makes the poem so tantilising. Equally he used literary images and knowledge of the Troy story and other legends to guide the reader. A close reading of the first 200 lines of Book II shows how the interweaving of such images as Janus, Philomel and the Oedipus Story provide the reader with a detailed moral tissue[4].

These sources, old tales and figures, were used as a base, as artifacts with stable meaning, in a world shifting both physically and morally. They defied this. It is an authority both questioned and affirmed by *The House of Fame*.

The „Aeneas" story is narrated from the decorations on a panel „wythyn a temple ymad of glas" (120). The process by which Chaucer narrated this section is interesting for its unrecorded shift from the material to the dramatic, from the dreamer describing the panels (There saugh I, I. 152, 174 etc.)[5] to the dramatisation of the scene betwenn Aeneas and Dido for the tirade against man's unfaithfulness. This use of the old to be revitalised in the present seems typical of Chaucer's vision of „auctorite", not as a fixed and dead series of wisdoms but as living and relevant in the hands of the present. At the close of the Aeneas section, the temple becomes a church:

> „A Lorde" thoughte I, „that madest us,
> Yet saugh I never such noblesse
> Of ymages, ne such richesse
> As I saw graven in this chirche".
>
> *The House of Fame*, 472-475

[4] Note also that Spenser himself referred to Chaucer's use of Alane as a source in his own reference quoted at the start of this article (*The Faerie Queene*, VII. vii. 9).

[5] The same expression permeates the later sections of the poem as well, suggesting that new experience, as well as old works, was for the artist a process of observation.

The use of the word „ymages" refers not merely to the statues and artifacts which made up the brass panel, but also to the extension of them in the ideas and guidance which they provoke. The stability of this opening section, as the dreamer statically narrates from within the church looking out, is in itself an image of order. When the story is finished and the dreamer leaves the temple, he loses both this richness and orientation:

> When I out at the dores cam,
> I faste about me beheld.
> Then saugh I but a large feld,
> As far as I myghte see
> Withouten toun of house or tree
> Or bush or grass or eryd lond.
>
> *The House of Fame*, 479-484

This image of the Libian desert is startling for an urban man, running between his accounts and his books. The losing of his source of authority is obviously profoundly important and confusing. This contrast is further stressed in Book II, when he has lost control and is openly frightened. In Book I he has been calmly, even arrogantly dealing with the past, while in Book II the dreamer is gripped by terror as he is taken away from his books and routine by the eagle. The eagle makes him experience life, suggesting how limiting and inhibiting the reliance on study and authority can be. The lack of any real spatial sense in Book II is laid against the image of the Dreamer sitting over his books in his little room. Order and Stability are seen as spatially limiting and are contrasted with the need for new experience, charged with a potential at once frightening and perhaps chaotic.

In fact, his image of the Temple of Fame questions even the stability which the dreamer had relied on, by emphasising the arbitrary nature of reputation, both in terms of its making and its keeping. And from the House of Fame the dreamer ends up in the chaotic house of Rumour, a labyrinth in which there are no certainties and no directions. At least within the House of Fame there had been some semblance of order. The Goddess of Fame passes judgement on supplicants; with the „black and whit" trumpets, the scene is some sort of earthly last judgement, an, at least temporary, organising and classifying of the past and present into the future; those who are successful become part of the structure of the temple itself. But unreality is here as well, after the Libian desert at the end of Book I, this is a polar region. The return to the natural world in the form of the „Laboryntus" is no respite; here the images of nature and the „real world" are dominated by movement. The house is made of twigs, leaves and trees, but is essentially nothing but noise „for al the world"; it is described not architecturally but thus:

> This hous was also ful gygges
> And also ful eke of chirkynges,
> And of many other werkynges.
>
> *The House of Fame*, 1942-1944

On top of this lack of physicality comes the repeated image of a cage enclosing this anarchy. As an image of the world, it displays chaos and captivity, a long way

from the settled position in Book I; the clear-cut decisions of the House of Fame are also left behind:

> Thus saugh I fals and soth compound.
> *The House of Fame*, 2108

With its mention of pardoners and other subjects, the world is shifting towards that of the *Canterbury Tales*. Within *The House of Fame*, there thus seems to have been a shift from the stability of the early section through to a chaotic world with no organising principle. The loss of any sort of „auctoritee" has left the poet and the world with nothing they can cling to; thus while the early sections suggest the dangers of being tied to study, the latter suggest that experience without its guidance is difficult to control. The close of the poem, as it stands in its unfinished state, reinforces this:

> Atte laste y saugh a man
> Which that y (nevere) nat ne kan;
> But he semed for to be
> A man of gret auctorite...
> *The House of Fame*, 2155-2158

The contrasts in these two poems, *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame* are centred on the balance between the personal and the social, and the past and the present; in *The Parliament of Foules* the focus shifts, for the *Somnium Scipionis* not only stands as an old authority but also contrasts the atemporal world with the temporal, the cyclical and transistory with the permanent and eternal. Once again there is the tension between order and change, this time not only within nature's kingdom but also between the mortal world and the „sterry place", an aspect not explicit in the other two poems. The section dealing with Tullus of the Dream of Scipioun is one of contrast with the rest of the poem.

> Oure present worldes lyves space
> Nis but a maner deth,
> *The Parliament of Foules*, 53-54

and that to come is one of peace and order. (Note how Chaucer's access to this comes from the authority of

> a bok was write with lettres olde
> And therupon a certyn thing to lerne
> *The Parliament of Foules*, 19-20

though this is said with a touch of irony.) The image that Chaucer uses is that of music, from the Music of the Spheres, which he had used with the birds' song on the narrator's roof in *The Book of the Duchess* in a more natural form. Africanus showed Scipio:

> the nyne speres
> And after that the melodye herde he
> That cometh of thilke speres thryes thre
> That welle is of mucik and melodye
> In this world here, and cause of armonye.
> *The Parliament of Foules*, 59-63

This scene is the most explicit statement of the Christian life after death that Chaucer makes in his early poetry. Scipio is instructed not to take delight in the world, and that

harmony will finally come[6]. The reader at line 85 is returned to the cycle of days, and prepared for the world of birds with a reminder that man is not the only animal which is at once cyclical and transitory:

> The day gan fallen, and the derke nyght
> That reveth beastes from here besynesse.
> *The Parliament of Foules*, 85-86

For the Garden in the poem is no paradise, but like the House of Rumour, though in a much more decorous form, an image of the world. Here there is structure whereas in the former there was none. Within, the two extremes of the gateways merge. Just past „peace" and „patience" roams „the bittere goddesse Jealoisie" (252). Lust and Curteysie are mentioned in tandem, recalling the generalisation made in *The House of Fame* quoted above (279-283). The dancers in front of the Temple are the disciples of Bacchus; they are dishevelled and are not all „Fayre of hemself" (234 PF); they dance „yer by yeere", „that was here offyce alwey" (236 PF). Here cycle and „alwey" are again seen together. The arrival of Nature stresses this ambivalent air; she is at once

> a queen
> That as of lyght the somer sonne shone
> *The Parliament of Foules*, 2897-2898

but mutability is also there. While she is compared to the stars, she is sitting on flowers and greenery that earlier stanzas have revealed to be temporary in their splendour. This is further amplified by the transience which requires the birds „to cometh of engendure" (306). There is a need to look to the future. The parliament itself displays the hierarchies and social orders of the world under enormous stress, and with them the whole courtly tradition. Again when compared with the positive role he found for such tradition in *The Book of the Duchess*, the ambivalent position of the dreamer appears. The whole meeting almost dissolves, and the system whereby every soul had „his own place" still leads to noise and arguments. It takes Nature to really control them: „Hold your tongues there" (*The Parliament of Foules*, 521). So even in this formal garden the tensions which Spenser was also trying to resolve appear as they had done earlier.

But whereas in his pastoral form, Spenser does not offer heavenly consolation in *Daphnaida* and *The Mutability Cantos* (though he does perhaps offer some sort of platonic resolution at the end of Book VI of *The Faerie Queene*), Chaucer does. This is not merely in the opening section of *The Parliament of Foules* with the obvious contrast of heavenly harmony and present transience, which was to be employed again at the close of *Troilus*, when Troilus looks back upon the world in much the same way as Scipio is asked to. The resolution in *The Book of the Duchess* was for the BlackKnight one which meant he was able to return to society. But as suggested above, there is no

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[6] Macrobius's commentary, which handed down the *Somnium Scipionis* from Cicero's *De Re Publica*, „had an incalculable influence on the Middle Ages [...] It is a simple expression of Contemptus Mundi" (J. J. Morgan 1968, Chapter I). There seems to be an ironic contrast between this expression of the futility of human life and the picture of the Garden and Parliament, so full of vitality and humour.

evidence that he has answered his attack on Fortune, nor seen the position of man in the context of the world, any more than Alcyon in Spenser's *Daphnaida*. He may have found solace in his ability to use social conventions and art, but he has not placed these in any wider context. But the Dreamer at the end, and so also the poet to his patron, does hint at heavenly as well as social consolation. This is made even more concrete if the Patron for whom the poem was written was indeed John of Gaunt. There is no need to delve into this problem here[7], but if he was the patron the following lines gather a double significance as the Dreamer describes the Knight returning to the world:

> With that me thoghte that this kyng
> Gan homewards for to ryde
> Unto a place, was there besyde
> Which was from us but a lyte,
> A long castel with walles white
> Be seynt Johan! on a ryche hil
>
> *The Book of the Duchess*, 1314-1319

The castle bells then go on to strike „houres twelve". John of Gaunt was the baron of both Lancaster and Richmond, and so the puns in the above can be said to refer to his social responsibilities; he returns to *long castel*, or Lancaster, and to *ryche hil* or Richmond[8]. The exclamation „Be seynt Johan" which stands out as a rare Christian oath in the poem, can with the idea of a castle on a hill lead the reader to St. John's Revelations:

> And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and
> high mountain and shewed me that great city, the holy
> Jerusalem descending out of heaven
>
> from God ... and her light was like unto stone most
> precious ... and had great wall and high.
>
> *Ch. 21, v. 10-11*

Though perhaps not a source, the holy Jerusalem was seen as a walled city made of white walls on a mount. Combined with the ringing of the bells twelve times for the twelth hour, there lies the suggestion that the Knight not only returns to his social responsibilities but also to future salvation.

In neither *Daphnaida* nor these early poems does there seem to be a full assessment of man's position in the world itself within the forces of stability and mutability, even granted his potential salvation. The situations in *The Book of the Duchess* and *Daphnaida* are the same, with man cruelly deprived, but neither leads to any real understanding of fate and fortune, or of free-will. In both, hate for fortune, for the transience of joy, are expressed but there is no real exploration of this. Essentially they express hatred for the position in which man is placed: within cycles and confronted by the fact of death, in spite of having free-will. In the *Seventh Canto of Mutability*, Mutability was seen as the enemy of order and a rival to Nature, and the latter rather like some Deux ex machina says that changes is in fact merely subordinate to the cycle. The present article has looked at they way in which this unsatisfactory tension informs

[7] For bibliography on this subject see F. N. Robinson, 1977, explanatory notes p. 773.
[8] F. N. Robinson, 1977 — explanatory notes to line 1318, p. 778.

Chaucer's early verse. But an extension of this, which involves the whole problem of order, change and the world, is the problem of man's free-will, and of predestination which is God's order. Thus man can identify himself with change at one level. *The Parliament of Foules* dramatises the situation at the close of the poem when the decision must be taken. In the relationship between Nature and the formel eagle, there is an outline of that prevailing between God and Man, and the „hard grace" of the world (*The Parliament of Foules*, 65). When the formel is first introduced it is with the same tones as those recalling God's relation to man:

> But to the point: Nature held on hire hond
> A formel egle, of shap the gentilleste
> That evere she among hire workes fond,
>
> *The Parliament of Foules*, 372-374

It is that of the benign look of the creator on her special child. When the final decision must be taken at the close of the ordered and formal debate, she gives the bird

> her owne electoun, [621]

and the bird replies, but the fear that exists in the relationship is obvious. The freedom to decide is there but final power always lies with Nature;

> With dredful vois the formel tho answerde [638]

and she is granted her plea to wait another year, to decide, also perhaps to see if any change has come upon her suitors. This is a different situation from that of the other birds, who seem to pair naturally; it is only the pairing of the special child which involves choice and therefore debate. Thus the free-will is granted, the symbol of humanity, but only within the larger context of Nature's control.

This is an important corollary to the themes of order and mutability and was later to be explored in *Troilus*, where the hero's rejection of the existence of free-will is tied into the whole nature of his relationship with Criseyde, which attempts to deny cycles and the movement of the wider world around them. The *Troilus* can be seen as a bringing together of the ideas Chaucer had explored in a different idiom in these early works. For as Spenser suggested in his invocation of Don Geffrey, these works do provide a complex picture of the tensions existing in those forces which bring order to a world dominated by transience. In *The Book of the Duchess* Chaucer looks at the individual's response and the potential social solace; in *The House of Fame* at the relationship of past to present, at the need for authority; *The Parliament of Foules* moves on to the internal conflicts in the world and their contrast to the eternal harmony of the spheres. These are subjects that never leave Chaucer and return later in more ambitious forms. So when J. J. Morgan Jnr. comments in his study *Chaucer and the Theme of Mutability* that not much critical work had been done on mutability in Chaucer, and suggests that it is because the final impression left by the poetry is one of „life-in-fullness and life-in-abundance" (p. 19), he is surely touching on the essential tension which gives strength and ambiguity to both this and Chaucer's later verse, between transience and the need to live, with the forms needed to make sense of life.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

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ON MANNERISM AND MANNERISTIC ELEMENTS IN THE EARLY WORKS OF JOHN LYLY*

The aim of this paper is to state certain general analogies between what seems to the author to be Mannerism in fine arts and Mannerism in literature on the basis of John Lyly's early works.

Mannerism as a historical phenomenon belongs to the most debatable problems both in the history of art and literature. Various attempts to describe and define Mannerism — especially in the field of the visual arts — as undertaken by a great number of scholars have hardly resulted in unanimity as far as its essence and range are concerned. Even the most inclusive approaches as the historical one by Hauser (1965) and the typological one by René Hocke (1957) do not provide a basis for the interpretation of all Manneristic artifacts; hence in recent descriptions there prevails a tendency to restrict the application of the notion of Mannerism to one homogeneous group of works of art and literature most frequently defined as *manieroso* or belonging to the Maniera (Białostocki 1970 : 107). Unfortunately these concepts are often limited to a number of characteristics concerning only the formal aspects of the sixteenth-century art and do not provide a more profound explanation of their occurrence. This attitude, apparently more explicit, does not really contribute to a better understanding of this phase of the development of European culture.

Any adequate presentation of Mannerism must determine its place in the development of the European culture especially in relation to both the preceding and following periods. From the chronological point of view Mannerism is generally said to have occurred between the Renaissance and the Baroque which, however, does not exclude a parallel existence of Baroque and Manneristic tendencies. The majority of scholars are agreed that Mannerism started in Italy in the 1530s and spread slowly all over Europe. About 1580 it appeared both in the Netherlands and in England.

* The following discussion is an extract from a broader study: *Manneristic Elements in the Early Comedies By John Lyly*, unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Wrocław.

Despite great differences, both the Medieval and the Renaissance art can be treated as similar due to the domination of the religious, i.e. Christian communicated structure[1] which was expressed by means of architectural forms, sculptures and figurative paintings in a clearly specified manner. Early gothic art was extremely symbolic; for example, there was little differentiation of features in particular presentations of human beings. As far as architecture is concerned it was Panofsky (1971 : 33-65) who first explained how the assumptions of scholastic philosophy were reflected in the design of a Gothic Cathedral, how every element, space, etc. were meaningful. It cannot be overemphasized that the form of a Medieval work of art was totally dominated by the religious content, by a unifying vision of the Universe where the relations between the microcosm and macrocosm were clearly defined. This domination could and did lead to certain deformations so as to stress the elements which conveyed the meaning.

An analogous situation can be traced in English drama before the so called Elizabethean Period where the religious content dominated over miracles and moralities. The behaviour of the characters being mainly virtues and vices, good and bad angels as well as other allegories was well defined. The human character was an universal type of man and the plot could not vary to a great extent as the end of human life was either damnation or salvation. Although mystery plays continued to be performed certain changes can be noticed towards the end of the fifteenth and in the early sixteenth century. There appears a new term in the history of English drama, namely, interlude. Interludes, apart from being presented by professionals, and what is more important from our point of view, introduced and developed a number of new subjects. As far as the comic interludes are concerned some of them were adaptations of foreign plays (*Celestina*) while other ones were closer connected with the native tradition (*Hick Scorner*). Although the playwrights' attention seems to be more and more directed towards intrigue as well as other comic elements, both moral instructions and conclusions appear in many plays (Nicoll 1973 : 48, 53).

In the late Middle Ages and especially in the Renaissance the naturalistic tendencies became prominent. When speaking about naturalism[2] it is important to stress both its objectivity and idealism restricted by certain norms. It was accompanied by the Christian view of the Universe, the ground on which the ancient prescriptions concerning both art and literature were accepted. The latter period is also marked by an immense increase of non-religious works of art and literature. Nevertheless the influence of the Christian „Weltanschauung" upon the structure of both religious and non-religious works, for example, paintings and frescoes is obvious. The difference between Medieval and Renaissance artifacts derived from the fact that the artists of the latter period made extensive use of all the achievements of science in order to fulfil the requirements of mimesis (Le Coat 1975 : 13-29).

[1] The term is used according to Ławniczak W, 1975.

[2] The term 'naturalism' appears here in the sense in which it is used by the art historians with reference to, for example, Gothic art.

Due to this situation the artists were mainly interested in how a given narration (Le Coat 1975 : 105-110) and how the beatiful can be rendered. There were already so many prescriptions that an artist's freedom was limited to a great extent and, generally, there was only one direction in which art could evolve.

The attempt at a perfect rendering of nature had its source in the Christian doctrine, especially in the writings of St Thomas Aquinas. According to his view only God was able to reflect upon Universe as a whole and perceive nature as it is; man's view was believed to be always distorted. Nevertheless the so-called *disegno interno* — granted to a certain extent to some men — which, as they stood closer to God, allowed them to depict things very closely to their real nature. This is both an explanation of the existence of a trend in the Renaissance and a future point of reference for the new concept of art and artist, the establishment of the term genius (Klaniczay 1977 : 204-206). According to this interpretation Renaissance culture cannot be considered as atheistic, as opposed to the Christian culture of the Middle Ages.

A number of political, economic and social phenomena (Hauser 1974 : 291-197) contributed to the rise of Mannerism. Among those usually mentioned are the *Sacco di Roma* (1527), the fall of Florence (1530) as well as a series of financial crises. They undermined the Renaissance belief in an orderly Universe and in the possibilities of penetrating nature by means of science. It was a time when the study of magic, treated as the only science providing insight into the mysteries of both the Universe and human life, reached its summit (Klaniczay 1977 : 88-92). The homogeneous vision of the world ceased to exist and the stress was shifted from the universal, objective to the diverse, paradoxical and subjective. The result was, that both in the fine arts and literature, the rules of rhetoric were either destroyed or deformed in a premediated way which caused various effects. To the twentieth century audience some of them appear as highly expressionistic, other ones as basically decorative with the domination of *elocutio* in literature and experiments with colour, light and some purely ornamental elements in fine arts. The changes affected also music which turned from *musici mathematici* to a contrapunctal style, to various melodic lines sung simultaneously so that the words could not be understood, which was against the rules of mimesis (Le Coat 1975 : 20).

An englightening comparison can be provided by two versions of the *Last Supper* — the first by Leonardo da Vinci and the second by Bonifazio Veronese. In the case of Leonardo's painting mathematical perspective, the symmetry of the composition as well as its generally ascetic character emphasize the importance of the content to which they are subordinated. In the case of the latter painting everything is uncertain, indefinite: the place and time, the character or importance of the meeting as well as the general message. The various elements of the composition as for example the landscape and the particular groups of Apostles form a number of centres — none of them superior. A similar situation can be traced in literature where some authors as for example Webster did not aim at a closer drawing of characters, a consequent development of emotions and plot (Strzetelski 1968 : LXI-LXII).

From the point of view of the intrinsic development of art, the Renaissance

brought to perfection the type of artistic activity based on mimesis, in which after Michelangelo, Leonardo da Vinci and Raphael produced their most famous works, no room was left for either novelty or improvement. At the same time the status of an artist was clarified which encouraged, among other things, the emergence of the theme of an artist with a stress upon the creative aspect of his work as well as a greater interest in art (and literature) as an independent phenomenon among artists themselves (Würtenberger 1962 : 160-168). It lead to a conscious rejection of the external influences, especially of the rules derived from the blending of the Christian view upon life and the classical aesthetic ideals. Giordano Bruno, for example, considered imitation of nature an activity worthy of an ape and not of an artist (Klaniczay 1977 : 188-190). A real artist should create something new, unparalleled and therefore it is impossible to establish universal rules. Bruno introduced scepticism and relativism to aesthetics as well as imposed a kind of mystery upon the notion of beauty which he refused to specify.

The above views resulted in a strange (from the Renaissance point of view) unconventional presentation of Christian and mythological themes as well as a different attitude towards the portrayal of the human being. The Manneristic portrait makes an attempt at rendering the individual character of a given person, to stress that which distinguishes this man from other people while the previous portraiture aimed at conveying the generally humane. This tendency is reflected in the growing interest in lyrical elements both in poetry and drama.

To sum up, in contradistinction to the Renaissance standards, Manneristic works of art, literature and music were based on individual artistic concepts and a deep concern for the essence of artistic activity. Due to this they were considered as atheistic and strongly criticised by the ecclesiastical authorities as useless and harmful (Klaniczay 1977 : 195-197).

Although Manneristic art is, by assumption, based on individual concepts it seems feasible to distinguish two main tendencies. The first, that might be labelled as „deductive" states its attitude towards God, man nature and artistic creativity in terms of theme and general changes in composition. There are either new frames or from the Renaissance point of view no frames within which the Manneristic philosophy is expressed. The second, which could be called inductive, exists to a great extent within the old frames, still within the scheme of the basically or apparently Renaissance composition. It tends to accumulate some elements in an unusual way, to use numerous ornaments and techniques which never occurred simultaneously or to make slight changes which destroy the old works from inside. The *Weltanschauung* is not expressed in a direct way but can be only deduced. John Lyly's early works represent the second rather than the first tendency. A good illustration of the two tendencies is provided by *The Fall of Giants* created by Giulio Romano on the one hand and frescoes in the Sala Paolina of the Angel's Castle in Rome (painted by Perino del Vaga) on the other hand. The whole fresco is a set of illusions and antitheses which are not subordinated to one aim but lead an independent life in various places of the composition. The apparent fire place, the illusion of the open door as well as

the tondos exist separately and do not contribute to either the „subject-matter" or the „theme".

Manneristic art, literature and music were usually created for a small group of connoisseurs often associated with a court. It was developed at courts where the owners were real collectors as at Fontainebleau and in Prague during the reign of Rudolph II. This might have facilitated the change of the Horacian *prodesse et delectare* — accepted in the Renaissance — to *delectare* only in Mannerism. Works of art were created to be admired as artifacts and their other functions were often either disregarded or provided only an excuse for creating a beautiful object. A good example is the marvellous gold-work by Cellini. Manneristic literature of which the comedies by John Lyly provide a sample was to please either the reader or the audience and not to edify. Such requirements as the display of the artist's skill, wit and erudition, a frequent occurrence of striking ideas and unusual, surprising conceits as well as techniques resulted from this situation.

Another characteristic feature often considered to be a common denominator of Manneristic artifacts is the effect of artifice and artificiality to be found especially in the form but also in the content (Freedberg 1965 : 187). This seems to be an outcome of the attitude towards a work of art (and literature) as an independent cultural phenomenon and therefore related not to nature but to cultural tradition.

According to Sherman (1970 : 109-116) this tendency was fully reflected in the *pastorale* invented in the time of Mannerism in Italy (a representative example is Guarini's *Pastor Fido*). It was a kind of completely artificial work; the characters were nymphs and shepherds living in a ficticious country were love relations, most frequently, provided the motivation. However, it was not the intrigue, not the content of their speeches or dialogues but the language which was of primary importance. They made idealizations of classical idealizations (Freedberg 1965 : 188) which was already intellectualizing, an extreme aesthetic deliberation rendered with a perfectly controlled technique. The difference between the Renaissance and the Manneristic use of what can be called quotations or ancient models is that the Renaissance always aimed at a synthesis of aesthetic ideals, the Christian doctrine and nature, while Mannerism appears to be fascinated by pure aesthetic ideals, models subject to no external values or any kind of external reality.

As far as the relation between Mannerism and Baroque is concerned the latter preserved many artistic achievements of its predecessor. It also accepted the autonomous character of art and artistic creativity although art became loyal to the Church. In the period of Baroque artistic achievements were subordinated to one *Weltanschauung* which affected the composition. If we compare a Baroque and a Manneristic fresco, both using illusionistic effects, as for example Giulio Romano's *The Heavenly Temple* in Palazzo del The and *The Allegory of the Jesuit Mission* in the San Ignazio Church in Rome by Andrea Pozzo the differences are easily discernable. In the latter all the elements are subordinated to a single centre and although the details might be similar the total effect is different. In literature this is reflected in the arrangement of the world presented in Lyly's comedies, on the one hand, and

in Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* on the other. Only in the latter case the character of the Queen functions as the organizing centre — a moral authority.

If a series of antitheses, both in poetry and drama, leads to nowhere it is probably a Manneristic work; if it ends with a conclusion or a moral statement it is probably Baroque. The above differentiation seems to be the most important.

Manneristic elements which can be traced especially in the early comedies by John Lyly as well as in *Euphues* belong rather to the „inductive" tendency. Lyly is not an innovator but a brilliant organizer of already existing material. The grounds on which it is feasible to classify the comedies as Manneristic are the arrangement, the use of Renaissance, Medieval and classical models — the change of their function.

The unifying function in comedy — expressed by means of mathematical perspective, light, colour, etc. in the fine arts — was assigned to a well-knit plot which allowed a logical development of action in the subsequent scenes leading to a clear-cut *dénouement* and a happy ending where all the characters who revealed their virtues or at least whose intentions were good, were rewarded while those who showed no sign of moral goodness (according to Christian moral standards) were either punished in a definite way or excluded from the circle of the happy ones. The well developed plot was indispensable to provide a test: obstacles and situations were included in which characters could either prove themselves virtuous or turn out to be villains. The structural elements of comedy were subordinated to the principle of *prodesse* which implied judgement. It is worth mentioning that the function of edification was also emphasized by a number of both sixteenth and seventeenth century commentators and writers, notably by Philip Sidney and Ben Jonson (Herrick 1950 : 54, 174)[3].

Contrary to the Terentian type, the organization of Lyly's early comedies is based either on debate such as *Campaspe* and *Sapho and Phao* or on a harmonious variety such as *Galathea* and *Love's Metamorphosis*[4]. Debate as such existed already in the Middle Ages and had become a frequent form of entertainment long before Lyly wrote his comedies. However, Lyly's use of the debate structure differed from that of his predecessors (Hunter 1962 : 161-192). From the viewpoint of Mannerism the most important difference between Lyly's application and the preceding ones is the absence of judgement; it has a non-teleological character. The author organizes wit around debate, presents various attitudes, often in antithetical terms, towards for example love, as in *Sapho and Phao* and magnanimity, kingliness as in *Campaspe*. The attitudes are not expressed in a clear, univocal manner, for the sake of arguing a point of view. Lyly seems to be interested only in creating a situation which enables him to explore its ambivalences in a witty and playful d...ogue. The role of a king (in *Campaspe*) is juxtaposed with the roles of a philosopher, an artist and a lover.

[3] The above quoted publication by Herrick is considered, by the author of the present thesis, only as a useful source, otherwise unavailable, of information concerning the history of thought.

[4] *Love's Metamorphosis*, although a later work, was included in the following discussion due to the existence of an earlier version upon which the later one was based. The author of the present paper relies on the chronology, the problem itself being of little interest to the author, suggested by Bond, W. R. in his edition of *The Complete Works of John Lyly*, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, I-III.

The aim of the comedy is not to judge the qualities of Alexander as a great ruler, to satirize his inability to paint, his incompetence as a lover or his failure in the role of a philosopher. The theme of the debate provides only a framework for a number of loosely connected scenes which reflect the absence of interest in a well-knit plot.

In a play that follows *Campaspe*, in the somewhat shaky chronology of Lyly's plays, the treatment of the form of debate as a mere framework and the absence of an interest in intrigue are still more explicit. The situation remains virtually the same throughout the whole play. The static character is preserved due to the mainly indirect expression of feelings which helps to avoid conflict and in consequence does not resolve action. *Sapho and Phao* can be viewed as a series of tableaux showing various ideals of love as presented by the court ladies, Venus, Sybilla and Phao. Despite the accumulation of contrasted attitudes they hardly work out the debate theme of love versus chastity. There are ample opportunities for criticizing or even satirizing some of the approaches and yet Lyly refrains from judgement which distinguishes him from the later Jacobean taste for realism and satire as for example in Jonson's comedies presenting man's corruption. Although the opening scenes of Jonson's plays are as varied as Lyly's the diversity is arranged to point forward to later events leading to a clear dénouement where „the middle ground of minor weakness is left vacant; virtue, vice and folly are all shown in their most exaggerated and mutually opposed forms" (Hunter 1962 : 293). The problem of the moral versus the immoral is not important in Lyly's comedies and reflects a Manneristic attitude towards the function of a literary work.

The next two plays to be discussed are *Galathea* and *Love's Metamorphosis* which are deliberate exercises in the pastoral mode. In the earlier plays it is still possible to find some references to reality, for example, the idea of a court, of a ruler surrounded by pages and court ladies, of a councillor and a scholar. On the contrary the world presented in both *Galathea* and *Love's Metamorphosis* is totally artificial. In the debate plays there was still the debate theme and a central figure which contributed to the unity of the plays. The construction of the two pastoral plays is based on the variety and accumulation of similar experiences explored in different ways.

The device which is repeated several times in *Galathea* is the situation of disguise and deception which shows the ability of both men and gods to dissemble. Although it would be possible to interpret the disguise of both Phillida and Galathea as betrayal it is not the way they function in this comedy. Here they belong to a series of juxtaposed variations. Lyly seems to have indulged in both a play on words, ideas, attitudes and situations for the sake of delight which is a typically Manneristic point of view. The labyrinth-like construction of his comedies was probably a conscious artistic decision which can be proved by the explanation Lyly includes already in the epilogue to *Sapho and Phao*:

> They that tread in a maze, walke oftentimes in one pathe, and at the last come out where they entered in. Wee feare wee have lead you all this while in a labyrinth of conceits [...] and have now brought you to an end, where we first began [...]. But if you accept this dance of a fairie in a circle, wee [...] will frame our fingers to all forms. [1892 : 214].

Various attempts at dissembling, pretending and the hiding of truth occur in the

subsequent scenes of *Galathea*. In the first act Tyterus and Melebeus persuade their daughters to disguise themselves as boys and the ambivalent situation is explored several times in the following acts. In the second act Cupid pretends to be an innocent girl in order to evoke unnatural love in Diana's nymphs. On the other hand the nymphs try to hide their feelings. Besides this the Arcadian people try to deceive Neptune by offering Haebe instead if Phillida or Galathea for sacrifice. There are still more acts of disguise and pretending also in the subplots but all of them end happily with no regard to whether they were, or could be, harmful.

Love's Metamorphosis can be interpreted as a series of juxtaposed attitudes to love. There is virtually no plot and the characters undergo no changes. Also in this play, contrary to the Renaissance model of comedy, the differentiation between virtue and vice is irrelevant to the happy end.

Due to the changes in the Model of the Universe and the emergence of a different concept of art and literature there appeared a new view about materials constituting an artifact as well as a literary work. Some elements which occur in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance for the purpose of instruction are treated as ornaments in Mannerism. On the other hand materials which served as illustrations, or which played a secondary role in general, were capable of becoming the subject of an artifact or receiving a central position in its structure. The new attitude was often expressed in a greater freedom of interpreting the subjects which had been rendered in a definite way in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance. The later playwrights such as Ben Jonson, for example, revealed a scholarly approach towards both ancient history and classical mythology (Rhys 1946 : XVIII). In contradistinction to Lyly's attitude, myth was for Ben Jonson also a mode of expressing the moral intentions of the play (Hunter 1962 : 293).

The main difference consists not merely in the quantity of mythological and classical allusions and characters but primarily in the quality of the world presented which is created by means of their application. Unlike in Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels*, mythology in Lyly's comedies contributes to the establishment of a world in which Christian morality is not valid and where gods establish laws to suit their fancies. Particularly in *Galathea* and *Love's Metamorphosis* he does not seem to be interested either in the psychological truth of the characters or in their possible edifying function. While in Renaissance literature Jove often stood for the Christian God, no parallel of that kind could be traced in the discussed comedies.

From the point of view of applying mythology *Love's Metamorphosis* seems to be especially interesting. It presents an imaginary world governed by Cupid whose interpretation differs from the standard Medieval and Renaisance ones. The God of Love is presented as the beginning of everything which imposes a peculiar non--Christian hierarchy of values. In contradistinction to the attitudes of both of the previous epochs as well as the Baroque Lyly does not aim at an orthodox presentation of mythology. His approach is that of an artist who can make free use of available material and who dallies with the long established images to provide, among other things, a refined intellectual entertainment. In *Love's Metamorposis* Ceres and her cruel and disdainful nymphs are not unlike Diana and her companions because of an

unexpected insistence in chastity as the only virtue. As a result there occurs a paradoxical situation in which the goddess of fruition or harvest advocates sterility offering white doves and an eagle to win Cupid's favour in order to save the coy and fickle nymphs from the danger of love.

Lyly's interpretation of Venus in *Sapho and Phao* where she is deprived of her essential attributes can be also viewed as Manneristic. She is presented as an ageing woman which is irreconciable both with the Greek concept of ever young gods and the Renaissance idea of Venus as remarkably beautiful. The epithets used by the author do not flatter the goddes of love: „stale", „a crowes foote is on her eye" and „the black oxe hath trod on her foote".

Such interpretations of myth introduce ambiguity and surprise and are to a certain extent analogous to the famous presentation of Venus in the *Allegory of Love and Time* by Angelo Bronzieno. They also reveal the tendency to create „alienated" art, i.e. satisfied with combination of literary models, materials, technical devices etc., being not subordinated to substance or to a definite set of values external to artistic creativity. This phenomenon which resulted in a loose construction of both works of art and literature appeared rather frequently in Mannerism.

The influence of Mannerism can be traced in the style of both the earlier works and the comedies of John Lyly, namely, in the so called euphuism. Therefore it may be useful to provide at least one example of this influence. It seems that it is rather the function of the particular devices as well as the total effect achieved by their peculiar application than the occurrence of antitheses, oxymoron or parallelism as such (Wellek 1979 : 191) which admits this interpretation. Contrary to both the preceding and following periods Lyly's style lacks an unifying point of view, in Baroque terms, a climax usually imposed by the domination of the Christian doctrine over artistic creativity. There is no hierarchy which would provide an order for the numerous stylistic devices. Although some scholars claim that there is a logical development of thought (King 1955 : 156) in terms of rhetoric it does not seem to be Lyly's aim to provide a clear discussion of pros and cons, a development leading to a conclusion (Hunter 1962 : 18). The tendency to carefully balanced antitheses and parallels which is basic for the composition of the fresco in the Sala Paolina and which can be traced in the structure of Lyly's *Euphues* as well as the comedies is a fundamental characteristic of his style. It is an expression of the tendency to present variety instead of a homogeneous picture. A good example of this is provided by the characterisation of Euphues (*Euphues. The Anatomy of Wit*, 1895 : 33-34) which consists of a series of antithetical statements and examples. Due to the absence of a hierarchy all of the enumerated examples have the same power of characterizing. Euphues himself ceases to be the converging point upon which both the examples and the reader's attention are focused. Instead, a supposed feature of the hero's character is projected upon the surrounding reality, ancient history and culture. Due to this composition, on the one hand, the series of antitheses and examples cease to function as defining (or describing) illustrations and, on the other hand, the centre around which they should be accumulated is lost. Each example seems to lead an independent life.

This approach to certain elements which occur in Lyly's comedies makes no

claim to be the only right and possible interpretation. Its advantage consists in providing an explanation of some recurrent features in Lyly's comedies which were usually considered as deficiencies.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS

No 704

Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

ANNA MICHOŃSKA-STADNIK

THE EPISTOLARY ROMANCE OF ALEKSANDER PAWEŁ ZATORSKI AND SAMUEL RICHARDSON'S "PAMELA" — AN ATTEMPT AT COMPARISON

Samuel Richardson published *Pamela* in 1740. Six years later, a Pole, Aleksander Paweł Zatorski who used the pen-name „Podgórzanin" wrote a book *Uwagi do zupełnego zabierających się w stan małżeński szczęścia służące*. And then he wrote *Przydatek...* to that book which is regarded as the first Polish epistolary romance. Both Zatorski's books were published in a Nurnbergian printing firm having its representative printers in Kraków, Leipzig and Wrocław. The first volume of *Przydatek...* was edited in Kraków, the second — in Wrocław. The copy of Zatorski's book that can be found in the Ossolineum Library in Wrocław gives 1746 as the date of its first publication. Mieczysław Klimowicz, on the basis of Zatorski's correspondence, writes that both volumes were in fact edited in 1747. 1746 signifies the year of their origin (Klimowicz 1958 : 397). *Pamela* is the first epistolary novel in English literature and *Przydatek...* — the first epistolary piece of fiction in Polish literature.

It is interesting to notice, however, that Richardson's novel became known and popular in Poland much later. According to Jan Kott, Richardson comes to Poland through German influences and finds his first warm adherents among the advanced and enlightened middle class (Kott 1966 : 49). The German translation of *Pamela* appeared in the years 1748-1751. The French translation came earlier. It was published as early as in 1742 in Paris and was wrongly attributed to Prévost who was only the initiator of the translation. The real translator was Auber de la Chesnaye Des Bois and his translation was almost verbatim (Sinko 1961 : 83). Still Richardson was first mentioned in Poland only in 1762 in „Warszawskie Ekstraordynaryjne Tygodniowe Wiadomości" 32/33 (Sinko 1968 : 144). The Polish moral journal „Monitor", appearing regularly twice a week from 1765 till 1785, mentioning *Pamela* in 1765 and 1777, admits the high didactic value of Richardson's novel, ignoring, however, its artistic achievement (Sinko 1968 : 144-145). *Pamela* was widely read in French translation by Polish noblemen and aristocracy. The marble statue of Pamela sculptured by order of Izabela Czartoryska and then placed in Puławy, is a clear evidence of the novel's popularity (Sinko 1968 : 152).

Zofia Sinko describes the history of the Polish translation of *Pamela* in her work *Powieść zachodnioeuropejska w kulturze literackiej polskiego Oświecenia*. The most astonishing thing is that the above-mentioned translation never appeared, although it was announced in Gröll's catalogues in Warsaw first in 1769 and then in 1770 and 1772. The translation failed to appear for numerous reasons. Probably Richardson's language was too rich and too complex for Polish translators. However, the subtle psychological layer of the book constituted the greatest difficulty. The Polish language was obviously less developed then (Sinko 1968 : 156). Technically, Richardson's *Pamela* was too wordy and its interest in detail, so characteristic of all middle--class novels, was the main reason of the translator's failure. Another reason was, presumably, the character of the heroine. Pamela comes from a lower middle-class family and becomes one of the gentry due to marriage. It is necessary to note that Pamela wants to marry Mr. B. very much — the fact probably not fully realized by Richardson himself. Besides, Pamela is a self-dependent, clever and sometimes even cunning girl. It was not an ideal model to be followed by young Polish ladies.

Finally, we find in *Pamela* a good deal of criticism of the English aristocracy and gentry (it is a middle-class novel after all). Mr. B. himself tells Pamela: „We people of fortune or such as are born to large expectations, of both sexes, are generally educated wrong" (Richardson 1972 : 401). And further: „The gentleman has never been controlled; the lady has never been contradicted" (P. 407). Obviously it would be difficult to adapt these opinions to the taste of a Polish, especially aristocratic, reader of the novel. In *Pamela*, as Zofia Sinko writes, screened by erotic interest the basic conflict consists in demonstrating the moral supremacy of a low-born heroine whom Richardson endowed with ethical qualities absent in the aristocratic hero (Sinko 1968 : 158). *Pamela* though popular in French translation, when translated into Polish could be dangerous. One could be moved to tears by Pamela's adventures, but it would be inconvenient if the girls from lower classes started to imitate her.

After 1780, the prospects of translating *Pamela* into Polish were certainly much better, but then the novel of sensibility had become old-fashioned while the sentimental novel of Sterne type became more and more popular.

No writer in Poland tried to imitate Richardson. Thus Zatorski's case being the only example of a lenghtly epistolary form in Polish Enlightenment, is interesting enough to be analysed.

It is still impossible to be proved whether Zatorski knew French and whether he read *Pamela* in its French translation. He could not have known the German translation since it appeared five years after his book. Polish literary critics still argue how to classify Zatorski's works. Mieczysław Klimowicz's opinion is that *Przydatek...* cannot yet be treated as a Polish Enlightenment novel, but it possesses some interesting traces of that literary genre, namely, the expression of one's own experiences and feelings in the form of direct confession (Klimowicz 1958: 431). On the other hand Jan Kott expresses a different view. According to him Klimowicz is probably wrong in attributing to this letterwriter the beginnings of the epistolary romance. In Zatorski's book we have the replacement of discourse by moral stereotype and not by letter-intercourse (Kott 1966: 57). There are certainly numerous conventional characters and situations in Zatorski's book, but still there is a plot, thought fragmentary, and there are some attempts at characterization. These would rather qualify *Przydatek...* as a romance.

Although it cannot be shown whether Zatorski knew any of *Pamela's* translations while writing his book, many similarities can be found between the two. First, there are analogous circumstances in the appearance of both works. In 1739 two of Richardson's editors and friends asked him to prepare for them „a little volume of letters in a common style, on such subjects as might be of use to those country readers who were unable to indide for themselves" (Dobson 1902: 18). In this way *Familiar Letters* came into being. Richardson was not happy, because, in his opinion, they were too common. But „in the progress of *Familiar Letters* he wrote 3 letters instructing handsome girls who were obliged to go out to service, how to avoid attacks on their virtue. And hence sprung *Pamela*. Richardson developed the idea" (Dobson 1902: 26). *Pamela* was published first, in November 1740, and *Familiar Letters* in January 1741. Richardson wrote the novel very quickly: „*Pamela* was begun on 10th November 1739 and finished on 10th January 1740" (Dobson 1902: 27). Probably Richardson himself liked writing letters, because it took him only two months to write such a long novel. It is important to notice that Pamela's history is a true one. In one of his letters to Aaron Hill Richardson relates the story, told him by another friend, about a Mr. B. and about a modest and beautiful girl, his handmaid, who later became his wife and was respected and loved by all for her beauty and kindness (Dobson 1902: 28-29).

Richardson created his first novel as an experienced man and a flourishing printer. Besides he wrote it in the period when the novel started to flourish as the most popular genre of the increasing in power middle class. Reading then was more popular than theatre-going (Baker 1970: 14-15). And hence Pamela, a poor girl marrying a gentleman, becomes a representative of all aspiring middle-class men and women. The subtitle of the book, „Virtue Rewarded", may signify the superiority of the middle--class moral code over the declining morals of gentry and aristocracy. The virtue may be rewarded not necessarily after death but in earthly life, and rewarded by higher social status.

Richardson was a middle-class man. Zatorski was a petty Mazovian nobleman. He probably finished a Piarist school, himself became a monk and was teaching poetics in a Piarist college at Łowicz. A love-affair was the reason of his leaving the monastery for good. He in turn became connected with the Załuski family and even took part in the competition for the secretary of the Załuski Library in 1748 (Klimowicz 1958: 393, 399). Writing his romance Zatorski had no literary tradition to follow besides baroque letter-writers and romances containing letters. He had to struggle with stiff language constructions alone. His achievement must therefore be properly appreciated (Klimowicz 1975: 56-57). There is no class problem in Zatorski's romance. Both lovers are equal in social status and thus the plot develops without conflict from courtship to marriage.

Similarly to Richardson Zatorski wrote *Przydatek...* almost by accident. While writing *Uwagi do zabierających się w stan małżeński szczęścia służące* he thought of arranging a letter-writer for ladies and gentlemen an then an epistolary romance

sprung from under his pen (Klimowicz 1958: 431). *Uwagi...* is an interesting handbook of good breeding, full of enlightened ideas and information about manners of the time and criticizing the baroque way of verbal expression. *Przydatek...* is a collection of letters of gentleman Rożyn to his beloved lady, Chloryda. There are also Chloryda's letters to Rożyn, as well as different letters to friends or parents. The first volume of *Przydatek...* contains 78 letters and ends when Rożyn, with the help of his friends and his lady, gets rid of all his rivals and gains approval of Chloryda's parents. The second volume contains 94 letters and here various misfortunes and adventures of the lovers end happily with the wedding. Zatorski does not say that the lovers' history is a true one. The choice of names and their artificiality (Mirtylla, Bryzylla, Tryfon, etc.) indicate that these mannerisms were taken from early 18th century romances. Besides, Zatorski wrote for noble readers who were usually familiar with all kinds of old romances, often translated from the French. Hence strangely sounding names were quite common in the 18th century.

Richardson's characters have names that are hardly artificial, e.g. Pamela, Barbara, John. Moreover, they are rarely used. On account of Pamela's social status the author prefers to use surnames, e.g. Mr Arnold, Mr Williams, Mrs Jervis, Mr Andrews, etc. Pamela, being a poor, modest and well-bred girl, does not consider it appropriate to use personal names in relation to her family and friends, also after her marriage to Mr. B.

Richardson, as the editor of letters, introduced authorial commentary in order to explain some fragments of the plot. „Here it is necessary the reader should know that the fair Pamela's trials were not yet over" (Richardson 1972: 76). Volume one of *Pamela* ends with the list of moral instructions deriving from the lot of the novel's heroes. Volume two describes further experiences of the characters (Pamela as an ideal wife and mother) and ends with the epilogue, where Richardson presents their lives till the very end.

In Zatorski's *Przydatek...* the author's presence is differently marked. There are authorial prefaces before each volume. In the first, written on the 1st of April 1746, Zatorski explains what the letters should look like: „W Listach powszechnie, według należytych, na osoby, czas, interessu nature, wielkość, własności względów, te zachwalają przymioty; Łatwość, Krótkość, iasność, y naturalny iakiś, bez Affektacyi, bez wysilonych expressyi etc, Słów i Sensów układ; ..." (Zatorski 1746: 7)[1].

The preface before the second volume presents instruction for people writing letters. Besides, before each letter Zatorski explains its purpose and character and also informs about the sender and the reader, e.g.: „Respons Chlorydy, żal swoy nad tą oświadcza nowiną, uprzeymie prosi, aby niesławney dał pokoy Batalii. Natura listu płaczliwego" (Zatorski 1746: 89), or: „Rożyn chorujący pisze do Chlorydy. Listów

[1] „Generally in letters, according to persons, time, kind of problem and its importance, the following features are estimated: fluency, shortness, clarity and natural arrangement of words and senses, without affectation or artificial expression..." (Zatorski 1746: 7; all translations from Polish into English by the author of the paper).

takich natura ordynaryjnie zmieszana bywa" (Zatorski 1746: 120)[2]. It is clear that Zatorski as the author of *Przydatek...* manifests his presence more distinctly than Richardson in *Pamela*.

The essential problem, however, is the function of letters in both works and also the way in which plot and characterization are developed by means of letters.

In Richardson's *Pamela* the presence of the letters is emphasized by characteristic introductions and also by characteristic endings, e.g. „your affectionate daughter", „your dutiful daughter" and the like. Other letters are referred to in several letters, e.g.: „Well, I can't find my letter, and so I'll try to recollect it all" (Richardson 1972: 11). The style of Richardson's letters is natural, it expresses the character's emotions. It is, at the same time, full of tension. It happily avoids artificial phrases and explanations.

Even more essential than the above mentioned introductions and endings are the descriptions of circumstances in which the letters are written. Hence we have information about how Pamela writes, e.g.: „I broke off abruptly my last letter; for I feared he was coming and so it happened" (Richardson, 18), where she writes, when, who is going to deliver the letter and even how it is read (Edelson 1977: 14).

Similarly, and even more distinctly than Richardson, Zatorski marks the presence of letters by means of introductions and endings which are characteristic of the 18th-century style in Poland, e.g. „WMC Panny Dobrodziyki...", WMWMci Państwa Dobrodzieystwa sługa"[3].

At the beginning of the book we can find mostly Rożyn's efforts to gain the favours of his lady and of her parents. Rożyn's letters here are, obviously, very formal and affected:

> Nie dosyć na tym, Żem raz, szczerożyczliwym Nóg WMWMci Państwa Dobrodzieystwa Ucałowaniem, poważne Ich nieco tamować śmiał zabawy, ale też y powtóre, lubo wiernym, nie bez znaczney iednak Importunij, prawdziwie wdzięcznego Łask odebranych serca Oświadczeniem, Pańskie WMWMci Państwa Dobrodzieystwa Ręce, inkomodować się ważę... [Zatorski 1746: 10][4].

Quite different is the letter of Chloryda's brother and Rożyn's friend: „To nowa qwestya! piszesz, że siostrę moię estymujesz? a ia, ieżeli się nie mylę, rozumiem, że kochasz!" (p. 12)[5].

Even in the letters which are most formal, there are neither macaronicisms nor Latin insertions, contrary to linguistic usage in Polish correspondence of the early eighteenth century. Inversions occur fairly often and they give the letters a certain dignity („court style"); short interrogative sentences and exclamations are often used

[2] „Chloryda's response, where she expresses her grief because of bad news; kindly asks Rożyn to abandon that disgraceful fight. The nature of the letter is tearful". „Rożyn, who is ill, writes to Chloryda. Such letters are usually of mixed nature" (Zatorski 1746: 89, 120).

[3] „My Honourable Lady's...", „Your Honourable Lordship's servant...".

[4] „It is not enough that once I dared delay Your Honourable Lordship's serious occupations by sincere embracing their feet, but also, grateful for the favours I received, I dare disturb Your Honourable Lordship's graceful hands for the second time..."

[5] „That is a new problem! you are writing that you respect my sister, but, if I am not mistaken, I understand that you love her".

(Klimowicz 1958: 424). The circumstances in which a particular letter is written are more often explained by the author himself than by the persons writing. Still, in some letters we can occasionally find information about how and when they had been written. For instance, there is Chloryda's letter to Rożyn expressing her anxiety and grief that her beloved is going to take part in a duel with one of his rivals: „Listu mi doczytać nie przyszło; nie tak mdleć jak w tym punkcie umierać mizerney trzeba było, gdyby stateczna miłość, słabego dla Responsu niepokrzepiała serca" (Zatorski 1746: 88)[6]. This particular letter of Chloryda (vol. 1, letter 61), sincere and full of authentic emotions, is one of the most interesting in the whole book. Similarly the subsequent one, full of anger, as her beloved did not follow her advice: „Idź że! idź! strzelay się, biy, zabiyay! kul, oręży sama dosyłać ci będę..." (Zatorski 1746: 91)[7].

Equally interesting are Chloryda's letters written during Rożyn's illness (vol. 2). They convey genuine affection and concern: „Już Brat moy odjeżdża, list mu ten jak tak zakończony oddaję, co mi za nowinę przyniesie, myśleć nie mogę, czyli mię żywą zastanie, nie wiem" (Zatorski 1746: 130)[8].

Richardson stresses the presence of the letters in the novel not only when he gives them the proper epistolary form or indicates the epical situations, but also when he stresses their meaning as a factor determining the development of plot (Edelson 1977: 16). Often plot is centred around letters and develops with their direct participation: John Arnold whom Pamela strongly believes as a discreet deliverer of her letters to her parents, appears to be a traitor and each Pamela's letter is first read by Mr. B. Letters are forged (Pamela's letter to Mrs Jervis after her elopement); Pamela uses different tricks to get the writing paper from Mrs Jewkes. Her letters to parson Williams, who tried to help her, are hidden in the garden near the sunflower and Pamela uses all her cleverness to conceal them and to take them from there. When Pamela marries Mr. B., her letters become the object of admiration of neighbouring acquaintances, they are widely read and become public property. In the second volume Lady Davers, her husband's sister, is the critic and commentator of Pamela's letters. Pamela quotes some letters written to her by different persons in those to her parents.

In Zatorski's books generally letters are not actively involved in the action. Such cases are very rare. One of them is when Chloryda explains to Rożyn that his letters to her maid where he thanks the girl for her services are unnecessary: „Więcej ci się przyznam, że właśnie mię pieszczona iakaś listów Twoich bierze zazdrość, zwłaszcza, gdy do podobnej mię płci pisujesz" (Zatorski 1746: 159)[9].

Because in *Pamela* letters are the factors determining the development of the plot, they must be written frequently and they must describe all events in a detailed way.

[6] „I could not finish reading your letter: I'd rather die than faint at that moment, but my sincere love helped my weak heart to respond to you".

[7] „Go, go; shoot, fight, kill! I myself will send you bullets and armour...".

[8] „My brother is leaving now; I give him this letter, so carelessly finished; I can't think what news he will bring; I don't know if he finds me still alive when coming back".

[9] „So I must confess that I am jealous of your letters, especially when you write to the sex the same as mine".

Consequently, Pamela often writes long letters even in situations dangerous or very important for her; for instance she wrote six letters to her parents on her wedding day, which is rather improbable. Richardson tries to justify Pamela's habitual writing by her keen interest in it or by the need to pass the time, e.g.: „I must write, though I shall come so soon; for now I have hardly any thing else to do" (Richardson 1972: 62); „I will continue my writing still, because, may-be I shall like to read it, when I am with you..." (p.: 71); „Let me write and bewail my miserable hard fate, though I have no hope that what I write can be conveyed to you. I have nothing to do but write, and weep, and pray" (p. 82).

The last of quoted fragments draws attention to the fact that from the moment of Pamela's elopement to Mr. B.'s etate in Lincolnshire, she is not allowed any contact with the outer world — she cannot send her letters. In fact Pamela writes for herself. Letters become a diary, but still destined for her parents, full of phrases like: „my dearest parents", „my beloved ‚mother". Finally, it is necessary to mention letters written 'from one room to another'. Mr. B., coming to Lincolnshire, presents Pamela his written proposals of profits she could gain after becoming his mistress. Pamela answers negatively, in written form, too.

Zatorski's letters, on the other hand, are comparatively short and more seldom written than those of Richardson. Narration occurs very rarely in them, whereas Pamela's letters are exclusively narrative. Only on several occasions do Zatorski's heroes tell about something or quote somebody's words. Chloryda's handmaid writes narrative letters to Rożyn relating how she gained the lady's favours for him (Zatorski 1976: 17) or how Chloryda and her brother got rid of Rożyn's rivals (letter 51). The only letter that quotes a dialogue is the one where Chloryda's brother describes his conversation with their mother about his sister's future marriage with Rożyn. Zatorski himself writes about it in his introduction to the letter: „List Brata Chlorydy do Rożyna. Natura jego narratywy jest. Opisuje swoye z Matką negocyacye, matki affektu ku Rożynowi znaki i finalne skłonienie" (Zatorski 1746: 109)[10].

As a rule, a single letter in Zatorski's book concerns basically a single matter. Most often it describes the lover's state of emotions, expresses anxiety or jealousy. The letters of different persons most often include invitations, thanks, requests for explanations, reproaches or grievances. Each letter ought to be treated as a whole. Still Zatorski gives the impression that his heroine writes her letters unnaturally often. He finds for her a justification, like Richardson for Pamela: „Ale y to we mnie dziwne, że dokąd wolne miałam serce, dziwniem do pisania ciężką była. Teraz kiedym się w moim zakochała Rożynie, gdyby całe nad listami przesiadywać się mi godziło nocy, milszeybym a słodszey dla siebie mieć niechciała rozrywki" (Zatorski 1746: 67)[11].

[10] „Chloryda's brother's letter to Rożyn. Its nature is narrative. He describes his negotiations with mother; signs of mother's sympathy for Rożyn and final approbation".

[11] „But it is strange that as long as my heart was free, I was slow at writing letters. Now, when I fell in love with my Rożyn I could write letters all nights and wouldn't choose a nicer and sweeter entertainment".

Finally, Zatorski, like Richardson, introduces letters written 'from one room to another'. Rożyn stays with Chloryda and her parents in their house as her official fiancé. Being sure of his lady's feelings and of her parents' approval, he occupies himself a little with the books in his future father-in-law's library. Chloryda, jokingly reproaching him for neglecting her, invites him for a walk in the garden (Zatorski 1746: 142). Earlier, in the morning, both lovers describe their dreams in letters.

In the second volume of *Przydatek...* we find several letters written by Rożyn from his military camp. Here we learn at last that Rożyn is a lieutenant and is twenty-two years old. We never hear about Chloryda's age. About Pamela's age and occupation we learn much earlier. In volume two we can also find a series of Chloryda's letters, full of jealousy when Rożyn's friend, the father of two grown-up daughters, invited the young man to his house and kept him by force for over two weeks. It nearly resulted in breaking the engagement of Chloryda and Rożyn. There are also Rożyn's letters, full of despair caused by false news about Chloryda's death. At last, after long courtship, Rożyn gets a final acceptance from Chloryda's parents and the date of their wedding is set. Chloryda's mother then writes numerous letters of invitation to the wedding to her family and friends and also to Rożyn's parents. The second volume ends with Rożyn's letter 'from one room to another' where he asks for Chloryda's pardon if ever he offended her.

Piety is one of the essential features of Richardson's characters (because they are middle class and Puritan). Both Pamela and her parents, and the later 'converted' Mr B. as well, mention what great influence Providence had on their fates. Especially in moments of unhappiness they turn for help to Divine Power. But also all happy events occur with the help of God. Pamela writes: „Oh, how I blessed God, and, I hope, ever shall, for all his gracious favours to his unworthy handmaid" (Richardson 1972: 241).

We cannot admit, on the basis of what they write, that Zatorski's characters are equally pious. In one letter only Chloryda admonishes Rożyn that he should thank not only people but primarily God for his returning health after a serious illness (Zatorski, 135).

Beside the function of determining the plot's development in *Pamela*, letters, and especially the epistolary form used by Richardson, allow a detailed analysis of the character's emotions and direct contact between heroes and reader. There is also an impression of immediate transmission of information about the events (Edelson 1977: 18). „Because these [letters] are written 'to the moment', and not collectedly later, consciousness can be caught on the wing and one can discover things about the characters that they do not yet know themselves" (Richardson 1972: vi-vii). The character of Pamela is psychologically true owing to the letters written by her. Richardson presented all the subtleties of the heroine's character with detailed insight; all her modest and probably unwitting craft, resulting in her marriage to a wealthy landowner. Pamela is, however, the only fully drawn character in the novel; the remaining ones are merely sketches. One more characteristic feature of *Pamela*, typical of the middle-class Richardson, is his predilection for a detailed analysis of women's and men's clothes and a total lack of landscape descriptions. Despite all

deficiences we must certainly admire the intricately composed structure of the writer's first novel, resulting from the fascination with the epistolary form and also from his undeniable literary instinct (Edelson 1977: 19).

None of Zatorski's characters is fully developed. They are merely sketched. Still the most interesting person is the heroine. Several of Chloryda's letters reveal some essential features of her character: modesty, sincerity, tenderness. Though she is not a full personality she can be treated as an attempt at proper characterization.

It is certainly not difficult to accept the statement that Zatorski was not a great talent. His books were rather those of a precursor. He was the first reformer of the language of Polish love-prose. He also tried to broaden the Polish lexical system (Klimowicz 1958: 429).

In conclusion we might as well state that the similarity that can be noticed between these two epistolary forms while comparing some selected situations taken from *Pamela* and *Przydatek...*, may be exclusively accidental and resulting from the literary convention of epistolary technique. But though *Przydatek...* seems to be very far behind Richardson's *Pamela* considering the difference in culture and talents, we can positively assume that both those writers independently, became the forerunners of the new literary technique in their respective countries.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

URSZULA TEMPSKA

BACKGROUND AND SETTING IN THE *END OF THE CHAPTER* BY JOHN GALSWORTHY — AN ATTEMPT AT DISCRIMINATION

From the outset it would seem necessary to draw the definitions of the two crucial terms — „background" and „setting" — as adopted by the author.

„Setting" is a word denoting the location of a scene. It functions in the same way as scenery in drama, and it is this interaction between the chosen sphere of the physical world presented and the appropriate part of the action, kind of mood, types of characters, etc. that is essential for differentiating setting from background. Setting involves discussion in terms of the „intrinsic" relationships among the different elements of the novel (e.g. characterization, symbolism, imagery, distribution of tensions...)[1]. It is highly unique and works as a tool with which to manipulate the constituents of the novel so as to achieve the desired structure of the whole. The novelist, bound by the fictional elements mentioned above, adjusts his creation of the environment (the fictional world) to them in such a way that no incongruity, but a harmonious structure results, in which he is guided by the semantic organizing principle of the work[2].

Background, on the other hand, may be said to constitute an „extrinsic" aspect of the novel, providing the sense of history and a suitable social context. It may be defined as the setting of the novel at large, too. It seems more independent on the novelist, being more objectively verifiable at the same time. It is apt to be built, to a greater extent than any setting, of history and to be based on document. Naturally,

[1] The terms „intrinsic" and „extrinsic", the latter used below in the text, are meant here to parallel R. Wellek's and A. Warren's idea reflected in their distinction (to be found in their *Theory of Literature*, part 3 and 4) between „the extrinsic approach to the study of literature" and „the intrinsic study of literature". The two approaches seem to correspond to the inescapable duality of the nature of any work and any element in the body of literature. It is always self-contained and independent, an intrinsic category within the sphere of fiction, as well as compatible with and related to the objective historical world of factual experience. Thus the terms extrinsic and intrinsic are used descriptively, having been carried over from the sphere of method to that of the object of study — the text.

[2] For the explanation of the term „semantic organizing principle" please see: Zgorzelski, Krajka (1974, part 2).

the non-fictional historical elements do play their part in the particular settings as well, but they are not essential unless it is the author's intent to write a historical novel.

Thus the term „setting" will be used here to denote the spheres of fictional world bound to the respective scenes in a novel; whereas 'background' will emerge from all settings, and even elements not traditionally associated with setting creation, like dialogues for instance, as the physical, historical and social world of the characters in its fullness.

„Background", if one adopts this meaning of the word, seems to be an important carrier of what might be called a denotative function, i.e. supplying information about the world presented, which should be a plausible transformation of the world of experience, and thus forming a suitable, considerably realistic groundplane for the characters to act on. Settings, on the other hand, built up of the elements which are fundamentally a creation of the artist's imagination, contribute his x to the novel („A memoir is history, it is based on evidence. A novel is based on evidence or — x, the unknown quantity being the temperament of the novelist, and the unknown quantity always modifies the effect of the evidences and sometimes transforms it entirely", Forster 1962:53). Settings are consciously embossed with the object of serving and strengthening the effect of the novelist's design, and are therefore more likely to perform what may be called the esthetic or self-asserting function within the body of the novel[3]. Settings mean a lot. In this way setting becomes parallel to any other fictional element (imagery, characterization...) as a means at the novelist's disposal. It is not only closely related to them but also often overlaps with them.

A good novelist can manage to convey much of his own feeling for the place by skilfully handling his characters' subjective commentary, which also gives us the idea of what sort of people the characters are. We may detect their types of sensitivity, their tastes, frames of mind, and so on. The nature of the character's close surroundings may give us a metaphoric picture of his personality. Seeing one's home we learn about the inhabitant.

But as much as the surrounding is subject to people, it shapes them accordingly. In most recent fiction great cities often play the part of real characters in the sense that they physically and socially interact with the protagonists.

The landscape may be used to confirm our suppositions about the characters, to complement their characteristics, to illustrate their will or emotions, or even to evoke feelings within them and the readers. A relation of analogy or contrast is then introduced between a man and the elements of background. Some symbolist and naturalist novelists have mastered such use of character and setting in coexistence.

It is important to realize in what close relation setting is with imagery. The most common use of imagery is by writers who wish to draw a figurative parallel between the state of the characters and some quality of the external world, which is really what settings at large do. Elements of background and images are used illustratively to externalise the protagonist's dilemma, or transformationally — to stimulate him.

[3] The source for such naming of the two functions has been Chapter 3 of U. Eco's *Pejzaż semiotyczny*.

The nature imagery, which is equivalent to the natural settings, is most often used for the latter purpose.

The presence of some kind of setting and imagery and even the means used for creating it contribute to establishing a given type of narration and point of view. The fuller and vaster the setting is, for instance, the more omniscient and objective the narrator appears, and the more extrinsically-oriented the background.

While considering the problem of setting in fiction we must remember that it is dependent on two factors simultaneously — the nature of the genre as well as the epoch in which the work has been written. „In *epic*, G. Lucacs has observed, an enormous part is played by the physical being of men, by the natural world surrounding them, by the things that form their environment, etc." (Burns 1977: 284). Yet in some literary periods the authors af all drama, poetry and fiction felt more inclined to carefully paint the material world around them than their predecessors of followers. Undeniably, the romantics and the realists were more concerned with the world we humans live in than, for instance, artists of other periods[4]. One way or another, no novelist ever managed to abolish the „place" in his fiction, which is connected with the very essence of the novel, the task of which is to „evoke directly the full span of life" (Lucács 1969: 287).

BACKGROUND AND SETTING IN THE *END OF THE CHAPTER*

The trilogy *End of the Chapter* by John Galsworthy seems to be a suitable specimen to work on while considering the function of background and setting in the novel. A blend of technical skill and ability with some peculiar charm makes this novel, strangely untouched by the iconoclastic and experimental trends contemporary to it, both unique and pleasing in its familiarity.

The temporal and geographical situation of action of *End of the Chapter* is easy to be defined. September of 1927 and mid-August of 1932 are the terminal dates, opening and closing the action which never goes beyond central England. Yet it is the whole inter-war period that is bearing on the issue of the trilogy, forming its back-ground simultaneously (both literally and a literary one).

With the end of the World War I the prosperity and stability of the Empire were brought to an end and Britain entered a period when she would permanently verge on crisis. The Roaring Twenties with their dancing mania, alcohol cocktails drinking, jazz music easily accessible through gramophone records and, above all, the popularity of the cinema contributed to spreading popular ideals and fashions in all strata of the society. The foundations of mass culture were laid. The world began to accept the customs that had once been confined to demi-monde. This refers mostly to the Society, however. The lowest strata still suffered from unemployment or low wages. Their growing social and class consciousness found its expression in the General Strike of 1926 which abruptly tempered the euphoric mood of the time. A period of seeming prosperity and increasing speculation followed, but this relative prosperity was terminated even for the best-off by October 1929. The depression which started

then intensified in 1930. Unemployment was the most vital problem to cope with. The unemployed were slowly becoming unemployable, a vast part of the nation thus suffering from moral trauma. Eventually, in 1931, the National Government was brought to life, headed by Ramsay McDonald. By this time the British intelligentsia became more concerned with politics than before. The wild, boisterous spirit of the 1920's gave way to a new seriousness and sobriety. The positivist mood pervading the society found its expression in the growing popularity of Galsworthy (awarded the Order of Merit in 1929) which reached its peak in 1931 (after Laver 1961).

The years of growing international tension that followed do not belong to the world of *End of the Chapter*. The England of the Charwells was still a country of quietude, but a country open to change and discussion.

Only few of the innumerable historical facts of the time are recorded in the trilogy, like the election of 1931, the slump, and some minor events — the French painting exhibition, for instance. No mention is made of any organized class or social struggle. The general mood of the epoch, though, is certainly preserved. We know it is a difficult time. Dozens of remarks interwoven in the narration show us the reality of everyday life — trains emptied by the crisis, characters in search of jobs (be it Tony Croom, Miss Pole or Lady Corven), Dinny's financial troubles. We see that General Charwell is hardly able to pay his taxes and that Dinny contrives plans which would save the horses and woods of Condaford. But we also witness the appearance of the portable wireless in Condaford, a young couple travelling on a motor-bike at night, the modernization of London.

Life is going on and human civilization advancing. A sense of changes in progress and of some deeper transition is imbued in the text. The protagonists, for instance, are expected to solve the moral dilemmas which could not have been a matter of controversy only two decades earlier. Wilfrid Desert's apostasy, now subject to discussion, would have been undeniably ostracized had it occurred some twenty years earlier. The relativism and growing openmindedness of the time, the relaxation of the morals, originated in the iconoclastic 1920' s, reveal themselves also in the characters' frank conversations upon so-far ticklish problems of love without marriage, birth control, the problems of slums or religion.

> — Difference in religion is serious, Dinny, especially when it comes to children.
> — Why mother? No child has any religion worth speaking of until it's grown up, and then it can choose itself. Besides, by the time my children, if I have any, are grown up, the question will be academic.
> — Dinny!
> — It's nearly so even now, exept in ultrareligious circles. Ordinary people's religion becomes more and more just ethical. [1971:371]

The comparative scarceness of the historical material in the trilogy results from two reasons mainly. One is that politics is not the primary interest of the protagonists. Some, by nature or profession, are clearly apolitical (e.g. Desert, aunt Emily, Lady Charwell), and others exhibit only random interest in this field of their national and international life. But it is natural when we consider that the heroine is a girl of 24 and the co-actors are middle-aged or elderly people, their careers established, their routines long ago accepted, themselves submerged in the tradition-dominated, peaceful flow of life of the English upper-class type. In fact, the politically active stratum of English upper-class society is represented only by Michael Mont, Allan and Hubert Charwell, who appear only sporadically and never go beyond a rather vague expression of their general patriotism and pride to be English.

The majority of people inhabiting the world of the trilogy belong to the upper classes of British society, if not economically most prosperous, then „higher" in the sense of esteem traditionally assigned to the old aristocracy.

> As country houses went, Condaford was, indeed, oldfashioned, inhabited by the only country family who had been in the district for more than three or four generations. The Grange had an almost institutional repute. „Condaford Grange" and the „Cherrels of Condaford" were spoken of as curiosities... The Charwells, with their much deeper roots, yet seemed to be less in evidence than almost anyone. [1971: 720]

The Charwells and their kin have an inbred sense of tradition. They struggle to maintain the old splendour. Some can still afford hunting parties in the country estates, all have the habit of changing for dinner, and some hardly pay the taxes (especially from the second volume on, when they suffer from the disadvantages of the crisis). Yet, with no regret but optimism and industriousness, they adapt to the new world. Their main beacon, however, is invariably the family honour, inseparable from the good name of the British nation. The genuine feeling of pride of the value of their family, not hypocrisy, makes them hate scandal, and they often fight to preserve it in themselves as if finding in it the driving force of their existence. They are used to discussing politics, but are only emotionally engaged in it when it interferes with their personal or family affairs. They are not antisocial, yet. Dinny, uncle Hilary, Sir Lawrence are so concerned with current social problems that, if we find them representative, we must acknowledge that their species is far from egoistic complacency and self-indulgence. And, in that world of novelty, they are becoming archaic: „So far the sense of social service was almost perquisite of the older families, who had somehow got hold of the notion that they must do something useful to pay for their position. Now that they were dying out would the sense of service persist?" (1971: 648).

Another reason for the scarceness of historical data in *End of the Chapter* is its author's engagement in social issues of the country which, as in the case of the Charwells, was a factor compensating the disregard of political issues. Galsworthy's lack of enthusiasm for politics had been noticed by his associates.

Catherine Dupré quotes, in her biography of Galsworthy, his friends' astonished comments on his absolute indifference to the idea of political career, calling his social interest „unusual" and „strange". To any impartial reader of the trilogy, though, they must seem rather compassionate, full of understanding and keen.

After these generalising remarks on the background of the trilogy (the most Galsworthian and English part of the society) let us proceed to a discussion of settings as a means (for characterization, for instance) and not as an end.

In *End of the Chapter* a distinction may be drawn between a direct and more indirect characterizational use of settings, tantamout to the distinction between the direct and indirect characterization. Many times a matter-of-fact, objective descrip-

tion of the rooms or the clothes gives us an appropriate picture of the inhabitant or wearer. Thus, Dinny's room is referred to as conventual in its simplicity, while Diana Ferse's house in Oakley Street characterizes her as a woman of exceptionally good taste and sense of beauty. The tiny characterizing hints of the author demand no further interpretation on the part of the reader. They are direct and transparent and follow the pattern of human perception so closely that they seem our own observations. At times authoritative, they are always realistic and complementary to the picture of the person concerned. Here is an example: the house gives us a picture of its one-passion inhabitant, states his social status and virtually qualifies him.

„The Briery", Jack Muskham's residence at Lepton, was old-fashioned and low, impretentious without, comfortable within. It was lined with the effigies of race horses and sporting prints. Only in one room, seldom used, was any sign of previous existence. „Here", as an American newspaper man put in, when he came to interview the „last of the dandies" on the subject of bloodstock, „here were the evidences of this aristocrat's early life in our glorious South West. Here were specimens of Navaho rugs and silver work; the plaited horsehair from El Paso; the great cowboy hats; and a set of Mexican harness dripping with silver... [1971: 408]

The passage effectively introduces a minor character, but is not very challenging. Demanding more effort on the part of the reader is the characterization through setting based on suggesting the facts about personages or showing the background filtered through their eyes, emotions, intellects. And so Dinny is most desirable while wearing seagreen, which gives the readers some idea of her natural colouring and, symbolically, stresses her innocence. Clare's colours are black and white, which is adequate to her complex nature and vivid character. The subtle shades of Dinny's love for Condaford are implied through her changing attitude to it. Passages reflecting the modulations of her moods sketch her love for England, susceptibility to Nature, sensitivity.

The whole world seemed miraculous on a night like this, but, always the yearly miracle of apple blooming was to Dinny most moving of all. The many miracles of England thronged her memory, while she stood among the old trunks inhaling the lichen-bark-dusted air. Upland grass with larks singing; the stilly drip in converts when sun came after rain; grouse on windblown commons; [...] swathed hay meadows, taunted cornfields; the bluish distances beyond; and the everchanging sky—all these were as jewels in her mind, but the chief was this white magic of the spring... [1971: 402-403]

Her scattered remarks about London (e.g. „I think in London one loses the sense of proportion" — 1971: 299), about places she likes and those which she doesn't („No, not to the ZOO. I hate the cages" — 1971: 351) will complete her picture as a girl of slightly old-fashioned homeliness, loving peace and natural beauty, disgusted with the disorder which the modern world was bringing about, but understanding its advantages and able to think in a modern way.

The same relates also to other characters. Wilfrid Desert's zest for the East with its heat, exotic colours and smells, exemplifies his sensuality, his nomadic nature and a homelessness of spirit — especially when compared to Dinny's reluctance to leave England.

Particular elements of background are employed as litmus paper, too, to stress differences between people by showing their opposite reactions to the world (which also is a way to characterize them). Let us look at Dinny and Clare:

— It gives you a thrill. Are you as fond of home as ever, Dinny?
— Fonder.
— It's funny. I love it, but I can't live in it. [1971: 582]

The use of settings for strengthening desired moods and atmosphere, without exercising any decisive impact on the course of the action, is of a similar, static kind as in the case of their use for characterizational purposes. When it is employed conventionally and directly, there emerges an immediate co-relation between the stratum of background and that of the action. The hackneyed example is when the heroes' falling in love coincides with the flowering of spring. But the settings may also serve as foils to the characters' emotions, and when the contrast is deep enough it will enhance the tension and the pace of the action.

Examples are numerous of both categories. Certain places are more congenial for experiencing certain emotions as they guarantee a sense of balance (thus Condaford was for Dinny „too quiet for nerve storms or crucial actions" — 1971: 720). Galsworthy employs both cliches: combining fear, unhappiness and torment with the gloom of winter and bleakness of stormy weather, and connoting the feeling of love with the brilliance of sunny summer with its bright colours and blooming gardens. Yet, in some more interesting cases, the juxtaposition of the heroes' inner experiences and the physical reality gives a refreshing shock to the readers' attention and enhances the tragic aspect of the action, making it more dramatic and dynamic.

In the first of their own fields the hay was still lying out, and she flung herself down [...] she didn't cry but pressed herself against the hay-covered earth and the sun burnt her neck. She framed no thought, dissolved in aching for what was lost and could never be found now. And the hum of summer bees drowsily above her from the wings of insects drunk on heat and honey [...]. If she could die, there, now in full summer with its hum and the singing of the larks... [1971: 564]

There is burning emotion there. But settings may be used even more dynamically. The characters may be brought to significant conclusions, to far-reaching deliberations resulting from the stimuli in the external world. This walk through London streets was supposed to pacify Dinny:

A policeman reversed the direction of his white sleeves, the driver jerked his reins, and the van moved on, followed by a long line of motor-vehicles. The policeman reversed his sleeves and Dinny crossed, walked on to Tottenham Court Road, and once more stood waiting. What a seething and intricate pattern of creatures, and their cars, [...] fulfilling what secret purpose? [...] A meal, a smoke, a glimpse of so-called life in some picture palace, a bed at the end of the day [...]. The inexorability of life caught her by the throat as she stood there, so that she gave a little gasp and a stout man said: „Beg pardon, did I tread on your foot, miss? [1971: 298]

In these recalled cases no peculiarly individual treatment of settings was revealed. We have seen Galsworthy skilfully following the conventional practice: characterizing his protagonists directly and indirectly, strengthening the moods by ways of analogy or constrast, and developing his characters. But, at times, Galsworthy goes further than that — when he makes his characters anthropomorphize the world, for instance. This mostly concerns natural settings, which reminds us of the Romantic principle in writing. Yet, in other cases where natural settings appear, and these are

abounding, Galsworthy's nature is pastoral and idyllic, merry-English, or is an impressionist's nature. Here we have it at its most romantic:

> Night was a friend — no eye to see, no ear to listen. She stared into it, unmoving, drawing comfort from the solidity and breadth behind her [...]
> Nature! Pitiless and indifferent even to the only creatures who crowned and patted her with pretty words! Threads broke and hearts broke, or whatever really happened to the silly things — Nature twitched no lip, heaved no sigh! One twitch of Nature's lip would be more to her than all human sympathy! [1971: 567]

Apart from the constant presence of nature and its liveliness, another characteristic feature of settings in the trilogy is that the author imbues his settings with his typical, slightly ironic, but very English sense of humour. The incongruity arising from the contrast between the expectation of the reader and the view he is presented with is comic enough to lighten up the atmosphere and make one smile: „Long she sat half dressed, her hands clasped between her kness, her head drooping, steeped in the narcotic remembrance, and with a strange feeling that all the lovers of the world were sitting within her on that bed bought at Pullbread's in the Tottenham Court Road..." (1971: 367).

Although it is not the proper domain of settings to carry comic load, more cases may be found of settings employed to evoke humour and laughter. Often it is the characters' (and Galsworthy's) scrutinizing, sober look at the too-beautiful-to-be-true English scenes that brings the comic effect.

Two more things to be mentioned here are both typically Galsworthian and proper to the trilogy discussed. The first is that practically all characters in the trilogy show an uncommon concern for their physical surroundings, especially for nature. Their responsiveness to the natural world being far above the average, we suspect that either they are exceptionally sensitive, or that this love for nature is a mark of their class or nation. The latter impression will be strengthened when we realise that Galsworthy idealizes, not without hints of sentimentality, the rural aspect of life, and English life especially. In almost every element of any setting the English quality is underlined and lovingly exposed.

THE QUALITY OF GALSWORTHY'S SETTINGS

The variety and abundance of places appearing in *End of the Chapter* is surprising, but understandable when we think of the range of characters inhabiting the world of the novel. No wonder we come to visit the poorest districts of London, the Pall Mall residential areas, the cabinets of state officials as well as the average city homes, ruined country estates and peasant huts; parks, museum, restaurants, railway compartments...

The people we meet are mostly members of the modern urban society, so the number of city scenes is considerable. Their commonness, their objective, matter-of--fact presentation and connection with the routines of daily life of business account for the fact that the country scenes bear more emotional undertones and are more

important. The city exists in the novel, but rarely more than that. It serves man but also engrosses him. Heroes seldom seek it. More often they are tired and bewildered by its chaotic vitality, brutality, alienating noise and crowds. That is why they desert it in search of places which would bring them peace in the form of natural beauty and calm. They choose parks or countryside. „Ferse seemed asleep now. Surely his brain would rest from its disorder here. If there were healing in air, in form, in colour it was upon this green cool hill for a thousand years and more undwelt on and freed from the restlessness of man" (1971: 222).

In fact these two kinds of settings are clearly opposed to each other — the city and the countryside. The significance of the rural scenes for characters' lives is greater than their quantity might suggest. They involve more emotional engagement of the heroes and the narrator. Also the type of narration used for creating them is special. The detailed, realistic description gives way to an impressionistic vision, which is subjective, filtered and soft. „In the woods above birds rustled and chirped, on their way to bed. The dew had begun to fall, and into the blue twilight the ground mist of autumn was creeping. Shape was all softened, but the tall chalk pit face still showed white" (1971:225).

What we see here is in fact an example of setting working as a carrier of the theme, of the very general message of the novel. A sentimental sigh to „good old England", which seems to emanate from the whole of the trilogy, is most often found to be emitted by the narrator's and characters' musing on the now almost extinct idyllic rural yesterday and the common industrial and vulgar today of the country.

This emotionalism in the treatment of nature, the already mentioned anthropomorphism in relation to it, and Galsworthy's tendency to glorify the natural in contrast to the urban are supported by one more feature which adds to his „romanticism". It is his escapist tendency to avoid what is new, modern, technicized in favour of what is old and remote (equivalent, for his characters and himself, with the simple, more beautiful and better) — see Dinny's visit to the old peasants' cottage (1971: 187-189). Galsworthy also exhibits a load of sentimental patriotism which accounts for the fact that the descriptions of familiar countryside are so idealized that sometimes indiscriminate. Sweet Old England revives in these eulogistic passages:

> The trees were beech and ash with here and there an English yew, the soil being chalky. A woodpecker's constant tap was the only sound, for the rain was not yet heavy enough for leaf-dripping to have started. Since babyhood she had been abroad only three times — to Italy, to Paris, to the Pyrences, and had always come home more in love with England and Condaford than ever... [1971: 368]

Indeed, these romantic traits seem often too Galsworthian in the sense that they suit the author rather than the protagonists. It is his personal creed that constitutes one of the leitmotifs of the cycle. The recurrent problem in the trilogy, beside others, is that of an atavistic necessity of having „roots", of enjoying the sense of belonging to some particular part of the world, of having a spiritual home.

> Roots! That was what she missed in London, what she would miss in the open spaces. She walked to the bottom of the narrow, straggling beechwood, and entered it through a tattered gate that she didn't even have to open... She breathed deeply, and for full ten minutes stood there, like a watered plant drawing up the food of its vitality. [1971: 190]

Now we see how essential, in certain respects, is to Galsworthy the world around him. Yet it is his life story which proves to what extent he has projected his experiences onto his characters. The following excerpt comes from one of his letters, and not from his fiction:

> Why is it that in some places one has such a feeling of life being, not merely a long pictureshow for human eyes, but a single breathing, glowing, growing thing, of which we are no more important a part than swallows and magpies, the foals and sheep in the meadows, the sycamores, and ash trees and flowers. In these rare spots, which are always in the remote country, untouched by the advantages of the civilization, one is conscious of an enwrapping web or mist of spirit — is it, perhaps, the glamorous and wistfull wraith of all the vanished shapes once dwelling there in such close comradeship? [Dupré 1976: 217]

The passage speaks for itself. His sensitivity to nature, to the pure, the simple and the eternal is that of a man mature and experienced, able to appreciate the deeper sense of the charms in which the world abounds. All this reveals itself in the descriptive passages of the trilogy, which are not so much sensual, as most of all visual. Colours and light sketch the presented settings. The impressionistic presentation brings them alive and plastic in front of our eyes. They are filtered through the characters' eyes, souls and minds, and thus are suggested by a number of sense subjective impressions which produce a picture, or rather an emotion desired:

> and the idea came to her to steal round and see it all grey and ghostly, tree-and-creeper-covered in the moonlight. Past the yew trees, throwing short shadows under the raised garden, she came round to the lawn. [...] The moon flicked a ghostly radiance on to windows and shiny leaves of the magnolias; and secrets lushed all over the old stone face. Lovely! [1971: 308]

Indeed Galsworthy's settings are permeated with emotion, suggestive and real. Sometimes they even seem overdrawn as are one's memories of long-gone youth and happiness. Was it the novelist's advanced age while writing this trilogy of youth and first love that made the physical world in it so lively, appealing and so important?

Galsworthy's scope and attitude to the background and settings of his works was changing as his career was progressing. The comparison of *The Forsyte Saga* with this last trilogy of the cycle will show how the author's historical concerns were curtailed in favour of the social, or sociological ones. In the *Saga* kings pass away, workers strike and the wars trouble the Forsytes. Exact dates and facts are recalled, whereas *End of the Chapter* is more a psychological novel and a social history than a novel of manners. Families pass away, new people are born, people fall in and out of love, they strive to enjoy life. The historical background is represented here by the evidence that might be classified as the material culture document and sociological study rather than a chapter in a volume of British history. *The Saga* and *The Chapter* might be paralelled to specimens of historical and genre painting respectively, reflecting the author's aging, characteristically accompanied with the reflective mood and his growing concern for the generally human, moral and ethical rather than the historically changing, political and economic.

In both trilogies Galsworthy's accuracy in detail presentation, in filling the rooms, the streets or the fields with hosts of verisimilar, convincing, often topographical details without ever boring the reader, is remarkable. A careful reader is likely to be able to produce a detailed enough map of London — with its parks, museums, galleries, monuments, restaurants, pubs and names of streets at hand. This panorama of places of interest makes the trilogy an exciting guide book to London of early 1930's. Yet, most of its charm rests on the fact that, unlike a guidebook, it is not impassionate or photographic. It is full of living nature as it is full of people; it also is infused with a mood which differentiates this London and the vicinities from those of Dickens, Huxley or any other writer. The mood comprising the sense of loss and gain (we are shown England which will soon turn into a memory), melancholy and optimism, appreciating and loving, but not blinkered.

It is probably this fullness of view that leaves that „London and vicinities" as distinctly in front of our eyes as Hardy's Wessex, the Brontës Yorkshire, or Bennet's *Five Towns*. The world of *End of the Chapter* creates an impression of the reality fascinating because very special — so beautifully natural, so very English.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

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CULTURAL BACKGROUND IN W. S. MAUGHAM'S EXOTIC SHORT STORIES

The number of stories devoted to the distant Eastern and Southern regions speaks for W. S. Maugham's exceptional interest in the topic. Over one third of all his collected stories may be regarded as „exotic".

Maugham's concern in the subject must have certainly come from his personal experience in the regions described. Philip Carey — the protagonist of the highly autobiographical novel *Of Human Bondage*, in which the writer gave a faithful account of his life, frequently repeats his great desire to visit the countries which are described in the short stories.

Being a very active person, Maugham set on his first distant venture in 1916. In the course of an extensive Pacific cruise, he visited the South Seas Islands and the Malayan Archipelago — the two main regions he will refer to in his stories. He covered the same route in 1919 and 1922 only to return there once more in 1929. In 1936, on the suggestion of Rudyard Kipling, he went to the West Indies, however the literary records of the latter trip are less significant. In 1959 he made his last visit to the Far East (Raphael 1980: 45, 82-83, 110). All those trips supplied him with a bulk of „raw materials" which were later used in the stories.

A Writer's Notebook is a valuable record of Maugham's observations, and one may easily trace in it the descriptions of real persons, places and incidents which, transformed, found their place in the stories. The author openly confesses in the preface to this book:

> As I grew older and more aware of my intentions, I used my notebooks less to record my private opinions, and more to put down while still fresh my impressions of such persons and places as seemed likely to be of service to me for the particular purpose I had in view at the moment. [1967: 13]

The evidence of this statement is obvious. The description of Honolulu in 1916, with its Union Saloon, the Chinese Quarters and the Red Lights District is exactly the one to be encountered in „Honolulu". On another trip to Pago Pago he met the prototypes of the Davidsons and Miss Thompson from the „Rain". The bore experienced in 1922 in Sarawak is echoed in „The Yellow Streak". Several further analogies may easily be drawn, but the point here is to show that being a keen observer, an active

participant and a patient listener, Maugham gathered an immense material concerning a range of local inhabitants, their culture, customs and their tribal organization. The stories which emerged out of this experience constitute a separate cycle exceeding thirty in number. However, not all of them have been taken into account in the following analysis. A close reading of all the stories set in far-away regions, validated a selection of those in which certain moral, cultural, economic, and/or social problems are prominent. The stories in which „exoticism" is limited to the setting alone such as in the case of „Princess September" — an imaginative philosophical tale; or „Mabel" where the reference to China is strictly geographical, have been ignored. Eventually, only few stories escaped this classification; thus a wide selection of stories makes it possible to view the same problem in a different context as it appears in a different, unique situation.

One of Maugham's chief interests was in the position of the white European and American inhabitants in the regions presented. He presents an extensive gallery of colonial pioneers who, as Frederic Raphael has accurately noticed, carried their badge of nationality as a main piece of luggage (Raphael 1980: 110). Thus their response to the local realities of life seems a well justified starting-point for a further selection and an analysis of the stories. Accordingly, I have concentrated on the stories set in far-away regions in which the prominent cultural problems are viewed in the light of the white-native interaction.

The identification and assessment of Maugham's exotic stories is evident as the author meticulously described the setting. Actually, he never fails to pin-point the place of action geographically. Stories in which a direct and more extensive treatment of the culture can be found fall into two groups. The first may conveniently be labelled the Malayan group which term, from the strictly geographical standpoint, is only an approximation, as the territories covered in the narratives extend over the Malayan Archipelago, the Peninsula, and Burma (the only exception connected with this region being „Masterson"). The other group is kept within more rigid boundaries and may appropriately be described as Polynesian.

However distant the two districts may be they share certain features. The former is often referred to as a bridge between two continents — Asia and Australia, and thus the whole area is characterized by distinct transitional features, both physical and cultural. It is a place of different peoples with their distinct cultures, myriad languages and many regions. Throughout the ages the region has been subject to Indian, Chinese, Australian, Malanesian, and finally European influences, all successively contributing to its cultural diversity (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1966, 14: 686).

Singapore — the place most frequently alluded to in the stories, had been discovered centuries ago as a convenient place to stop at during the exhausting sea passages. In the story „The Letter" it is described as „the meeting place of a hundred peoples; and men of all colours" (1976: 861), and then a list of nationalities follows including Tamils (Indians brought to work on the plantations), Chinks (the most enterprising people, owners of shops and stalls), Malays, Americans, Jews and Bengalis.

A similar tenor appears in the description in „Honolulu": „Along the streets crowd an unimaginable assortment of people [...]. It is the meeting place of East and West" (1976: 63). The nations to be encountered are Americans, Kanakas, Japanese and Chinese. Even the considerable isolation of the little islands scattered in the middle of the Pacific Ocean did not prevent them from falling prey of the more venturesome nations. No wonder that the British and Americans (mainly dealt with in the stories discussed), with their high level of civilization, were present in both districts. As the writer says in the Preface to the fourth volume of his collected stories: „The British gave them justice, provided them with hospitals and schools, and encouraged their industries" (1963, 4: 7). In turn they picked up some local habits and manners. Unfortunately, there remained several points at which no mutual understanding could be reached.

In the following analysis the first three sections are devoted to the reciprocal influence of the coexisting cultures. In the final section the problems of religion and the impact of the white missionaries are discussed.

One reservation however, must be made at the very outset — the exotic culture never appears as the main theme in any of Maugham's short stories. Its function is only auxiliary. It serves as a point of reference, a detail in rendering the exotic milieu, a curious and an extraordinary motif which provides an exceptional event — an element of paramount importance to Maugham. However slight the references to the native culture may be, the total effect is that of its omnipresence, it permeates the atmosphere of the distant regions.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE EUROPEAN TRENDS UPON THE NATIVES

The impact of the European civilization, as presented in Maugham's stories, is very superficial. It is visible mainly in the outward appearance of the natives, i.e. their dress and manners. These were either enforced or adopted by the natives out of their own will and free choice, the latter being more common. The Malays, for instance, are remarkable for their relatively big flexibility. Thus being far from conservative, they welcomed changes in such realms as custom, law, medicine and dress, introduced either by Hindu, Moslem or European tradition.

In the story „Masterson" a subtle blend of the European and the Oriental is presented. Masterson's local concubine dexterously mixes cocktails and makes a good fourth to bridge, both skills being evidently European acquirements (1963, 4: 265).

A very similar motif can be traced in „The Fall of Edward Barnard" which takes us for a change to Tahiti — the island which had fallen prey to American influence. The picture presented there is that of American life stylized in the native manner. Arnold Jackson's daughter (a half-caste) appears as „the goddess of Polynesian spring. She wore but one garment, a Mother Hubbard of pink cotton, her feet were bare and she was crowned with a wreath of white scented flowers" (1976: 53). So far the description is kept well within the local mood — there appears the „lei" (the traditional Tahitan wreath), although Mother Hubbard is already a foreign innovation. However Bateman (a visitor from America) is „not put at ease to see the sylph-like creature take a shaker and with a practised hand mix three cocktails" (1976: 53).

One cannot help thinking about the modern commercials when reading the scene. Tahiti and Hawaii have been greatly susceptible to American influence being one of the states. The native elements such as fragrant „leis" and the „ukulele" music which attracted the tourists were purposely retained, but on the whole, the natives realized that tolerance, hospitality and cultural flexibility were most profitable.

Another beauty, this time from Malaya, appears in „The Pool". In this case the Samoan girl was induced to yield to strange habits through her marriage to a European:

> In her pretty pink frock and high shoes she looked quite European. [...] There was something extremely civilized about her, so that it surprised you to see her in those surroundings, and you thought of those famous beauties who had set all the world talking at the court of Emperor Napoleon III. Though she wore a muslin frock and a straw hat she wore them with an elegance that suggested a woman of fashion. [1976: 85]

The changes adopted by Ethel never went any deeper beyond the superficial appearances. Mentally she remained a true Samoan.

There is a single instance in the stories where European culture along with education might seem to be the aim of an ambitious native. „The Letter" introduces a Chinese clerk in neat white ducks who „spoke beatiful English, accenting each word with precision, and Mr Joyce (i.e. his employer) had often wondered at the extent of his vocabulary. Ong Chi Seng was a Cantonese, and he studied law at Grey's Inn" (1976: 824). Again, the amazing command of English and impeccable dress are superficial acquirements. The Chinese clerk proved by his treacherous actions on behalf of the native woman that he felt one with his people.

It has been already suggested that some of the changes had been actually introduced by force. The British missionaries had their visible share in changing the local customs. The Davidsons from „Rain" imposed rigorous discipline upon the natives, their judgement about the local customs was very severe. The suppression of „lava-lava" (a regional costume) and of the ritual dances were the main objects of Davidsons' destructive zeal during their mission work in the South Seas, although the inoffensive habits seemed quite reasonable to less prudish Europeans:

> „It's a very indecent costume" said Mrs Davidson. „Mr Davidson thinks it should be prohibited by law. How can you expect people to be moral when they wear nothing, but a strip of red cotton round their loins?"
>
> „It's suitable for the climate" said the doctor [...] „In our islands (said Mrs Davidson) we've practically eradicated the lava-lava. A few old men still continue to wear it, but that's all. The women have all taken to Mother Hubbard, and the men wear trousers and singlets". [1976:16]

A pair of conventional trousers is regarded to be a matter of crucial importance, as reflected in Mr Davidson's categoric statement: „The inhabitants of these islands will never be thoroughly Christianized till every boy of more than ten years is made to wear a pair of trousers" (1976: 16).

But the Davidsons miscalculated here. The natives remained inflexible. Ironically enough, Christianity had been exceptionally unsuccessful in the South Seas district, the influence in faith being mainly Buddhist and Moslem. The extent of European influence therefore appears to be extremely limited. Maugham seems to reflect in his

fiction what he had seen when he was travelling. Possibly it was still too early to expect more essential changes in the Oriental culture. Thus the natives presented in the stories were driven by mere comfort in adopting patent-leather shoes, ducks, singlets, Mother Hubbards, etc. External sources say that even religion would not restrict them in doing things which were at the moment convenient eg. the Malays willingly wore the wide-brimmed hats virtually forbidden by the religion, as the hats prevented proper bending during their worshipping of the Spiritual Father (Clifford, 1898: 65).

Another point which must be made here is that the locale of Maugham's stories is very restricted, accordingly the changes presented by him cannot be generalized. He deals mainly with the urban areas and hardly ever ventures to penetrate the nomadic tribes, and the life there went along quite different tracks. An official Smithsonian government report from 1943 on the contours of culture of Indonesia states: „seclusion of the district contributes largely to the significance of ethnographic studies in the region. Most of the interior regions have only recently been open up to outside access, many large districts still remain virtually untouched by European influence" (Kennedy 1944: 513-522).

THE INFLUENCE OF THE LOCAL CUSTOMS UPON THE NEWCOMERS

The influence of the local culture upon the British and Americans went along the same lines as those operating in the opposite direction (i.e. the outsiders influencing the natives). It was natural for the newcomers to adopt some of the local habits which were proved in the course of hundreds of years of practice and which made their lives easier. It was convenient for them to change into light native clothes after a hard day's work, just as Edward Barnard did: „They undressed and Edward showed his friend how to make the strip of red trade cotton which is called pareo into a very neat pair of bathing-drawers" (1976: 52).

The newcomers indulged in the refined local cuisine — „raw fish" and „sundry messes", although they did not forget about the nourishing bacon and eggs which, under the circumstances, were temporarily served with „paw-paw" (1976: 106).

Unfortunately some Europeans took up also some devastating Eastern habits such as smoking opium — eg. Grossely from „Mirage".

„The Door of Opportunity" provides the only instance in the stories of an active attitude towards the Oriental cultural heritage. The district officer and his wife took pains to learn the native language so that they could listen to original local tales. However, this example must not be overestimated; a reservation must be made that Alban and Anne were an exceptional couple; they were intellectuals too sophisticated to conform to the ways of the British community, and yet remained essentially British.

The prevalent attitude of the British is characterized by their inflexibility and conservatism. It is demonstrated by Masterson, Warburton from „The Outstation" and Lawson from „The Pool".

Lawson and Warburton represent the same type. They both dream of returning

to Britain, they treat their posts in the East only as temporary occupations. Being deeply rooted in the British tradition they cannot adapt themselves to strange conditions, Masterson dreams of being buried in an English churchyard. He says: „I want England with its grey skies and rain, with the rabbits to shoot, golf to play, a local club to go to, England with walled back gardens to grow roses in" (1963, 4: 267). The richness of the Eastern nature, profusion of game, splendid weather cannot obliterate his longing for the land he was brought up in, and Masterson pathetically states it in the words: „It's a dream if you like but it's all I have, it means everything in the world to me, and I can't give it up" (1963, 4: 267).

A similar nostalgia overwhelms Lawson who cannot bear the Samoan pattern of family life, the blood ties being all-important in social relations, great emphasis being laid on any degree of kinship: „When Lawson, after his work, went back to the bungalow he found it crowded with natives. They lay about smoking and sleeping drinking kava; and they talked incessantly. The place was grubby and untidy" (1976: 95). It was after his return to Scotland that Lawson realized that this was the only environment that he could peacefully live in. Life in Apia seemed then to him years spent in exile. „It was good to play golf once more, and to fish [...], and it was good to see a paper every day with that day's news" (1976: 91). A well-bred Englishman has some basic habits such as newspaper-reading, playing golf, enjoying his club, and he feels miserable when these are denied to him.

„The Pool" is also significant because it illustrates the exclusiveness of the two cultures. Neither Lawson nor Ethel was capable of surrendering.

The protagonist of „The Outstation" — Mr Warburton is the bulwark of British conservatism, priggishness, manners. His motto during all the years spent in Malaya was: „When a white man surrenders in the slightest degree to the influences that surround him he very soon loses his self-respect, and when he loses his self-respect you may be quite sure the natives will soon cease to respect him" (1963, 4: 340). True that he was uncompromising, true he was demanding, but he could be objective. He developed even some sort of affection for the Malays, he knew their customs, but his principles would not let him adopt them.

The white inhabitants, as compared with the natives, seem to be more reluctant in approaching the local ways. Aloofness and isolation helped them to preserve their uniqueness within the local masses.

THE SUPERNATURAL AND THE IRRATIONAL AND THE RESPONSE TO IT

The theme of the supernatural is explicitly dealt with in only two stories: „Honolulu" and „P&O", belonging to the Polynesian and the Malayan cycles, respectively. The story „The Taipan" dealing with mysterious visions and incidents is not analysed as no exact reference to local beliefs and practices can be found in it. It should rather be considered as a story of disturbed mind and coincidence.

A few words should be said about the beliefs in both regions. The supernatural elements were derived from the ancient pagan cults which persisted and strongly coloured the more recently adopted religions.

Native religion of Indonesia rests on three partly overlapping and partly independent sets of concepts: beliefs concerning magical power, spirits of various kinds, and ghosts of the dead. The most essential for the analysis of the stories in the concept of magical power which can be used for the benefit of its objects, but in emergency cases — against the enemies as well (Kennedy 1944: 513-522).

The Polynesians, due to their relative isolation in the past, also conceived most remarkable religious ideas. Important for this purpose is the fact that sorcery was widespread and sorcerers greatly feared.

Superstition, magic, supernatural powers are points where no mutual understanding is reached between the natives and the inhabitants of the civilized world. However, the local beliefs are never ignored or mocked. There are even moments when less credulous Europeans get the feeling of terror.

The Schooner's story from „Honolulu" starts with the narrator's presupposition: „It is a story of primitive superstition and it startles me that anything of the sort should survive in a civilization which, if not very distinguished, is certainly very elaborate" (1976: 63).

A jealous native shipmate, Bananas, casts a spell on his employer — Captain Butler — because he happens to be in love with the Captain's girl. For a civilized European a story of casting a spell upon an adversary, and making him suffer some vague illnesses is most amazing. Furthermore, the fact that the spell should have been broken by some disentchanting ritual must have been stunning. The narrator says: „I cannot get over the fact that such incredible things should happen, or at least be thought to happen, right in the middle, so to speak, of telephones, tramcars and daily papers" (1976: 64).

Yet the natives strongly believed in it. No one could have sounded more convincing than the girl who knew that it was truth, God's truth, and that the American doctors were helpless in the situation and the only help could be got from their native people.

A parallel situation is shown in „P&O". The European — Mrs Hamlyn — takes the supposed spell on Mr Gallagher rather lightheartedly. Even Mr Gallagher, the victim, does not believe it. Mr Pryce, a credulous little man, a simpleton almost, is the only one who shares the natives' view, but is scorned by Mrs Hamlyn who says that: „It's perfectly absurd [...]. Fat women cannot throw spells on people at a distance of a thousand miles" (1976: 744). According to a sane European opinion such cases should be dealt with by a doctor or a psychoanalyst.

Mr Pryce, however, is quite convinced that no white man's medicine can help. His attitude may indicate that beliefs in spells and black magic are current only among the people representing the less sophisticated mental level, which simultaneously explains the natives' faith in the supernatural. Nevertheless, the tension grows and no official acknowledgment is made, more and more white passengers who had lived in the East, produce, from the recesses of their memory, strange and inexplicable stories.

In neither of the stories an attempt is made to explain the irrational facts. Instead, a summing-up statement is provided in the description of Honolulu — the cross-roads

of the East and West: „All these strange people live close to each other, with different languages and different thoughts; they believe in different Gods and they have different values; two passions alone they share, love and hunger" (1976: 63).

A similar statement has been made in the story „The Schooner with the Past" dealing with the Malayan supernatural themes, where Hugh Clifford, a British Resident at Pahang at the end of the nineteenth century, concludes:

> I have no attempt to use the words of either of my informants, for the Eyes of the East and the Eyes of the West are of different focus, the one seeing clearly where the other is almost blind. No given circumstances have precisely the same value when they are related by a native or by a European, yet each may speak truly according to his own vision; and who shall say which of the two attains the more, nearly to the abstract truth? [1898: 68].

Some explanation for the inveteracy of those folk beliefs and fears may be found in the travel book *Bivouacs a Borneo* by a French scientist Pierre Pfeffer, in which an account of a meeting with a chief of a Borneo village is given. It is explained that since the whole system of power was rooted in the old religion, and made effective through religious taboos, the chiefs were personally interested in preserving them (1968: 161--162).

RELIGION — THE IMPACT OF THE MISSIONARIES

As early as 1901, when Maugham had not made yet any journey significant for his writing, he wrote the words:

> If the use of religion is to make men moral, and so long as it does this dogma is unimportant, it seems to follow that men can't do better than to accept the religion of the country they happen to have been born in. Why then should missionaries go to India and China to convert people who have already a religion that performs very adequately the chief function of religion? Probably few Hindus in India, few Buddhists in China are as moral as Hinduism or Buddhism would have them be, but that is no reason why they shouldn't be left alone. We all know that few Christians act up to the principles of Christianity.
>
> Or is it that the missionaries think that God will condemn to endless torment all who do not share their particular beliefs? No wonder they think you are cursing and swearing when you say, Good God! [*A Writer's Notebook*, 1967: 76-77].

This significant passage may be treated as the key to the problem of missionaries in the stories. The narrated incidents are by no means favourable to European or American missionaries. They are presented as narrow-minded, hypocritical, mean and aloof. The significance of the job they were performing in the colonies placed them in a privileged position. They imposed Christian doctrines on the people who had been happy in their own faith. It is sufficient to quote Maugham's authentic materials (*A Writer's Notebook*: 130) where he relates that even fights took place when the doctrines of peace and goodwill expounded by the missionaries happened to be questioned by the natives.

Missionaries had little respect for cultural heritage of the people they were converting and they effectively tried to stamp it out. They disregarded the old tradition, they were predatory and lacked tact.

Once again Maugham's record from 1916 relates an incident of a quarrel which arose over the matter who was to be ranked higher: the missionary's wife or the native queen. At the natives' support of the queen the missionary couple flew into rage: „they threatened to get even with them if such a slight were put upon them, and the natives, frightened, at length yielded. The missionaries had their way" (*A Writer's Notebook*: 129).

The same bitter tone is adopted in all Maugham's stories referring to the subject.

The Davidsons from „Rain" are a very supercilious couple. They would never condescend to mix with most passengers on the ship. They considered themselves superior in every respect to ordinary mortals. Macphail's remark about them that „the founder of their religion wasn't so exclusive" (1976: 14) hits the point formidably. The main task they performed in their district consisted of eradicating the comfortable local costume and prohibiting ritual dancing. In this respect they show themselves prudish and at the same time hypocritical, especially when one reflects upon Mr Davidson and the outcome of the unfortunate trip. Mrs Davidson's prudishness and hypocrisy are made evident the moment she confides all „improper" information about the sexual behaviour of the natives to Mrs Macphail, asking her to pass it over to her husband, as she considers it highly improper for her to talk with gentlemen on such subjects. Davidsons' extreme intolerance is given full vent in the case of Miss Thompson.

It is made plain that the missionaries represented a considerable power in the colonies. The Davidsons are a cunning team, and actually there is nothing they cannot do if they set their minds on it. They give a sample of their authority when talking of keeping order within their district: „There are one or two traders, of course, but we take care to make them behave, and if they don't we make the place so hot for them they're glad to go" (1976: 15).

Some more specimens of fervent Christians appear in the story „The Vessel of Wrath". Mr Jones and his sister were in charge of a Baptist Mission on the scattered Alas Islands. They were aided by the native helpers on the separate islands. The portrait of Mr Jones is given by the Controleur Mr Gruyter and is perhaps tinted with malice: „Mr Gruyter both disliked and respected him. He disliked him because he was narrow-minded and dogmatic [...] He respected him because he was honest, zealous and good" (1976: 233).

Being a zealot, Mr Jones destroyed the way of living of the native inhabitants of the islands, which had suited them for centuries. Jones appears to be an intruder and yet he has some merits; he was the only trained physician in the region and he did not spare himself whenever help was needed. Miss Jones proved worthy of her brother in every respect. She was reliable and efficient, daring and full of initiative. She would not spare herself either. Even in the biggest upheaval she would not forget the duties church imposed on her. At the dangerous venture to save the headman's life: „she had given medical care to such as needed it, she had strengthened the small Christian community in its faith, admonished such as were lax and cast the good seed in places where it might be hoped under divine providence to take root" (1976: 241).

It follows from the story that what the natives really needed were qualified doctors and nurses to take care of their bodies and not necessarily of their souls.

The most devastating direct criticism of the missionary proceedings is to be found, quite unexpectedly, in „Honolulu". On the round the town tour the narrator is taken to see the houses of the rich. A hundred thousand dollar mansion appears to belong to the Stubbses: „Old man Stubbs came here as a missionary more than seventy years ago [...]. All our best families are missionary families [...]. You are not much in Honolulu unless your father or grandfather converted the heathen!" (1976: 64-65).

The incisiveness of this statement is evident. It points to the mercenary motives of the pioneer exponents of the Holy Scriptures in the district. They were given the land by the local kings as a mark of esteem; and they bought a good deal more, cunningly concealing the motives under the guise of religion. Missions gradually became a profitable business. The father attended to his missionary work whereas the sons took care of the land. There is a great dose of resentment in the statement: „The fathers brought Christianity to the Kanaka and the children jumped his land... By the time the natives of the island had embraced Christianity they had nothing else they could afford to embrace" (1976: 64-65).

It is very characteristic of Maugham's presentation of the missionaries that he avoids discussing religion in the strict sense. No forms of worship are practically mentioned, there is no evaluation of religious dogmas. The author's attention is focussed on the white missionaries, not on their spiritual message. Maugham is an advocate of freedom of faith according to his creed recorded as early as 1894:

> The evidence adduced to prove the truth of one religion is of very much the same as that adduced to prove the truth of another. I wonder that it does not make the Christian uneasy to reflect that if he had been born in Marocco he would have been a Mahometan, if in Ceylon a Buddhist; and in that case Christianity would have seemed to him as absurd and obviously untrue as those religions seem to the Christian. [*A Writer's Notebook*: 26]

Evil hardly results from faith; it comes from people themselves.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of Maugham's presentation of culture in the distant regions once visited by him allows to draw some general conclusions.

The predominant position of the white inhabitants of Malaya or Polynesia is evident in this field of human activity. The separation of the two coexisting ethnic groups is visible except for some degenerated cases such as in the story „The Mirage". The natives, on the other hand, adopt the „civilized" ways not of true, deep conviction but for the sake of mere convenience. It clearly speaks for the author that he approves of such a state of affairs. The two races should keep to themselves trespassing upon each other's habits as little as possible. One may even venture a statement that Maugham's treatment of the natives' culture, customs and beliefs involves a great deal of acrimonious leniency of a sophisticated intellectual perceiving all the aspects of their backwardness. Thus the author understandably concentrates on the white representatives whose manners, motivation, mode of thinking are closer to his own.

However, it must be emphasized that Maugham does not explore the exotic culture

in order to draw any competent conclusions, which is hardly the function of fiction, although the information he provides is never erroneous, but with the object to discover extraordinary cases which would provide a good narrative material. Maugham remains a cool, detached observer, British to the bone, well remembering *The Arabian Nights* and such-like exotic books, only too happy to compose tales of his own.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

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ISOLATION AND LONELINESS OF WOMEN IN KATHERINE MANSFIELD'S SHORT STORIES

Mansfield's heroines are instinctual creatures motivated by complex emotions. There are women who go through life content to hold beliefs and persist in the modes of existence which have been handed down to them. Others are destined to find their own way.

There is a large number of women who differ from the average in the amount of suffering which they experience.

All women are threatened with suffering from three directions: from their own body, from the external world and from their relations to other people. They manifest a profound psychic discipline hiding their problems behind an ignorant, shiftless, happy-go-lucky manner. It is obvious, however, that the suffering coming from the last source is more painful than any other (Laing 1978: 39-65).

There are women who find a measure of safety and happiness in isolation; they consciously separate from others. For most of Mansfield's heroines, however, isolation is not a choice but a cursed destiny resulting in the feeling of loneliness. Loneliness means being deprived of love and understanding, suffering from the pressure of social alienation, a painful awareness of the worthlessness and emptiness of life. It is a self-defeating and self-destructive force causing the disturbances in emotional development (Szczepański 1978: 20-31).

Woman's need to be apprehended involves the general need to have her presence endorsed or confirmed by others, the need for her total existence to be recognized, the need in fact — to be loved. A successful relationship is the essence of life, an aim in itself: „Yes, that is the secret of life for me — to feel loved, to feel wanted" („Late at Night": 649). A woman desires an emphatic understanding of someone who can grasp what she is thinking and feeling: „There are relations, friends, heaps of them; but that's not what she means. She wants someone who will find the Beryl that none of them knows, who will expect her to be that Beryl always. She wants a lover" („At the Bay": 242).

Tragically enough, those women who are most in need of love cannot find acceptance, intimacy and understanding: „I had been most frightfully depressed [...]. I

felt as though I could not make up my mind at anything. I felt so terribly useless — that I had no place in the scheme of things — and worst of all, nobody, who understood me" („Violet": 599). Loneliness threatens woman's security, makes her helpless, weak, sad: „And suddenly I felt it was unbearable that I had no one to whom I could say, 'I've had such a dreadful dream' or 'Hide me from the dark'" („The Canary": 431).

A lonely woman is unable to deal with vital aspects of life. She is emotionally ill: „'Oh, how terryfying life was', thought Monica. 'How dreadful. It is the loneliness which is so appaling'" („Revelations": 195). A woman encounters the aching void in her personality with an awareness of nothingness, emptiness, and impasse. She tries to escape the painful consequences of loneliness but the feeling of fear would not leave her. The night covers up despair. During the day it is hard to steady the nerves: „Monica Tyrell suffered from her nerves and suffered so terribly that these hours were — agonizing simply" (p. 190). She grabs at anything to fill the blankness. However, being overwhelmed by anxiety from within she is unable to express her emotions which become destructive to her very self.

In order to exist a woman needs someone else to believe in her existence, she must be significant to someone else in whatever capacity. The necessity to love somebody is as strong as the desire to be loved: „'I loved him! [the canary] How I loved him! Perhaps it does not matter so very much what it is one loves in this world. But love something one must'" („The Canary": 429). The comparison of Lennie in „Life of Ma Parker" and the pet bird in „The Canary" may seem absurd but they both serve the same purpose. Lennie gives the meaning to the painful and obscure life of his grandmother: „And a little voice, so warm so close, it half stifled her — it seemed to be in her breast under her heart laughed out, and said 'I'm gran's boy'" („Life of Ma Parker": 306). Similarly, the canary is the only joy in the life of a lonely heroine: „Company you see — that what he was. Perfect company. If you have lived alone you will realize how precious it is" („The Canary": 430).

The pivotal point around which the two stories are centred is a hopeless alienation. Both of the women are old and when deprived of the objects of their love find their lives empty and petrified: „She had nothing. He was all she'd got from life and now he was took too" („Life of Ma Parker": 307).

Old women's loneliness in Mansfield's stories is extremely touching. Old age does not simply mean physical infirmities and decay; the loss of beauty, that concomitant of aging is what a young girl dreads: „And these pretty arms will have turned into little short ones. And you'll smile away like the poor old dears up there [...] And your heart will ache, ache" („Her First Ball": 342). However, what is really unbearable in old women's life is the cruelty and unscrupulousness of others. Even though they do try to be content with very little, they are forced to realize the full implications of their miserable lot; all they get from others is hostility and suspicion: „'That stupid old thing at the end there [...] why does she come here at all — who wants her? Why doesn't she keep her silly old mug at home" („Miss Brill": 335). They are deprived of happiness, subjected to despair and hopelessness.

It is not enough for a woman to see people around her. Even though she is a member of a certain social group she finds herself a stranger and suffers the anxiety of

alienation: „She imagined that all these people were laughing at her, more people than there were in the room even — all laughing at her because they were so much stronger than she was" („Frau Brechenmacher": 723). Very often, regarding herself as weak and others as powerful, not being involved in any kind of relationship with them, a woman intensely fears other people.

Even one's marriage and family which are expected to give a privilege of familiarity may turn out to be only formal relationships offering a kind of intimacy without warmth. A woman, then, starts to feel that she is set „world away" („Prelude": 25) from her family. Mansfield's heroines usually dream of a relationship in which each partner, while acknowledging the need of the other, feels free to be what he or she is by his/her very nature. As it is, many women have to face up the enormous limitations imposed upon them by marriage. They move from pregnancy through labour to motherhood and, usually, their real self cannot find expression:

> What you have been trying to do, ever since you married me, is to make me submit, to turn me into your shadow, to rely on me so utterly that you'd only to glance up to find the right time printed on me somehow, as if I were a clock. You have never been curious about me; you never wanted to explore my soul. [„Black Cap": 656]

The frustration of not finding happiness results in tension. In the absence of spontaneous, natural, creative relationship a sense of inner impoverishment, deadness, worthlessness and, above all, loneliness is developed.

Woman's feeling of being lonely among other people often results from her social alienation. The causes of her misery are of an economic nature. Many of Mansfield's heroines show the signs of extreme emotional disturbance. They are in a situation where they have to accept without demur the presence of inhuman, monotonous work, degrading poverty and powerlessness, mechanical and meaningless personal relationships. Their loneliness is the result of injustice or degradation. They can make no decision, are not supported by any relations and naturally enough they drift into poverty. Presenting woman living in oppression Mansfield conveys the idea of the relativity of morality. Her heroines are often driven to despair verging on insanity. Their morality is the morality of the starving, isolated organism: „I am cold. I wonder why it is that I always wake up so cold in the mornings now... It's because I don't have a good hot dinner in the evenings" („Pictures", 119). Deprived of opportunities these women are compelled to fight their own individual way of life if they are to survive. In „A Cup of Tea" a destitute young girl — a catalyst of the action — turns to begging, in „Pictures" Ada Moss is driven to prostitution. Their moral degradation is an outcome of the deplorable social situations of life.

The destructive power of loneliness and social alienation is best shown in the story „The Woman at the Store": „She was a figure of fun. Looking at her, you felt there was nothing but sticks and wires under that pinafore — her front teeth were knocked out, she had red pulpy hands and she wore on her feet a pair of dirty Bluckers [...]. Imagine being here day in, day out with that rat of a child and a mangy dog" (p. 564). The heroine commits a crime and this act is a very strong violation of moral code. What Mansfield stresses is the fact that mental and emotional health is impossible when society is governed by dehumanizing norms.

The best safeguard against the suffering which may come upon woman from human relationships appears to be a voluntary isolation. The happiness which can be achieved along this path is the happiness of serenity. Against the dreaded external world a woman can only defend herself by keeping aloof (Laing: 106-120). When she cannot feel at ease with others she has to resort to an elaborate game of pretence and equivocation (Goffman: 28, 83). She can be herself only in isolation, albeit with a sense of aloneness. The more introverted she is the more she feels the need for moments of separation from the external world. In this way she preserves her autonomy. It is „an inner necessity to go alone and return when she likes" („A Truthful Adventure": 544). The position of detachment gives her the opportunity of heightening and intensifying the awareness of her own being: „She remembered too how, whenever they were at the seaside, she had gone off by herself and got as close to the sea as she could, and sung something, something she had made up, while she gazed all over the restless water" („The Daughters of the Late Colonel": 284). It is in the world of natural beauty where the aloneness is desirable and where a woman can feel relief. Nature gives her the possibility of the individual, subjective vision: „'I shall dream away whole days', I thought. Take a boat and float up and down the canals or tether it to a green bush tangling the water side and absorb medieval house fronts [...] and look up at the elm trees — their leaves touched with gold light..." („A Truthful Adventure": 54).

Mansfield's woman, by her very nature, is not a solitary creature. Therefore, the efforts to realize her own personality, the attempts at individualization must include relationships with others. It is only when a woman may relate to other people fully and honestly that she is able to experience and express genuine emotions. She likes to feel that she is valued, loved and admired. She is afraid of being unnoticed and lonely. Loneliness is a curse for her. It is a limit beyond which she cannot go.

Mansfield presents the woman's world as a developing set of views. In this world feelings and relationships are of utmost importance; small incidents create the atmosphere of intimacy; love prevails over the wordly happiness — everything is truly feminine.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

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„THE LADY'S MAID" AND „OH, MADAM...": THE ART OF KATHERINE MANSFIELD AND ELIZABETH BOWEN

Anyone familiar with the work of Katherine Mansfield is likely to experience a mild shock when reading Elizabeth Bowen's wartime story „Oh, madam..." (1940)[1]. The analogies between the latter story and Katherine Mansfield's „The Lady's Maid" (1922) are too conspicuous to be overlooked. Both stories are narrated as dramatic monologues, both can be regarded mainly as character studies[2] of speakers who are devoted domestic servants, the method of characterization being indirect, the leading device being that of contrast with the selfish lady.

The concurrences can hardly be regarded as coincidental. Since Katherine Mansfield died prematurely in 1923 there can be no question that her story published eighteen years before „Oh, madam..." proved to be a formative influence with Miss Bowen who was eleven years younger, and whose literary start was accordingly later. To my knowledge, the latter writer never acknowledged any indebtedness in this respect. She was not likely to admit it even in relation to her less mature work than „Oh, madam...".

In her introduction to her *Early Stories* (1951: viii) Elizabeth Bowen writes that when she had completed the first set of her stories that were to make *Encounter*, she read K. Mansfield's *Bliss* with „admiration and envy" that were to be supplanted by „a profound dismay : I thought : If I ever am published, everybody will say I imitated her. I was right. This happened".

Miss Bowen did, however, pay a lasting tribute to her senior colleague in her

[1] The text available to me is that reprinted in the *Listener's* golden jubilee issue of 18 January 1979. All references hereafter are to this text.

All quotations from, and references to, „The Lady's Maid" are from the *Collected Stories of Katherine Mansfield*, ed. John Middleton Murry, London 1948.

Original ellipses in the respective texts have been retained while the omissions of my own are enclosed in brackets.

[2] In 1921 Katherine Mansfield described the forthcoming volume of stories, *Garden Party* in which „The Lady's Maid" was included, as „a collection of stories [...] of which several are character sketches of women rather like poor Miss Ada Moss in the story 'Pictures'" (*Scrapbook* 1939: 186, 187).

brilliant, penetrating assessment of her work in the introduction of the Vintage edition of the *Stories of Katherine Mansfield*. Her selection of twenty-six stories, which — she explains — was done with the object of presenting the writers's major stories, her „ways of seeing and feeling", „her supremacy as a story-teller" (Bowen 1956: xiii) and her artistic development, includes neither „The Lady's Maid" nor „The Canary" (the latter being K. Mansfield's last completed story), although both are fairly representative of the writer's sensibility and both employ the novel narrative technique to be followed in Miss Bowen's own „Oh, madam..."

Are these omissions from the Vintage edition purely accidental? Whatever the answer there is little ground, if any, for Miss Bowen's possible apprehensions that her wartime story might be regarded as a mere imitation of „The Lady's Maid".

It is true that the basic situation in both stories is essentially similar — it takes the form of a conversation between two women of which one is a servant the other the employer or the employer's guest, respectively. The rejoinders of the servant's interlocutor are altogether suppressed though they can easily be inferred from the servant's monologue.

Here the parallels apparently end since each pair — the speaking protagonist and her interlocutor — are distinctly individualized. In K. Mansfield's story the maid Ellen, solicitous for the visiting lady's comfort, finds in her a sympathetic listener. In Elizabeth Bowen's story the speaker is apparently an unnamed housekeeper who is welcoming her mistress on her return home, trying to accomodate the newcomer to the sight of her house which was badly damaged on the preceding night.

The respective settings of the two stories — or to use Bachtin's term — their respective chronotops[3], i.e., the timespace relationships, stand in sharp contrast to each other. Ellen's monologue has a quiet, comfortable scenery of the guest bedroom in the late evening (between 11 p.m. and some time past midnight), when, her duties being over, she can indulge in chattering to her kindly interlocutor. In „Oh, madam..." broad daylight (there is reference to the autumn sun) falls upon a scene of havoc in what used to be an elegant, handsomely furnished house — now with the ceiling partly collapsed, the plaster dust falling down and being blown in ceaselessly through paneless windows.

The form of the monologue in either story reflects its respective setting: the easy, leisurely pace of Ellen's garrulous account standing in sharp opposition to the housekeeper's hectic talk, frequently broken and interspersed by nervous ejaculations.

Moreover, the monologue is perfectly adapted to the subject matter of each story. In „The Lady's Maid" Ellen's gossipy tale starts with the eulogy of her lady, the news of some recent household events (the lady's mother's senile dementia and death), subsequently to enfold the maid's own life story. The housekeeper's monologue, though providing some backgroud information, is primarily a record of her emotional

[3] In his paper on froms of time and chronotop in a tale, published in *Voprosy literatury i estetyki*, Bachtin defines the chronotop as „the interconnection of time-place relationships handed in literature in an artistic form" (1975: 234). Translation mine after a Polish rendering of the text of this paper in *Nowy Wyraz*, No. 11 (1978).

reactions to the destruction of the house during the raid, to her mistress's homecoming, and the latter's decision to abandon the house to its own fate as she is immediately leaving for the country.

Both monologues are devised, each in its peculiar way, to expose the protagonist's character and thereby reveal the theme. In K. Mansfield's story this is achieved through the presentation of Ellen's blind, unswerving attachment to the selfish lady who accepted the girl's sacrifice of her personal happiness. The maid's story is rendered very moving by a careful selection of the crucial moments of her life, all of them being indicative of her miserable fate. We thus learn of her being orphaned at the age of four; of her brief stay with her grandfather and his cruel punishment of the little girl for snipping her hair off: he gripped her fingers in hot tongs inflicting a terrible burn; of the child working with her aunt who was an upholstress; of her being put in harness, at the age of thirteen, as her lady's maid; of her life's dreams twice frustrated — first, her greatest childish desire to have a ride on a donkey, and later, her prospects of marrying a young florist and starting a new, independent life — both marred by her employer.

The climax of Ellen's life story — the lady manoeuvring her to stay on with them and Ellen's dismissal of her fiancé — is made conspicuous also by virtue of its meticulous scenic presentation: she is returning to Henry his letters and presents, including the engagement ring: „'Take them all back', [...] it's all over, I am not going to marry you', I said, 'I can't leave my lady'. White! He turned as white as a women. I had to slam the door, and there I stood, all of a tremble, till I knew he was gone" (380). Ellen's anguish and bewilderment at his mild submission to her resolution — for even though she has rejected him she felt heartbroken and bitterly disappointed — are shown again in the scene as it might have been seen by a casual observer, and not by the girl herself; there is a mere record of her outward behaviour without the slightest reference to her emotional state: „I ran out into the road just as I was, in my apron and my houseshoes and there I stayed in the middle of the road... staring. People must have laughed if they saw me" (380).

Ellen has served her lady most devotedly, doggedly ever since: „You see, it's like this, I've got nobody but my lady" (376). Yet what prospects are there for the faithful servant? Her employer has grown old and may die soon and then the maid will lose her job, will become homeless and helpless since the future has nothing in store for her except old age and infirmity. Ellen is not unaware of her precarious position. On that very night when she saw her mistress lying back in bed she could not help observing that her lady looked exactly like her dear mother on the bier. Prompted by her thoughtful interlocutor she admits she has been worrying: „I sometimes think [...] whatever should I do if anything were to..." (376). But then she would instantly check herself chiding: „Thinking won't help. [...] Now then, Ellen. At it again — you silly girl! If you can't find anything better to do than to start thinking...!" (370).

In Elizabeth Bowen's story the development of action is also distinctly discernible in a succession of stages, each revealing the speaker's keen emotional response. The initial encounter with her employer evokes mixed feelings, chiefly those of joy at her return and, at the same time, those of confusion and perplexity how the mis-

tress will react to her home being ruined: „Oh, madam [...] Oh, madam, here you are! I don't know what you'll say. Look, sit down just for a minute; I dusted this chair for you. [...] This is a shock for you, isn't it" (104[a]). The housekeeper's growing concern and her anxious attempts to delay the moment of her employer's facing facts / „Oh, do *sit* a minute, madam; you look quite white. [...] If you'll only sit still, madam, I'll go and get you something. I know you don't take tea, not in the regular way, but it is really wonderful what tea does for you" (104[a]) / become palpable also to the mistress who insists on being shown round the house. The housekeeper cannot but comply — „Yes, madam, I'll follow madam. As you say, get it over..." (p. 104[b]) — and they wade through the plaster dust upstairs only to have a fuller view of devastation:

> The drawing-room? Oh, *madam*... Very well... *There*! I don't know what to say, really... You know, madam, I'd rather last night than to have to show you all this. [...] The window's gone — your satin curtains, madam! Torn and torn, like a maniac had been on them. [...] Yes, it did look worse — I swept up a bit in here [...]. I was really dreading bringing you up here madam. (104[b-c], 105[a])

The housekeeper is invariably protective — „you'll need your fur coat, excuse me madam, you will. There's the draught right through the house" (104[b]); „That's right, madam, turn up your coat-collar. The draught comes right through!" (104[c]) — and reassuring, her manner growing more and more optimistic — „I'll have it all [plaster and dust] off in a day or two"; (104[b]); „well, it might have been worse, mightn't it! when we just get the windows back in again — why, madam, I'll have the drawing-room fit for you in no time!" (104[c]); „The clock is going; listen — would you believe that? We mustn't be crying after the curtains, must we?" (105[a]) — until her cheerful outlook takes a daring turn: „now you're back — such a difference I feel! Hitler can't beat you and me, madam, can he?" (105[a]).

This is clearly the culminating point of the housekeeper's euphoria. Her mood changes diametrically as soon as she realizes that her employer is not interested in repairing the damages as she does not intend to stay on in the house. The climax is worked out elaborately so as to gradually reveal the lady's decision as disclosed by the housekeeper's reaction which takes the form of an emotional crescendo to be followed by a flat descent. Surprise („No such great hurry? — I don't understand — I — you — why, madam? *Wouldn't* you wish —" 105[a]), misbelief („You feel you don't really ...Not after all this" 105[a]) expostulation (*„But you couldn't have ever, not this beautiful house*! You couldn't ever..." 105[a]), and pleading („But, madam, this seemed so much your home —" 105[a]) are suddenly arrested by the employer's verbal reproof or an impatient gesture which instantly brings the servant to submission: „You must excuse me, madam. I had no right — [...] The whole thing come on so sudden. Why, yes, madam; I have no doubt that you should. It will be nice for you at her ladyship's. All that nice quiet country and everything. We should all wish you to be where it's safe, I'm sure..." (105[a]).

The climactic scene with all its vehemence mounting, as shown by disconnected, truncated, over-elliptical speech, marks the turning point. Its dull, benumbed sequel of routine behaviour is characterized by the conventional language: the longer, fuller, rounded sentences.

And yet what follows is hardly a quiet resignation (which is the case of Ellen's), though the tenor of the monologue is evidently subdued. There is still a faint gleam of hope that the employer's removal might be temporary („You mean for the duration"? 105[a]), only to be immediately extinguished, a disciplined reply following: „I see, madam, I am sure you'll only decide what's right. [...] but somehow, I never saw us not starting again..." (105[a]). There are still some recurrent, almost involuntary attempts mildly to plead for the house, yet invariably accompanied by an obeisance: „Look — there's not a mirror got cracked..."; „you won't find such good-fitting cupboards, not at her ladyship's [...] Your dresses, madam — I've been over them: not a speck. There must be some merciful providence, mustn't there?" (105[b]).

The proprietor will stay unmoved yet the most essential outcome of the confrontation is an emphatic reaffirmation of the housekeeper's loyalty to the mutilated house, her eagerness to devote all her energies to do whatever she possibly can to remove waste and dirt, to make the house more presentable before her notice expires. This declaration is firmly voiced in defiance of the employer's observation that the house may fall a prey to another bombing:

> I suppose it might, yes. Happen another night... All the same, I should like, if you didn't object, **madam, to stay on here for the month and get things straight, I'd like to leave things as I found** them — fancy, ten years ago. [...] I should prefer that, if it would suit you, [...] I've been through so **much with this place... In any event, madam, I should rather be here (105[a]).**

The sense of duty towards the house which, she feels, now commands her undivided attention, proves stronger than family ties. Twice reminded of her relatives with the implication that she ought to join them, or at least spend the night there, she chooses to ignore the hint. Naturally, she is anxious to know if her sister and the little house that has been their home have survived. She might pay a brief call to her sister's in Camden Town („just run up there for a minute this afternoon"), but her determination to stay on in the house remains unshaken: „That really is what I'd rather if you have no objection. [...] And I couldn't leave this house empty, the whole night" (105[c]).

It is eventually in her mistress's bedroom, after she has tried in vain to play upon her employer's heart's strings by repeatedly recalling the advantages of the house, that the housekeeper is overcome by emotion, hard as she is trying to control the tears: „Excuse me, madam — it's nothing, really. [...] I daresay I — got a bit of dust in my eye... You're too kind — you make me ashamed, really... yes, I daresay it's the lack of sleep. [...] I'll try a good nap. But to tell you the truth, madam, I shan't truly sleep till I've started to get things straight" (105[b-c]).

Like Ellen, she will brace herself up promptly, ready to fetch her mistress's trunks and cases to start packing. All the same her prime and final loyalty is to the house: „Lonely? No, no, *I* don't feel lonely. And this never did feel to me a lonely house" (105[c]).

Clearly, the movement of the action in both stories is directed so as to expose the central character and her sad plight. In both instances the employer is the chief agent responsible for the servant's predicament.

As far as characterization is concerned, the employer serves as a foil to the protagonist. In „The Lady's Maid" the employer's character is further contrasted with

the visiting lady who provokes Ellen's reminiscences. Elizabeth Bowen's portraiture retains the broad traits of Katherine Mansfield's characterization: the housekeeper is as industrious and selfless, as benevolent and tolerant of other people's weaknesses, as considerate of her mistress's comfort and prone to adulation as Ellen is; the housekeeper's mistress has proved to be no less exacting and selfish than Ellen's lady. She does display a polite interest in the servant's and her relatives' well-being (she has the advantage of being the housekeeper's interlocutor) yet her interest does not extend so far as to reflect what will happen to the housekeeper when her notice expires. Mindful of her own welfare she insists on the housekeeper's packing up everything immediately even though the woman is evidently at the end of her tether. Her conduct actually conforms to Ellen's lady's idea how servants should be treated, expressed — among others — in her parting formula: „Good night, Ellen. Sleep well and wake early!) (380).

Admittedly, Elizabeth Bowen's characters are more sophisticated — the housekeeper shows no traces of Ellen's naiveté and credulousness, her employer — none of the lady's bigotry and hypocrisy.

The technique of character drawing betrays a marked preference for indirect method in both stories. Whenever a direct statement is made about a character, be it the speaker herself, her interlocutor or some other character, it is almost invariably ironic. Ellen's appreciation of her lady's piety may serve as an illustration. She complains that her lady „won't have a cushion" when she prays, „she kneels on *hard* carpet" (375). So Ellen tried to „*cheat* her" by spreading out the eiderdown on the carpet:

> But *the first time* I did it — oh, she gave me such a look — *holy* it was, madam. „Did our Lord have an eiderdown, Ellen?" she said. But — I was younger at the time — I felt inclined to say, „No, but our Lord wasn't your age, and he didn't know what it was to have your lumbago". *Wicked* — wasn't it. But she is *too good*, you know madam"[4] [376].

It is hardly necessary to add that Ellen's „cheatings" and „wickedness" are manifestations of her affection for, or rather doting on her lady, a selfish hypocrite who was anything but „good" and „holy".

Similarly, we are not inclined to take the housekeeper's words at face value when she praises her mistress for being „brave" simply because the latter has compared the plaster dust to snow or when she thinks her employer is „very kind" or even „too kind" on account of her casual politeness. The same holds true of the housekeeper's description of herself as „funny" and „silly" when she actually refers to her attachment to the house.

Understatement as well as overstatement are instrumental in preserving an ironic distance in both stories. In „The Lady's Maid" irony is not infrequently allied to humour, as seen in Ellen's skirmish with her employer in the incident with the eiderdown.

Irony can also be linked to symbol which then works on different planes. Thus, e.g., when Ellen says that her lady „put her into collars and cuffs from the first" (378) she refers to the maid's uniform and duties. But „cuffs" and „collars" are also suggestive of handcuffs and metal collars which used to be forced on the limbs of chained prisoners and slaves and thus become the marks of Ellen's bondage to her lady. A similar implication is connected with still another meaning of the term „collar" — that of beast harness — a token of slavery and subjection. Significantly enough that connotation evokes another key image in the story — that of „lovely silver-grey donkeys" with their „neat little feet and sad eyes" (378). Ellen, then a teen-ager, was fascinated by the sight of the donkeys which, she said, haunted her day and night till she could voice her heart's desire. Again, by an ironic twist, the donkey image most aptly epitomizes Ellen herself, both on account of her position and her obtuseness.

[4] Italics mine — M. G.

Katherine Mansfield displays an amazing versatility in her employment of irony. In „The Lady's Maid" it functions also as the major structural principle controlling the handling of the theme. I would risk the statement that it is the imaginative use of irony, especially by way of distancing and understatement, as well as evocative language that relieve the pathos of the story and preclude its becoming too sentimental.

Ironic distance and reticence are largely characteristic of Elizabeth Bowen's story as well. Its uniqueness, however, derives from the imaginative handling of the theme which, as seen above[5], is not the same as that of „The Lady's Maid". „Oh, madam..." is concerned not so much with the relationship between a devoted, selfless servant and a selfish lady as with the housekeeper's allegiance to *the house* which once entrusted to her care has become the object of her love and pride. Miss Bowen's story evokes the vision of a solitary figure of the woman, staunch and undaunted, against the background of a dilapidating house deserted by the servants and the owner alike, only too eager to undertake the formidable task of reconstruction.

This lonely figure and the house are suggestive of parabolical and metaphorical overtones. There may be in the story some faint reverberations of the biblical parable of the people invited to attend the royal feast, with an aphoristic ending about many being summoned but only few being the elect.

Moreover, the text of the story seems to provide some verbal clues which point to the house being a metaphor. The phrases „this lovely house", „this beautiful house" (105[a]) together with the sentence „the house has been wonderful, [...] you really have cause to be proud of it" (104[b]) may echo the resounding cadences of dying John of Gaunt speaking of his beloved country in jeopardy: „This other Eden, demi-paradise. [...] This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England" (*Rich. II.* II.i.42, 50). The house is then a metaphor for England and this connotation is not out of keeping with the text in which the house is also referred to as home, the latter term also connoting the home country, the native land.

This connotation seems to be corroborated also by direct political allusions to England's arch-enemy in World War II, one quoted earlier[6] („Hitler can't beat you and me") and another in which the housekeeper epitomizes him: „He is a maniac, isn't He?" (104[c]). When we refer them to the early stages of the war („Oh, madam..." was dated 5 December 1940), and particularly to Winston Churchill's speech on Dunkirk:

[5] *Cf.* p. 66.
[6] *Cf.* p. 68.

„We shall not flag or fail. [...]We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be[...] we shall never surrender" (June 4, 1940) and his radio broadcast of September 11, 1940 („This wicked man Hitler, the repository and embodiment of many forms of soul-destroying hatred..."), the parabolical dimensions of Elizabeth Bowen's story can no longer be doubted. The housekeeper's defiance and resilience may as well stand for the spirit of national resistance, her earnestness and her sense of responsibility being the marks of sanity which is challening the fury of warfare and destruction.

This then appears to be the message embroidered upon the canvas of the familiar tale of the faithful servant. But should this reading be discarded, the story still retains its value as an imaginative treatment of the more pedestrian theme in terms of a penetrating analysis of the feminine sensitivity. Even this narrower interpretation cannot fail to recognize the younger writers' refinement upon the creative, innovating technique of Katherine Mansfield. Elizabeth Bowen's achievement then consists not merely in modifying the theme of the earlier story and giving it topical flavour, but above all in refining the uses of dramatic monologue.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

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ALLAN SILLITOE'S NIHILON*

1

When it was published in 1971 Alan Sillitoe's *Travels in Nihilon* was greeted as an amusing and entertaining novel. And no doubt, the incredible adventures of five reporters attempting to collect information to a guidebook of the strange and little-known country Nihilon, deliver unexpected thrills and emotions. Five independent plots of action constructed of many episodes meet only towards the end of the novel in order to bring all the characters together and to enable them to take a decisive part in the revolution. The plots parallelly narrated and unexpectedly broken at the moments of highest suspense in order to present the lots of the other characters, may encourage the reader to think that action is the element of major importance in the novel. This feeling may be the stronger as the action, full of tension and dynamism, takes place in different, seemingly casually chosen parts of the country which may suggest that the background is not fully developed.

But *Travels in Nihilon* is not an adventure novel only, since almost all the incidents in the first part of the book are ideologically marked implying a negative evaluation of the laws governing Nihilon. This is manifested by numerous acts of brigandage and hostility shown to the main characters by Nihilonian officials. To exemplify their attitude to the visitors it will be enough to mention shooting at Adam while he was crossing the border, stealing Jaquiline's luggage or forcing Benjamin to give a litre of blood according to the country's customs demands. As one of the officials said: „The fact is, no matter how much blood a person says he has we always take a litre out, on this route. We sell it to the Nihilon Blood Bank for use in our war against Cronacia. It not only makes us money, but it's patriotic as well" (Sillitoe 1973: 63).

Besides most of the events happening in Nihilon are determined by the very way in which the country is organized (eg. Smith's mishaps resulting from his not subordinating to the law that driving unless drunk was prohibited; Jaquiline's escape from obligatory medical treatment; Edgar's love affair with the ex-president's daughter and his subsequent engagement in the revolution).

The adventures of the reporters seem to exemplify particular spheres of the

state activities since, except for the detailed descriptions of Nihilon, much of the information about the country derives from the direct utterances and actions of the characters. Also the method of narration, that is the introduction of independent plots told by the main characters from different points of view allows Sillitoe to present many aspects of Nihilonian reality. All journalists, being specialists in different fields, pay attention to chosen problems which interest them. Thanks to such a narrative technique the picture of Nihilon is broad and comprehensive.

Finally the author's intention to write a guidebook („A committee of editors has decided to collect information for a new and up-to-date volume. [...] your Chief Editor hopes to complete the writing of this handbook when his five more active collaborators have come back from Nihilon itself" — Sillitoe 1973: 9) reveals that it is the functioning of Nihilon and not the adventures of the reporters which constitute the theme of the novel.

As has been mentioned above, the background in *Travels in Nihilon*, that is the state of Nihilon, often dominates, shapes and influences the experiences of the characters. The setting of Sillitoe's novel functions as „the massive determinant — environment viewed as physical or social causation, something over which the individual has little individual control" (Wellek 1963: 221).

The setting in Sillitoe's novel comprises many different aspects — from geographical and historical data to the social and political life of Nihilon, the two former only supporting or explaining the latter ones. But even though the detailed information sent by the reporters refers to many spheres of the state activities, Nihilon sometimes seems to be revealed in a chaotic and disordered way, and apparently the state itself lacks logic and coherency. Yet, this is only superficial for, as can be seen in the authorial comment („Man, by nature, is not nihilistic, and in order to make him behave and live in such a fashion, one can assume that certain „principles of nihilism" have been formulated by the one man who runs the country" — Sillitoe 1973: 10) the conception of this country had been carefully considered by its ruler. President Nil by carrying out the revolution, realized his theoretical ideas and incorporated them into the organization of the state. The President's method is not explicitly formulated in the novel, but can be reconstructed through an observation of the way in which the country worked.

2

Let us now try to reconstruct what Nihilon looks like and find rules governing its structures.

Nihilon is a capitalistic republic based on free competition with large areas of nationalization. Private shops, restaurants, bars and printing-houses determine their prices independently, without the interference of the state. Railways, airways and other transport are, however, state-owned. The state also has monopoly of the mass media. In fact this is all what can be learnt about the economy of Nihilon. Except for their own observations, the reporters had no access to reliable sources of information. Even scientific reports falsified real data:

> The columns of figures presented a dazzling picture of a nation set on such a course of economic betterment that it seemed destined to dominate the world. Every commodity for a firm industrial base was to be found in Nihilon, it was stated, from coal to bauxite, [...] though no one had ever claimed such a thing for the country before it went Nihilistic. However, the National Statistics Board of Mystical Nihilism (to give these voluminous reports their full title) acquired such deposits for Nihilon simply by stating that they existed. And so, in the imagination at least, as well as in print, they did. [Sillitoe 1973: 204]

In contrast much more can be learnt about the superstructure of Nihilon — that is law, ideology, education, art or science. But, as has already been mentioned, even these aspects of the state activities are often shown at random and incompletly. Despite this the superstructure of Nihilon is clearly constructed according to a logical overriding principle, a method which makes it possible to rebuild any state. The aim of this method is to make clear all the aspects of a state which enslave individuals.

This procedure relies on: a) isolating of particular aspects of the state's activities, b) subjecting each aspect to criticism and revealing the role it plays in constricting individual freedom, and c) embodying each negative aspect in such a way that it became perceptible to the inhabitants. In this article this method will be called The Principle Of Uncovering Contradictions (PUC). It should also be explained that the impression of chaos and disorder in Nihilon derives from the fact that this method requires each aspect of the state activities to be treated in isolation. The effect of such a procedure is as if several architects were to independently design different parts of the same building.

Let us now look at some chosen examples of how PUC has been applied to construct particular spheres of the Nihilonian superstructure.

The aim of ideology according to PUC is to explain and confirm the existing establishment and to prepare people to live in agreement with imposed social and political norms. Thus in fact it shapes and restricts the opinions and activities of individuals. Yet it is all done in the name of freedom and equal rights which are the main watchwords in most constitutions.

President Nil reveals how false and untrue these slogans are. What, then, can he do in his country to uncover this absurdity? He must build an ideology which by nature will remain a mechanism of constraint, which will still condition people and force them to behave as they are expected to by the rest of the society. Nil's ideology compels citizens to freedom, self-expression and self-indulgence. Yet, the president's „constant extolling of total freedom, of *compulsory* freedom, of nihilism, had only been a more through way of enslaving the population" (Sillitoe 1973: 258). This compulsion to freedom has changed Nihilon into a totalitarian country where internal police and all citizens „guard" the others' rights to self-expression. At the same time love, honour and honesty, which require civil responsibility and respect for the rights of others, are suppressed in this country for a simple reason:" Love and nihilism don't go together. Love is a threat to nihilism. It can be used by the opposition as a social force. Honesty, stability, all those terrible things stem from love. If you allow love, you get idealism, co-operation, affection. That would never do. Nihilism would rot under it" (Sillitoe 1973: 120).

The propaganda popularizing Nil's ideology is also aggressive. All Nihilon is covered with numerous slogans glorifying its system. Even if „one lands at Nihilon airport, being only permitted to approach at dusk, a string of immense and lit-up letters nearly two kilometres long spells out the coruscating message: NIHILISM WORKS!" (Sillitoe 1973: 9).

In the light of PUC foreign policy is nothing other than a cover for leading hostile activities against other countries. International peace treaties do not guarantee security, on the contrary, they are violated as soon as they become inconvenient for the stronger country. A declaration of war is usually a lawful justification for invading, killing and bringing disaster to other nations. Thousands of people die in the name of patriotism and peace, while in fact they fight to fulfil the ambitions and aspirations of their rulers.

Nil's foreign policy highlights all this. The relations between his country and adjoining Cronacia are hostile. Tendentious claims against Cronacia for all mishaps constitute a permanent reason for war. To carry on this perpetual war with open battles, assaults or rapid, unexpected attacks, Nihilon needs an army.

This army is formed in compliance to PUC. In Nihilon nobody doubts that one serves in the army in order to fight and die. Thus only geriatric soldiers are allowed to fulfil this „patriotic obligation". One of the geriatric soldiers stoically remarks: „in this country we don't send our young and able-bodied men to fight. Why should they waste their time? They are too busy working for Nihilon... Since the old have to die anyway, they are sent into battle" (Sillitoe 1973: 26).

When technology, science and education are subjected to criticism it turns out that new inventions and machines primarily serve the build up of arms and economic or political domination. For example very expensive space programmes for which people pay high taxes are said to bring direct results in agriculture, medicine and science. In fact all these benefits constitute only a tiny part of the interest, while the main attention is put on gaining hegemony and conquering space.

Nihilon is also engaged in a space programme. This programme has to serve propaganda directly, has to win fame for the country and cover its nihilism with glory. Thus it has to be exceptional and unique: the aim of Nihilon's first great space spectacular is a sexual link-up in space. The whole country works to this end — from the underdeveloped industry and the news that perversely and impudently sell the charms of that space programme, to the highly developed tax system depriving poor citizens of hard earned money.

Education in Nihilon is also formed according to PUC. It is made clear that the aim of schools is to prepare young citizens to live in the established social and political situation. Children from their earliest years are indoctrinated and brain-washed and all inclinations to independent thinking are smothered with astonishing precision. Thus schools kill the pupil's personality and replace it by a mass-consciousness. The education is devoted to injecting young people with nihilistic ideas and ways of life. As one of the members of the expedition comments: „In the country's schools history was scandal. Nothing else was allowed. Dates and facts were hard to come by. Political reality was out. There were only false accounts of drunkenness, greed, bribe-taking, murder, orgy, perversion, incompetence, blackmail and corruption" (Sillitoe 1973: 57).

Law, to Nil's thinking, is said to protect people and isolate dangerous individuals from the society. But in reality its main task is to guard the established order from inconvenient people who might challenge it. Nil decides to incorporate this aspect of the legal system in his country. He orders those citizens to be imprisoned who do not submit to his ideology. On the other hand all murderers and criminals are let free. The result is that the prisons are full of honest people rebelling against nihilistic rules.

In Nihilon more institutions function on similar principles. Nil, after having made a critical diagnosis of other states, strips away all appearences and exaggerating the negative tendencies, reveals their internal absurdities and the role they play in constricting freedom. Thus in Nihilon medical treatment, social welfare and social movements such as Women's Liberation are also distorted. The women's fight for equal rights leads to a total reversal of the traditional parts which men and women play in society. As one of the citizens notices:

> ... the women of Shelp were very revolutionary. They demanded equality with men, so we gave it to them — building, digging, driving, carrying, rowing, hauling. Now they are happy, because they are equal.
> — What about men? —
> — They are happy too. They sit in cafés, and work in offices all day. They are not equal with women, but they are generous and don't mind. [Sillitoe 1973: 41]

The whole plot of Edgar and Mella is an illustration of this problem and results from applying PUC to reshape Women's Liberation Movements.

President Nil claims that his country is nihilistic. There are many definitions and forms of nihilism. Most commonly it is described as a rejection of all or chosen groups of norms accepted in a culture. Thus the notion of nihilism is relative and can be defined only when referred to a specific context. It seems that Sillitoe's intention was to refer president Nil's nihilism to the norms accepted by the Western societies contemporary to the novel. But this idea of nihilism is not only a pure rejection and an attempt to create a society organized on the negation of commonly accepted norms. The nihilism results from applying of some sort of law which uncovered the modern society's inherent contradictions (PUC). All rules of Nihilon are in fact extrapolated absurdities and contradictions, normally carefully hidden but inherent in the Western societies of the sixties. Thus nihilism in *Travels in Nihilon* is a reaction against such appearancies as order, stability and good organization, in other words, against the ideology of the capitalistic state based on a free-market economy and excessive individual freedom. Benjamin Smith, one of the members of the expedition to Nihilon, a historian and politician, seems to be the only person in the group who understands Nil's ideas. He comments: „It may not be the finest of governments, but it was the best next thing to having no government at all" (Sillitoe 1973: 204).

As these examples prove the state and its functioning is neither an absolutly abstract, purely imaginary construction, nor a simple negation of existing states. It seems that the actual shape of Nihilon resulted from Sillitoe's applying some sort of law (called PUC in this article) to rebuild a contemporary state of the kind Sillitoe lived

in. Thus to find the principle organizing the setting in the novel it seemed necessary to contrast Nihilon with the functions of real states.

3

The above considerations have shown the working of PUC in *Travels in Nihilon*. Yet some questions should still be answered concerning the origin of the book's ideas. Why was such a principle employed by the author? As it can be seen these problems are related to questions about the meaning of the novel.

One of the possibilities of interpreting and understanding the meaning of the novel is to place it in a historical context. R. D. Vaverka analyzing Alan Sillitoe's fiction remarked: „Sillitoe's works have to be seen in relation to a given socio-historical context" (Vaverka 1979: 27).

The novel was written soon after the events of 1968 in the West and seems to reflect some of the tendencies in vogue at that period. The atmosphere and intellectual climate of those times are worth recollecting.

The sixties, and especially late sixties, were characterized by a series of explosive and spontaneous rebellions by Western youth. These outbursts of discontent surprised and frightened public opinion, particularly because a few years earlier the young had been considered as „politically passive". Even the left-wing „New Statesman" in 1967 commented on the youth's lack of political interest suggesting that this revealed their good judgment and common sense. As it later turned out this passiveness, caused by general apathy, was only a calm before the storm (Janicki 1972).

The sixties showed that the West could not solve its growing problems such as unemployment, poverty and both social and racial discrimination. Finally, American aggression in Vietnam demonstrated that Western governments were unable to deal with these contradictions within the framework of accepted social norms and had to resort to violence as both an outlet and solution. The accumulation of these problems broke down optimistic visions of the welfare states. This crisis partly caused the collapse of moral, intellectual and ideological values.

As usually happens young people, especially students, were hardest hit in this situation. They were, however, unable to formulate their protest in any coherent form. Their protests and demonstrations in 1968 only negated bourgeois complacency attacking consumerism, bureaucracy, the enslavement of people and a variety of other targets. Some of those involved indiscriminately rebelled against all institutions including governments and states. If the students found any real articulation of their protests and demands it came from „The New Left". Perhaps the most influential representative of „The New Left" was Herbert Marcuse with his *One-Dimensional Man* and *Reason and Revolution* (Janicki 1972).

According to Marcuse, man in society is never free because society has created many means of exerting external pressure upon individuals in various subtle and camouflaged forms. Society thus manipulates the needs and aims of individuals, so they identify their needs with those of larger groups. Very few people register this process, while the majority suppress their authentic needs and desires moulding them to those required by the society in which they live. Under these circumstances man becomes one-dimenstional. This one-dimensionality and the subsequent enslavement of the individual is the basic reason for conformism (Janicki 1972).

The reason for comparing Marcuse's ideas with those of Sillitoe's fictional character — President Nil is the fact that there ia s noticeable similarity between their basic criticisms and diagnoses of the Western society of the sixties. This assessment of society, resulting in the state of Nihilon, is crucial to Nil's political programme, and thus crucial to the sense of the novel itself.

Also both Marcuse and Nil stress the importance of setting people free, and not of the political or social aspects of living in society, which are so often essential to programmes of reform.

Yet it should be mentioned that further concepts of Marcuse and Nil differ in their conception of the shape of the future society. Marcuse maintained that the role of the young was to carry through the revolution and that the new society would construct itself naturally. According to him the passage from the old to the new would be analogous to the passage from realism to surrealism. In his ideal state an intellectual élite should be in authority, an élite which, at least at the beginning, would have to deprive society of individual freedom in the name of educating them (Marcuse 1972).

In contrast, President Nil follows a course reminiscent of the young Hegelians, especially Stirner (Janicki 1981: 23-25). Nil seems to believe that it is impossible to compromise between the existence of the state and the realization of absolute individual freedom. Thus he decides to replace this concept of freedom by psychological freedom, meaning that the individual is free only when he is aware of being constrained by social forces. This psychological freedom does not imply individual freedom, because mere awareness of one's restrictions does not set one physically free. But psychological liberation will diminish the enslavement of man by society. Thus the only freedom which Nil can offer is a psychological one. To achieve it he has to uncover the mechanism of social life which enslave individuals, make people „one-dimensional". Man should always be aware that society tries to shape his needs, ideas, emotions and expectations: it forces individuals to obey and submit to its structures. This is obviously absurd and a reversal of the purpose of society, which being an organization of individuals should function for their benefit.

In Nihilon this contradiction is made clear. Nil removes the mask of wisdom, dignity and solemnity from the mechanisms and institutions of other states. Now people can clearly see how absurd society is and this awareness should set them psychologically free.

Thus it seems that the method which Sillitoe uses in order to construct Nihilon (PUC) is inspired and partly based on Herbert Marcuse's diagnosis of the Western society of the sixties and on the intellectual climate of the time.

4

According to thematic definitions of the anti-utopia[1] *Travels in Nihilon* can be classified as a representative of this genre. Sillitoe signals the danger that had one of the rebellious programmes of the sixties come to reality, Western society could have been transformed into society similar to Nihilon. Sillitoe fears that the realization of such programmes could damage the existing social order. Their nihilism could cause economic chaos, while imposition of freedom, compulsory freedom could become a more through way of enslaving individuals, thus could result in totalitarianism.

But Sillitoe directs his criticism not against the attempt to reform Western countries of the sixties, but rather against some reactionary programmes which instead of introducing progressive changes only strenghtened the existing controversies.

Travels in Nihilon shows what „perfection" looks like when imposed on people against their will. This „height of perfection" means tyranny, slavery and anarchy. Yet, while many anti-utopias present a world stable, rigid and immune to change (Szacki 1980: 167-8; Zgorzelski 1980: 81), Sillitoe notices some chance in the strength and revolutionary character of the people and their anxiety for improvement. The citizens of Nihilon carry through revolution and the opposition, working so far underground, comes to power. But Sillitoe is not an unrealistic optimist. He realizes how difficult it is to change people's customs, morality and social knowledge which had been corrupting the minds of citizens for many years. The new order established by the revolutionary government reminds one in many ways of the previous one. The officials still rob people, but this time it is not called robbery but „officially removed".

> Officially, because there were no thieves now in Nihilon. Thieving, like nihilism, had been abolished. The state saw to that, because it had acquired total rights to both. In its benevolent honesty the government carried on a policy of „removals", not only to protect the people from the temptation of mass pilfering, which in Nihilon had always either been a habit or a temporary necessity, but also to make sure there was nothing left to pilfer. This system was known as „income tax". [Sillitoe 1973: 277]

Also the very revolutionaries and their ideas are ridiculed by Sillitoe and it is made clear that they cannot bring new, honest ways of life. As one of them says:

> The duty of a revolutionary is to keep alive, so that his ideas don't perish with his body. He gets his food where he can, how he can, and when he can. [...] I'll make a bargain by giving you my valuable ideas of honesty and cooperation, while you provide me with food till the revolution is over in two or three days. [Sillitoe 1973: 217, 218]

Thus though Nihilon is not a stabile country, the changes introduced by the opposition do not fill one with optimism.

The choice of a thematic definition of the anti-utopia and the author's main interest in extrinsic[2] problems of literature have been dictated by the explicit reference to the socio-

[1] M. Kwapień (1972: 47), „An anti-utopia is a literary work presenting in a variety of forms a negative picture of a social system, which may be observed by the author in the tendencies existing in the development of real societies".

[2] The term „extrinsic" is here understood as in Wellek and Warren (1963: 73-74).

-political situation to be found in the prologue to *Travels in Nihilon*: „Since most of the capitalistic freedom-loving nations are going in the same direction, we feel it our duty to show the truth of what Nihilon claims to have achieved by way of constructive nihilism" (Sillitoe 1973: 10).

Also political ideas reconstructed on the basis of the text unequivocally reminded one of the tendencies, intellectual climate and reformatory programmes of some of the Western philosophers of the sixties.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII
Wrocław 1984

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THE AMERICAN ABSURDIST NOVEL: COMING OF AGE IN THE SIXTIES

The absurdist vision — that in a meaningless universe, neither God nor man, theology nor philosophy can make sense of the human condition (Harris 1971: 7) — which becomes thematic in the absurdist novel, can hardly be called a „modern" vision. Yet in our modern world, a world which in the last decade alone has witnessed firsthand via the news media, wars in Southeast Asia, race riots and prison revolts, absurdism acquires a renewed presence. As Raymond M. Olderman writes, in our time

> fact and fiction constantly blur. In the past, science assuring us that the unseen is unreal, sanctified fact as the basic unit of reality. If we were to build a sense of the ordinary, we had to build it out of fact. Writers had to write from fact. But the growth of mass society, the increased discoveries about the world of the unconscious, and the supremacy of scientific relativism make us no longer sure that our own idea of reality will be recognizable to anyone else. Indeed, if we glance back and forth from the abyss of the unconscious to the daily passage of historical time, we can easily lose hold on the whole idea of reality itself. [Olderman 1971: 2]

This fine „fading line between fantasy and reality", to borrow Bruce Jay Friedman's terminology, presents a peculiar dilemma for the contemporary writer. As Philip Roth expressed it in his article, „Writing American Fiction":

> The American writer in the middle of the twentieth century has his hands full in trying to understand, and then describe, and then make *credible*, much of the American reality. It stupefies, it sickens, it infuriates, and finally it is even a kind of embarrassment to one's own meager imagination. The actuality is continually outdoing our talents and the culture tosses up figures almost daily that are the envy of any novelist. [Roth 1961: 224]

Contemporary novelists of the absurd begin with the same premise as the existentialists — that the world is absurd — but they are post-existential in their view of man, generally lacking the existentialists' faith in the human character (Harris 1971: 31). Existentialists from Nietzsche to Camus have agreed that no God exists; subsequently, man must rely upon himself in order to derive the strength necessary for survival. Nietzsche possessed such confidence in the individual potential that he could envision an *Übermensch*, a superman of Romantic proportions. Even Sisyphus, who had his perpetual rock to roll up the mountain, could surmount his absurd circumstances, deriving meaning from his struggle. „One must imagine Sisyphus happy",

concludes Camus. And Sartre insists that existentialism is a kind of humanism. For the contemporary novelists of the absurd, however, man is incapable of self-reliance[1]. Unlike the existential hero who was vis-à-vis an absurd universe, the contemporary hero faces an absurd culture which proves impenetrable to his meager energies.

In the existential American novels of the fifties, there was a widespread use of the mythic pattern of withdrawal and return — a pattern closely connected to American tradition, according to R.W.B. Lewis (Lewis 1955). Bellow's Henderson retreats from a world as actual as an aching tooth to the Africa of his soul and then returns via NewFoundLand. Cass Kinsolving returns to America from the Europe of his retreat in Styron's *Set This House on Fire*. Even Ellison's narrator tells in the „Epilogue" of *Invisible Man* that he is ready to return from his land of light bulbs, gin fizz, and holy Louis Armstrong to the arena of human responsibility (Olderman 1971: 17). The pattern is a variation on the one which Joseph Campbell, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, calls the „monomyth". It is particularly compatible with the existential vision and occurs throughout the fiction of the fifties. With the sixties, however, there is little of it. If there has been withdrawal, it has occurred before the novel begins, Raymond Olderman notes, and in most cases, „whether there has been a withdrawal is impossible to determine. The blurring of fact and fiction with its resulting confusion over the nature of reality is so intense that there is nothing very firm for a character to retreat from or return to" (Olderman 1971: 17).

Traditionally, a character's return from withdrawal is meant to symbolize his coming to terms with reality, his affirmation of life in this world. Such return and affirmation is a matter of personal choice in the existential novel of the fifties. But in the sixties man's power is reduced; he has no time to withdraw and ponder his decisions; he must stay rooted in the wasteland — in the system that attempts to deny his vitality — and concentrate all his energies on battling both himself and the mysterious powers that control him, thereby assuring himself that he is alive. While both visions recognize the need to be and thereby to affirm life and existence, the character of the sixties, unlike his predecessor of the fifties, cannot retreat to a fabulous land already and is „constantly assaulted by the fabulous nature of fact" (Olderman 1971: 16-17).

The treatment of sex, a result of the continued movement away from conventional realism[2], further distinguishes the novel of the sixties and the early seventies from the novels which preceded it. Most writers of the fifties handled sexual encounters with reasonable amount of fidelity to detail, though few ventured into realms as explicit or graphic as those explored by Henry Miller in his *Tropics* or his trilogy. Fidelity to detail was observed even in comic sexual treatments, as in Malamud's *The Assistant* and *A New Life*. With the sixties, sex becomes fabulous and absurd. John Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy* presents such diverse sexual encounters — man-woman, man-man, man-goat, man-computer — that the possibility of mature love seems as absurd as Barth's absurdist premise. Barthelme's *Snow White* treats a heroine with seven lovers, who engages in intercourse only while in the shower. A seduction scene in *The Crying of Lot-49* portrays a woman who dresses in so many layers of clothing that it takes her lover twenty minutes to undress her, enough time for her to take a nap. In Stanley Elkin's *A Bad Man*, Feldman, hardly relishing the thought of intercourse with his unattractive wife, laughs himself from an erection into an orgasm. In Kosinski's *Being There*, misunderstanding is the key to farce; Chance, not knowing how to react to EE's advances, explains that he would prefer „to watch". EE masturbates before him and later raves about his marvelously candid sexual attitudes, swearing that for the first time in her life she has experienced an „open" and „honest" sexual encounter.

[1] A possible exception would be Joseph Heller's Yossarian in *Catch-22*.

[2] Robert Scholes (1967: 11), writes that „the emergence of fabulation in recent fiction is not only an exciting development in itself; it also provides on answer to the great question of where fiction could go after the realistic novel".

While many of the characteristics of the American existential novel of the fifties, discussed by Ihab Hassan in *Radical Innocence*, still hold true for the absurdist novel of the sixties and the seventies — absurdity ruling human actions; lack of accepted norms of feeling or conduct to which the hero may appeal; opposition between hero and environment; mixture of human motives (irony, contradiction, ambiguity); impossibility of possessing complete knowledge — an essential difference between the visions rests in their respective concepts of resolution or reconciliation. For the existentialist, courage exists in the face of the void, and affirmation through commitment can resolve the dilemma of survival. For the absurdist, there is no comfort, no guide for coping; reconciliation with the elements of an absurd universe is irrelevant and certainly impossible. There is only one ultimate resolution, and it is not escape or even accommodation[3]; it is transcendent resolution of bare and simple affirmation of life over death.

Few journeys appear in the novel of the sixties. Settings are stationary, and a massive static institution or background has taken the place of the journey as a symbol for the obstacles of human experience. When there is movement, as in Pynchon's *V.* or Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, it is aimless, unproductive; the image conveys the fruitless comings and goings of modern man as opposed to the possibilities of moral growth and spiritual progress that are usually symbolized by the journey (Olderman 1971: 7, 15). The child narrator of Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, rather than gaining moral perspective through his journey, learns to master the evil practices of his environment and forsake the spiritual consciousness he once possessed.

Likewise, the once popular identity quest is muted in the novel of the sixties. Although individual identity remains a major concern, there is little of the „deep agonizing introspection, toiling anguish, and long-suffering posture that had been vital to the search for identity" (Olderman 1971: 15), even in novels as recent as Saul Bellow's *Herzog*. The hero of the sixties acts; for the most part, he spends no long hours in introspection but pursues his identity haphazardly through conflict with nearly everything and everyone.

In the absurdist novel, the ultimate absurdity of life is suggested by a series of

[3] Accommodation in this sense derives from Marcus Klein's usage in *After Alienation*. The term is different from what Ihab Hassan in *Radical Innocence* calls existential encounter and commitment.

preposterous and ridiculous events, by characters who — although described with apparent gravity — are distorted, exaggerated and caricatured, and by language which makes use of, to use Eugene McNamara's list, „lexical distortions, meaningless puns, and insistent repetition of empty words, clichés, exaggeration, deliberately misplaced particulars, and juxtaposed incongruous details" (McNamara 1968: 44-45). The reason for such comic exaggeration, or burlesque, in the contemporary novel is discussed by John Barth in his article „The Literature of Exhaustion". Referring to Jorge Luis Borges' idea that as far as fictional forms are concerned, „literary history [...] has pretty well exhausted the possibilities of novelty", Barth adds that „for one to attempt to add overtly to the sum of 'original' literature by even so much as a conventional short story, not to mention a novel, would be too presumptuous, too naive; literature has been done long since". Only two alternatives are left to the modern writer in search of original forms: he can give up writing entirely, the direction now being taken by Beckett, or he can employ the „exhausted" forms of the past, revitalizing them by ironic treatment. By consciously imitating a form the possibilities of which are seemingly exhausted and employing it against itself, the writer is able to present „new human work", whose ultimate meaning is new and different (Harris 1971: 23). Through the use of burlesque, American absurdist novelists, like all writers in the venerable tradition of burlesque, are able to reject traditional forms and styles while at the same time continuing to use them.

Parody becomes an important vehicle for the irony of the contemporary writer, extending even to the forms he employs. Kosinski's *The Painted Bird*, like Barth's *The Sot-Weed Factor*, is a parody of the picaresque novel. Heller's *Catch-22* and Purdy's *Malcolm* parody the traditional American romance. *Malcolm*, Barthelme's *Snow White*, and Kosinski's *Being There* parody the fairy tale, and *Being There* and *The Devil Tree*, along with several of Vonnegut's novels, particularly *Slaughterhouse-Five*, can be read as parodies of Utopian fantasy. Berger's *Little Big Man* (which also mocks the Western), Barth's *Giles Goat-Boy*, Vonnegut's *Mother Night* and Kosinski's *The Painted Bird* parody the heroic epic.

While burlesque and parody are hardly innovative techniques — as evidenced by such famous parodies as *Shamela* and Byron's „The Vision of Judgement" — the absurdists have given the traditional literary devices a new direction. As Robert Buckeye points out, burlesque is no longer directed toward the external world, but often becomes „reflexive in nature. [...] It is an irony toward [the novelist] as author, the value of art, the possibility of language". No longer restricted merely to literature, burlesque branches its ridicule out toward history (*The Sot-Weed Factor, V., The Crying of Lot-49, Little Big Man*), religion (*The Painted Bird, Cat's Cradle, Giles Goat-Boy*), philosophy (*The Devil Tree*, Barth's novels), and all other institutions which attempt to impose order on an absurdist existence. In such a world, „what better way to represent reality", asks Buckeye, „than [by] parody: to present a reality that is questioned by another..." (Buckeye 1967: 33-45). By turning art back upon itself, by confronting what Barth calls „an intellectual dead end and employing it against itself", the novelist achieves a viable art form, its „newness" lying paradoxically in its „oldness" (Harris 1971: 23).

Nor do the fictional characters escape the burlesque of the absurdists' pens. Both Eugene McNamara and Leslie Fiedler have commented on the resemblance of figures in recent absurdist novels to comic strip characters. Not only their „occasional obviousness and thinness of texture" (Fiedler 1968: 184) but also their very names suggest comic strip ideas and attitudes. Pynchon, in *The Crying of Lot-49*, presents an inept psychiatrist named Dr. Hilarius, along with Stanley Koteks, Genghis Cohen, Diocletan Blobb. Vonnegut's Billy Pilgrim quite naturally makes extraterrestrial pilgrimages in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Dr. Vox Humana is named after an organ stop in *Cat's Cradle*, and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater's* Diana Moon Glampers is a sixty-eight-year-old virgin. Kosinski, in *Being There*, portrays a character with no identity named Chance, and in *The Devil Tree* makes Jonathan Whalen a rich spoiled adolescent who is always „wailing" and bemoaning his personal misfortunes.

The use of two-dimensional characters allows contemporary novelists to emphasize the artificiality of their art. As Charles Harris writes:

> Their use of caricature also indicates their rejection of the assumption underlying realistic characterization that human beings can be accurately formulated. As aspects of a protean reality, human beings remain as illusive and as problematic as the absurd universe they occupy. By oversimplifying their characters in an exaggerated way, contemporary novelists of the absurd suggest the complexity of human nature by indirection. [Harris 1971: 27]

Two-dimensional, „comic strip" characters, which abound in the contemporary American novel, force a detachment on the reader's part, a detachment which gives rise to much of the so-called „black humor". When the reader is aesthetically detached and objective, he is able to laugh at events and situations without contemplating the cruelty and violence often found behind them. As Max Schulz writes in *Black Humor Fiction of the Sixties*, „as a term, Black Humor is vague" (Schulz 1973: 4). Olderman defines it as „the kind of comedy that juxtaposes pain with laughter, fantastic fact with calmly inadequate reaction, and cruelty with tenderness. It requires a certain distance from the very despair it recognizes" (Olderman 1971: 26). Robert Scholes adds that Black Humor is concerned „not with what to do about life but how to take it" and is closer to Swift and Voltaire than to anything in the twentieth century, except that it has none of „the scorn, resignation, or hope of reform that accompanies satire" (Scholes 1967: 43). Harris echoes Scholes when he states that „while the novelist of the absurd emphasizes the blackness of modern existence, the response he seeks is neither stoic resignation nor Camusian scorn, but laughter" (Harris 1971: 30). As such, Black Humor is compatible with both the absurdist premises and the fabulous tradition of the American absurdist writers.

Most of the significant contemporary American novelists — among them Barth, Kosinski, Heller, Berger, Pynchon, Vonnegut, Hawkes, Kesey, O'Toole, even Styron and Percy — consistently describe and depict the chaos and absurdity of modern life. It is obvious that the absurdist tradition in America, a tradition which continues into the decade of the eighties, has taken firm hold of the literary imagination. Or, as John Barth wrote in *Lost in the Funhouse*:

> No turning back now, we've gone too far.
> Everything's finished. Name eight. Story,

novel, literature, art, humanism, humanity, the self itself.
Wait: the story's not finished...

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

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KNIGHTS ABERRANT: KOSINSKI'S PARODIES OF MEDIEVAL ROMANCE

In the novels of Jerzy Kosiński, the existential themes, the characters who are seeking to retain some trace of human dignity and freedom or who are defined by the views of others, and the plots often criticized for excessive use of violence and sex are unquestionably reflections of and comments on the modern age. Yet, as is the case with almost all good writers, Kosinski is not without an awareness of the literary traditions that preceded him. It has been demonstrated, for example, that some of his material is influenced by Polish literature, and an understanding of these „Polish contexts" contributes to an appreciation of Kosinski's talent for transforming traditional material into something new and original (Tepa 1977: 52-61). As with any study of sources and analogues, the very nature of the changes or differences can be an important key to the meaning of the new work.

A reading of Kosinski's novel *Passion Play* makes it clear that he is consciously drawing on another body of material, the stories and the legends of the Middle Ages — particularly the Arthurian romances treating knightly deeds and the legend of the Holy Grail. Of course, it should not be surprising that so thoroughly modern a novelist would look to the past. As John Barth has said in his essay called „The Literature of Exhaustion", the parodying of earlier works is „about where the genre began, with *Quixote*, imitating *Amadis of Gaul* [...] or Fielding parodying Richardson". In fact, as Barth goes on to say, some modern writers feel that „for one to attempt to add overtly to the sum of 'original' literature by even so much as a conventional short story, not to mention a novel, would be too presumptuous, too naive; literature has been done long since" (Barth 1967: 33).

Although there is an apparent incompatibility between American values, particularly as Kosinski writes about them, and medieval material, such as the legends revolving around King Arthur and his knights, there are precedents for the use of this material by American authors. As early as 1848, James Russell Lowell wrote the narrative poem *The Vision of Sir Launfal*, which, despite its medieval setting, applies Romantic American values to the story of one knight's quest for the Holy Grail. Another poet, Edwin Arlington Robinson, has written three book-length narrative

poems based on Arthurian legend — *Merlin, Lancelot*, and the Pulitzer-Prizewinning *Tristram. Tristram* is a poem which focuses on the dreams of the central characters and through them comments on dreams in general and American Dream in particular. T. S. Eliot also uses Arthurian material, the Grail legend, in *The Waste Land* to point out the sterility of modern society.

Among American novelists, Mark Twain is the first to use Arthurian material in his *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*. Twain began to write a parody of the monarchal ideals presented in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, but his final product is an indictment of American capitalism as well as of British monarchy. In *The Great Gatsby*, F. Scott Fitzgerald makes use of the Holy Grail in a manner closer to Kosinski's use of medieval material. In *Gatsby* there is, of course, an American setting. Gatsby's pursuit of Daisy is, however, compared to quest for the Holy Grail. Nick, the narrator, observes that Gatsby „found he had committed himself to the following of a grail" (Fitzgerald 1953: 149). This and related allusions throughout the novel emphasize the irony of Gatsby's quest, for Daisy is unworthy of his devotion. She leads Gatsby not to great courage and virtue but only to the accumulation of wealth through shady deals. Gatsby's quest is thus an obvious perversion of the traditional ideals of the Grail quest as well as of the American dream.

Two serious contemporary novelists other than Kosinski have used medieval Arthurian material. One of these, like Twain, has written an Arthurian novel with a medieval setting. The other, like Fitzgerald, has made allusions to the medieval legends an important part of a novel set in modern America.

Thomas Berger's *Arthur Rex* is a retelling of the Arthurian legend which follows the traditional story fairly closely. There are, however, obvious elements of parody, as when Ygraine, pregnant with Arthur, desires „cutlet of griffin and roc's eggs" (Berger 1978: 14) instead of the traditional pickles and ice cream. On a more serious level, the novel parodies the illusion of perfection that Camelot so often implies and examines the nature of good and evil and the extent to which men's ideals contribute to evil in the world. For example, Guinevere, reflecting on the tragic downfall of Camelot, decides that it was caused by „men and their laws and their principles. And she wondered whether those who were not knights did not have it better, living according to their appetites..." (Berger 1978: 442). Thus, the medieval setting is used to present a very un-medieval theme.

The other serious contemporary novel to use medieval legend is *Lancelot* by Walker Percy. The title itself alludes to Arthur's greatest knight. The central characters are named Lancelot and Percival, and they act out a drama of love and strife and religion just as their counterparts in Arthurian legend do. However, there is an inversion of traditional material. Instead of deceiving someone else, Lancelot is deceived by his wife. And rather than desperately trying to preserve established society, Lancelot wants to do away completely with the old and begin anew. The priest Percival, on the other hand, experiences a crisis of faith and then, instead of seeking some mysterious and marvelous Grail, decides to go to a little church in Alabama, a return to simple religion.

A similar and fairly obvious use of medieval material can be found in two of

Kosinski's novels. One of these is *Passion Play*, whose title is wonderfully ambiguous. It suggests the passionate intensity with which Fabian, the protagonist, plays the game of polo. It suggests the games of love and sex that are played throughout the book. It also suggests the passionate creativity with which Fabian faces life. Kosinski says:

> He had acted always in the conviction that to master his life, to assert dominion over that indifferent span, what he must do was to shape it into drama, each scene so charged, so unrepeatable, that no interval could be permitted to divert him from the spectacle of which he was both protagonist and solitary witness[1].

And finally the title calls to mind the drama of the Middle Ages and the values and world-view of that drama which are diametrically opposed to the values and world-view of Kosinski's novel.

Fabian is presented as a modern version of the medieval knight errant:

> Erupting from a brake in the woods, Fabian's convoy could stir alarm and a flush of panic; people would halt at a distance far enough to take flight, yet near enough to see the figure of a rider framed against the trees, helmeted in white, booted in long sheaths of black and brown rising from the crested gleam of spurs to the armor of his knee guards, a black gloved hand curved about the poised lance of his long whip. [p. 36]

Later in the book when Fabian prepares for his deadly duel with Eugene Stanhope, each item of clothing and piece of equipment is described, just as the arming of knights in medieval romance is so frequently described in what often seems to the modern reader repetitious detail. And every stroke of the contest is recounted, just as a writer like Malory gives blow-by-blow accounts of knightly combats. In fact, the final image of Fabian is as „a man on a horse, streaming along the black strip of runway, the man's helmet, shirt and breeches all white, his horse black, the run of the horse unbroken, the rider tilting, as if charging with a lance, in combat with an enemy only he could see" (p. 271).

That enemy is anything or anyone that will restrict his freedom. It is, for example, Grail Industries, which would tempt him into the world of business. Thus Kosinski inverts medieval legend. The Holy Grail represents the most spiritual ideal. It is in various legends described as a plate or a chalice, sometimes that in which Joseph of Arimathea caught the holy blood as Christ hung on the cross and sometimes the cup which Christ used at the Last Supper. The lack of a fixed definition of the Grail implies that to the Middle Ages the spiritual significance is more important than the material form. Yet in *Passion Play* there is no spiritual Grail; there is only an obviously materialistic corporation with the name of the Grail. And this Grail is a temptation rather than a goal. It would provide Fabian with the stability and permanence that would, in turn, define him and thus negate his freedom.

The Grail allusion makes it clear there is a further irony to the medieval connotation of the title. Passion plays call to mind the suffering and sacrifice of Christ. Yet this is a novel without a god. And the medieval trappings are from the world of

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[1] Jerzy Kosinski, *Passion Play* (1979: 71). All references to *Passion Play*, as well as to *Perceval* and *Being There*, will be given in the text after the initial citations in the notes.

romance and not from that of the mystery plays. The point of this irony is that there is no salvation from above, no scapegoat to suffer for others. The individual suffering, the personal acts of heroism have no cosmic or universal significance. Fabian is on a quest for his freedom. Achieving the quest is a lifelong struggle which results only in his freedom. It does not change society. In fact, Fabian can achieve his quest only by alienating himself from society. Kosinski's knight-errant must also be a knight--aberrant. He can not, like the knights of medieval romance, fight to uphold the values of society since there are no objective values and the standards of society are precisely what must be fought against. It is only by being a loner and a wanderer that Fabian can maintain his identity.

The very fact that Fabian plays polo not as a team sport but as a one-on-one contest — that is, as a duel or joust — demonstrates his alienation. Before his contest with José-Manuel Costeiro, Fabian observes that Costeiro's placing of barriers on the polo field to hinder his performance indicates that Costeiro is „an exponent of the team mentality, which stressed the passing of the ball from one player to the next to achieve an uninterrupted flow in the game" (p. 77). Costeiro is undone by his own scheme because Fabian played with „an ambition to take each as an independent event, formally detached from what preceded it and from what might follow — the reverse of a group code" (p. 78).

In sexual matters, too, Fabian is aberrant. He has a fondness for young girls and transsexuals. His desire to tame and dominate women is the antithesis of the medieval love ethic. It inverts — the Middle Ages would say perverts — the standards of courtly love, whereby the knight serves his beloved and yields to her every wish. Even Chaucer's Franklin's more realistic solution to the problem of love and marriage — that a man should be a servant in love and a lord in marriage — is worlds away from Fabian's shunning of marriage and dominance in love, or, one might say, in „passion play". Only at the end of the novel when Fabian charges back to Vanessa's plane is there any indication that he may crave a somewhat more conventional relationship.

Even the structure of Kosinski's novel parodies medieval romance. *Passion Play* is clearly episodic, but the philosophic basis for this type of structure is totally different from the philosophic basis for the episodic nature od medieval romance. The Middle Ages believed that everything was linked in a cosmic harmony, Boethius's divine „chain of love". Thus, different episodes are ultimately linked because of the order of the universe. For Kosinski there is no ultimate order. Things happen at random. Kosinski's hero is not trying to work out his destiny. Rather, he is trying to avoid yielding to the concept of destiny or any other concept which would force him or allow him to end his struggle to main in his humanity in the face of the never-ending chance happenings one encounters. It may seem to others that Fabian is tilting at windmills, but for him the enemy is very real.

Looking back to *Being There*, Kosinski's third novel, with *Passion Play's* obvious parody of medieval material in mind, one can see that this book too gains a dimension by being read as a parody of medieval legend. One finds that there are a number of elements of *Being There* which are more specifically analogous to a version of the Grail legend than are the general allusions found in *Passion Play*. Chance, the main character of *Being There*, is a naif much like the title character in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*. Perceval has been raised in seclusion by his mother who fears that, like his father and brothers, Perceval will leave her to live the life of a knight-errant and that this life will be his downfall as it was theirs. Inevitably Perceval encounters a group of knights and determines that he too will be a knight. As he leaves the sequestered home of his mother to enter the real world for the first time, his mother advises him how he should act. Among other things, she instructs him how to treat ladies:

> He who wins a kiss from a maiden receives much; if she permits you to kiss her, I forbid you to take more if, for my sake, you are willing to forego it. If she has a ring on her finger [...] and if for love or for entreaty she gives it to you, it will be right and proper for you to wear her ring...[2].

Perceval follows his mother's instructions without fully understanding them so that when he meets a lady in a pavilion (which he initially believes to be a church because it is beautiful and his mother has told him that churches are beautiful), he insists on kissing her against her wishes because „my mother taught me to". After stealing twenty kisses, he also steals the maiden's ring because „My mother told me besides [...] to take the ring on your finger" (p. 19).

Later Perceval is told by a nobleman named Gornemant that he should stop saying my mother told me to do this or that. Gornemant also gives the young knight a new set of instructions, among which is the injunction to „Beware also of talking too much and of gossiping" (p. 35). Perceval then follows these instructions as blindly as he did his mother's, and this causes him much grief. For when he comes to the castle of the Fisher King where the Holy Grail is kept, he fails to ask the question which would cure his host and end the sterility of the wasteland his kingdom has become.

Kosinski's Chance also has lived in a sheltered environment. He has never been outside the house of the Old Man who raised him, and he has not even learned to read and write. But he does have two „instructors", his garden and television. Chance responds to questions in terms of the garden he has worked in. He is thought to be speaking metaphorically rather than literally. But Chance is not using the Book of Nature the way a medieval man might. It is only *by chance* that his simple-mindedness seems profound, and only because people are trying to define Chance according to their image of him that his ignorance is taken for wisdom.

Chance also has television as an instructor. It gives him his basic world-view. He believes that things will work out for the best because they do on TV. It also teaches him how to act in specific instances: „In deciding how to behave, Chance chose the TV program of a young businessman who often dined with his boss and his boss's daughter" (Kosinski 1972: 33).

Chance is catapulted to fame because of a series of „accidents" or „chance" happenings. Although he says that being struck by Mrs. Rand's car was „the first time in my life that I have had an accident" (p. 32), the reader knows that his very existence is an accident: „His name was Chance because he had been born by chance" (p. 7). Chance is brought into Rand's house, meets the President and is quoted by him

[2] R. Sherman Loomis, trans., „Perceval or the Story of The Grail by Chrétien de Troyes", in: Loomis and Loomis (1957: 17).

because of his „accident". His fame spreads even further when Skrapinov decides „to take a chance" and „include Gardiner's name in the speech that he was to deliver that evening" (p. 83). By the end of the novel, the simple-minded illiterate has become „the famous Chauncey Gardiner" (p. 85) and is proposed as a Vice-Presidential candidate because, as one of the politicians puts it, „Gardiner is our one chance" (p. 117). Thus Chance becomes what people perceive him to be. Like the people on TV, he is created and not a real being, as is indicated by the change in name from Chance the gardener to Chauncey Gardiner, a name that better fits the well dressed man that Mrs. Rand sees.

Perceval's rise to fame, though it seems the result of a number of chance encounters, is actually a working out of his destiny. Unlike Chance, he is what he is despite people's opinions about him. Sir Kay, who inevitably misjudges character in Arthurian romances, mocks Perceval. As Perceval leaves King Arthur's court, a maiden laughs and predicts his future reputation. Kay is angered by her laughing because Arthur's fool had often predicted that this maiden would „never laugh until she sees him who will win the lordship of knighthood". (p. 25). Kay strikes the maiden and kicks the fool into the fire. Shortly thereafter, the fool predicts that Kay will regret „his stupid, churlish tongue" and that he will be paid back for his insults to the lady and the fool by having his right arm broken „between the elbow and shoulder". The fool adds: „he can escape it no more than death" (p. 29). Of course, the predictions all come true because Chrétien's world is orderly, unlike the random world of Kosinski. Everything has a purpose in Chrétien's world. Even Perceval's suffering for not asking the appropriate questions at the Fisher King's castle, which seems arbitrary punishment for an honest, if naive, misinterpretation of good advice, is actually punishment for his sin against his mother who died of grief for him when he left her. And it is for this *reason* that his name is changed from Perceval of Wales to „Perceval the wretched" (p. 64). If it still seems that his punishment is unjustified, we should remember that in this orderly Boethian world bad fortune can be the most beneficial because it is not random but part of divine Providence. Perceval ultimately repents his sins and comes to an awareness of the world around him and of his responsibility for his own actions.

The very fact that Perceval recognizes a fault is significant. The curing of the Fisher King is something he might have effected. But this king is sustained by the sacred host, presumably until the Grail Knight does ask the correct question, so no ultimate harm is done. At any rate, a holy hermit gives Perceval a third set of instructions, which impart the most important knowledge — that his soul needs as much attention as his worldly pursuits.

For Chance, there is no final instruction and there never was any hope of effecting the cure of the terminally ill Benjamin Rand, whose sickness reflects not the infertility of the land but the economic woes of the country. There is, of course, no chance that Rand, whose illness is referred to over and over again, will be cured, especially by Chance, who is himself infertile. (We are told that „Though Chance prodded and massaged his organ, he felt nothing" and that „his organ refused to stiffen out; it gave him no pleasure at all" — p. 64). Nor is there any spiritual sustenance in Rand's house. There are merely the medicines that prolong his life, without curing

him. In fact, there is no Grail, no squire carrying a bleeding lance or damsel carrying the holy cup, as in Chrétien's story (p. 58). There is merely „the nurse with the injection" (p. 32). In what may be a foreshadowing of the use of the Grail legend in *Passion Play*, Rand's house contains all the material comforts that money can buy, but no Grail, no ultimate cure.

The fact that Chance *may* bring fiscal salvation to the nation as Vice-President is an indication of the gap between the medieval and the modern world. Rand's fate is not linked to that of the land, which may be saved even though he dies. But if it is saved, it will be totally *by chance*.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS
No 704
Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

MIROSŁAWA MAJCHROWSKA

THOMAS PYNCHON: ENTROPY AND MODERN MAN

The fiction of Thomas Pynchon, one of the major contemporary American writers, is a complex phenomenon. It is hardly possible to put a single label on it. One thing, however, seems to be crucial in considering Pynchon's work: Pynchon, more thoroughly and consistently than any other novelist writing in and about today's America, applies scientific concepts in literature. Among the scientific notions that Pynchon employs in his works entropy is of primary importance. It provides Pynchon with subject matter and also influences his mode of writing.

The word „entropy" was first introduced into physics. In 1865 Rudolf Clausius used the term while formulating his version of the second law of thermodynamics which is also called the law of entropy. Since that time, the concept of entropy has been elaborated by many specialists, and it may be defined in a variety of ways. In its most general sense entropy implies that in any *closed* system the most probable and irreversible tendency is from order to lack of organization, from logical and conscious diversity to sameness and monotony — the final state of entropy being inertia and death. According to scientists, the second law of thermodynamics applies to our universe. One of the definitions of entropy is the following: „the ultimate state reached in the degradation of the matter and energy of the universe: state of inert uniformity of component elements" (Webster 1966: 759). What it says is that our world is in decline and that one day it will perish althogether. Entropy then is a highly pessimistic notion and, it seems, this is what makes the concept so attractive not only to Pynchon but to many writers in the sinister twentieth century. Most of them regard entropy but as an adequate metaphor for present-day realities. Pynchon shares the above viewpoint; however, he never forgets that entropy is an actual law of nature. His fiction is rightly considered a bridge between the sciences and the arts, where metaphors blend with facts, where imagination and scientific knowledge are of equal importance.

In his works, Thomas Pynchon presents the contemporary world, and America in particular, as a system in which entropy seems to have reached its apogee. If, however, Pynchon's fiction merely pointed out to its readers that the world they inhabit is doomed, it would hardly be original: by now, few people believe that matter will continue endlessly. The operation of various processes, including entropy, causes a relati-

vely slow but gradual disintegration of the physical universe. Pynchon differs from scientists in that he sees the day of doom close at hand and not millions of years ahead of us. The blame for the rapid increase in the world's entropy in recent times lies, according to Pynchon, with contemporary people.

Although entropy is considered applicable to the universe, man is said to be unaffected by it. In his illuminative book *The Human Use of Human Beings*, Professor Norbert Wiener convincingly argues that man cannot be subject to the second law of thermodynamics since he is not an isolated system: „we take in food, which generates energy [...] But even more important is the fact that we take in information through our sense organs, and we act on information received" (1956: 28). Being intelligent, having his dignity, and, above all, capable of communication, man acts upon his environment so as to increase organization around him. The eventual annihilation of the world is, in accordance with the law, inevitable, but as Professor Wiener insists, man postpones the final destruction by creating „local enclaves" in which „life finds its home".

Pynchon's basic assumption is like that of Wiener's. He believes that powerful as the second law of thermodynamics is, its operation can be reversed by human beings. Whether or not men succeed in resisting entropy — either on a personal or general scale — depends upon the approach they take towards the law. The primary objective of the present paper is a brief examination of possible alternatives that are revealed by Pynchon's characters — some of them absurd figures as they certainly are. We shall also try to show that Pynchon allows far less optimism than many distinguished critics grant him with. For the purposes of the present paper three of Pynchon's works have been selected: the short story „Entropy" and two novels — *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*[1].

The second law of thermodynamics has been introduced to Pynchon's fiction with the publication of „Entropy". The situation in the story is as follows. A third-floor apartment in one of the houses in Washington, D.C., is inhabited by Meatball Mulligan, who is holding a lease-breaking party. One floor up lives Callisto with his girl-friend, Aubade. There are two intermingled plots in the story: one deals with the events downstairs, the other shows the development of the situation upstairs. Each of the plots illustrates a different aspect of the law of entropy. Entropy is understood as a measure of disorganization within a system whose elements begin to move in a more and more chaotic way as energy is dispersed more and more at random. This aspect of the law is reflected in the plot which takes place downstairs. But entropy is also a measure of sameness and uniformity in a system whose elements lack diversity; such a system is „orderly" in an entropic sense. The latter manifestation of the second law of thermodynamics is illustrated with what happens in the upstairs apartment.

Only two of the characters who appear in the story are fully conscious of the existence of the law of entropy — Callisto himself and Saul, one of Meatball's guests. Their reactions to the law and its symptoms differ widely. Saul comes to the party

[1] In parenthetical references we shall abbreviate *Entropy* as *E* and *The Crying of Lot 49* as *CL49*.

right after a quarrel with his wife, Miriam. His appearance is crucial to the story's structure because he introduces a new human sphere in which the workings of entropy are to be found — communication. Ironically, Saul, an expert in information theory, cannot communicate with his own wife. He is a cold intellectual whose morals are derived from the *Handbook of Chemistry and Physics*. Miriam rejects the scientific principles which Saul consciously accepts and tries to employ in his life. Embodying the Virgin Mary (Simons 1977: 91), Miriam is willing to give her husband love. He, unlike the biblical Saul, does not want to be converted; he does not want either to receive or to give any feelings. For rational Saul, „love" is an empty word which has no *raison d'être* in scientific terminology. Through abstract analysis, he destroys his capacity for love: „Tell a girl 'I love you'. No trouble with two-thirds of it, it's a closed circuit [...] But that nasty four-letter word in the middle, that's the one you have to look out for. Ambiguity. Redundance. Irrelevance, even. Leakage" (E: 29). Saul's rejection of the exchange of feelings turns him into a closed system of the type postulated by the second law of thermodynamics. It seems to be his wish to serve as a living example of the science he so much believes in. Instead of decreasing entropy, Saul consciously adds to it.

Contrary to Saul, Callisto is strongly appalled at the law. He first got to know it as a student at Princeton. He became acquainted with the theories of the fathers of entropy — Clausius, Gibbs, and Boltzman. Awareness of the law has immense effects upon Callisto's perception. He starts to see everything in terms of closed circuits which succumb to entropic equilibrium. For Callisto, contemporary American society is a perfect illustration of the law; it assures uniformity and reveals ever-growing tendency toward eventual homogeneity. He predicts entropic decline for American culture „in which ideas, like heat, would no longer be transferred, since each point in it would ultimately have the same quantity of energy" (E: 28).

Such being his observations, Callisto decides to isolate himself from the world and to create his own microcosm where he can resist entropy. In his „hermetically sealed" apartment, Callisto creates a small jungle with birds and oriental plants. Meant to be an anti-entropic island, Callisto's flat becomes, ironically, a totally closed system in a state of entropic balance. It is a system which, unlike Meatball's party, comes to be more and more „orderly": „the swayings of its plant life, the stirrings of its birds and human inhabitants were all as integral as the rhythms of a perfectly executed mobile" (E: 24). The rhythm of mobiles is regular and monotonous. When this sort of rhythm reflects activities of human beings, who are potentially capable of diverse, constructive action, it inevitably leads to inertia.

Callisto's approach to the problem of entropy — that of separation from life and total passivity — fails. The existence he leads is referred to as an „enclave of regularity in the city's chaos" (E: 24). His, however, is an entirely different kind of enclave than the one discussed by Professor Wiener. In Wiener's enclaves life flourishes. To perform this function, such enclaves cannot be closed systems since in any closed system entropy rapidly increases. Callisto, however, walls himself off from the world. The progress of entropy is accelerated in Callisto's microcosm since neither he nor Aubade make any effort to fight with the law of thermodynamics.

Their passivity is contrasted with anti-entropic actions of their downstairs neighbour, Meatball. His lease-breaking party gradually becomes more and more frenzied. While the Duke di Angelis quartet carry out their nonsense experiment whose aim is to counteract entropy by coming „back to the airless void" but which actually endorses the second law of thermodynamics, the party reaches a state that seems to be announcing entropic equilibrium: people are shouting, screaming, some start fighting, a girl is drowning in the bathroom. Meatball himself wonders what he should do. He knows that there are „two ways he could cope: a) lock himself in the closet and maybe. eventually they would all go away, or b) try to calm everybody down, one by one" (E: 34). The former solution is tempting because it is free of trouble, difficulty or pain; the latter is far less attractive. Yet Meatball chooses the second alternative. He *acts*. Instead of separating himself from the confusion of the party, he tries to restore order in his apartment.

From among possible approaches to entropy that Pynchon puts forward in the story, that of active response seems to be the only reasonable one. Meatball takes steps to prevent his party from deteriorating into total chaos. This certainly requires some effort on his part, but his work does produce desirable results: the apparently unavoidable collapse of the party is brought under control. Meatball does what should be the duty of a human being, who has the potential to defy entropy. The world *is* running down, but the *tempo* of this process depends very much on people: they may slow it down through labour. Work is never an inviting suggestion, yet in this case „a pain in the neck" is surely „better in the long run".

Usually, however, people prefer to surrender to entropy and just drift with its tide. This is exactly what the majority of Meatball's guests are doing. The party becomes so much chaotic because those who participate in it start to be more and more noisy, aimless, even agressive. Most of them are not aware that they are bringing an abstract rule into practice. They behave in a way that is most natural to them.

Each approach to the problem of entropy presented above may be considered typical of a certain layer in modern man's consciousness. If we adapt Freud's paradigm to the analysis of people's reactions to the second law of thermodynamics, then Meatball's guests, whose behaviour is determined by the instinctive desire to satisfy their pleasures regardless of the entropic results of their deeds, will represent man's id; Meatball's realistic solution to the problem he faces, his conscious decision to take defensive measures against growing chaos of the party will stand for man's ego; finally, superego will be traceable in uncompromising actions and views of the two intellectuals, Callisto and Saul.

The reference to Freud while dealing with Pynchon's fiction is not inappropriate. While metaphors in the story are drawn directly from physics and information theory, it seems that Pynchon's additional inspiration for *V.* — his first novel which appeared in 1963 — was the concept of death-wish which Freud himself viewed as a kind of „psychical entropy". Pynchon holds after Freud that

> If [...] the tendency of instinct is toward repeating or restating an earlier condition, then the desire to return to the inorganic is irresistible [...] The ultimate pleasure is in untroubled security of not-

> -being; therefore the drag toward inertia (Thanatos) is constantly behind that self-assertion we call living [Sypher 1962: 75-76].

In *V.* it is mainly people's attitude to the inanimate that determines their relation to the law of entropy. Proportionately to the degree of attraction that objects hold to them, people either retain their humanity or drift into decadence which is defined as „a clear movement toward death, or preferably, nonhumanity" (*V.*: 301). It is humanity that differentiates men from the world of mere things. Love, sympathy, care, and genuine communication furnish men with power necessary to resist the general decline. The farther people fall away from what is human, the more they become automata. In *V.* Pynchon's chief and the most terrifying recognition is that contemporary people voluntarily abandon their humanity and tend to regard others and themselves as objects. By doing so, they move „closer to the time when like any leaf or fragment of metal, they'd be finally subject to the laws of physics" (*V.*: 301).

The main example of such self-degradation is lady V — one of the most absurd figures in Pynchon's fiction. Her physical degeneration goes hand-in-hand with moral decay and leads eventually to entropic death. She appeares in the novel under several names and in various identities; each of them reveals her gradual progression towards entropic disintegration. The process begins with her abandonment of love for others and soon grows into appaling cruelty: being engaged in several instances of political unrest, lady V. is the cause of many terrible murders, an agent of destruction. Her Catholicism soon deteriorates into fetishism — worship of an object. Parallel to her loss of humanity is the increase of lady V.'s love for the inanimate. She not only adorns herself with various things but also replaces parts of her body with them. At the moment of her death it turns out that lady V. is almost totally composed of different objects: she has an artificial eye, wears a wig, has an artificial foot, false teeth, and a star sapphire sewn into her navel. Wedged under a fallen pillar, lady V. is finally disassembled by the Maltese girls whom she taught sterility and boys to whom she she advertised nihilism. She cannot stop her pupils from taking her apart; devitalized, lady V. lies still (entropic inertia). Her progress toward annihilation is complete.

Lady V. is not merely a perverse woman. She personifies the entropic process itself. And entropy, Pynchon insists, is „active today"; lady V. has many followers. Bongo-Shaftsbury becomes part of an electric circuit and loses his human feelings. He assassinates Porpentine thus putting into practice his belief that „Humanity is something to destroy" (*V.*: 69). Fergus Mixolydian, whose activities are restricted to those „necessary to sustain life" finally becomes an extension of his TV set. Esther Harvitz, a Jewish girl, has her nose characteristic of her race replaced by an artificial one „identical with an ideal of nasal beauty established by movies, advertisements, magazine illustrations" (*V.*: 91) Esther's surgeon himself adds to the toll of entropy since, as one of the characters notices, he „sells out the human race" by filling people with inert matter and thereby turning them into things.

While all lady V.-like figures are lured by inert substances, Benny Profane, whose adventures constitute one of the novel's plots, is strongly appalled by the inanimate. Benny, however, is no redeemer. Indeed, his life has certain entropic qualities. Benny spends most of his time on meaningless and fruitless wanderings either along the East

Coast of America or, on a smaller scale, up and down the streets. Pynchon calls this mode of motion yo-yoing. Yo-yoing is a metaphor employed by Pynchon[2] to express an aimlessly mechanical way of life (cf. rhythms of a mobile). Although he gets in touch with many people, Benny tries hard to avoid any deep relationship with them. All he wants is to „take and give nothing back". Despite his dislike of the inanimate, Benny prefers to be treated like a thing — an object of mercy. He is horrified by the inanimate as a manifestation of entropy, but he does not face the problem properly. Being almost totally passive, Benny really profanes man's dignity; he is certainly no Meatball Mulligan.

Herbert Stencil is another major figure in the novel. Born in 1901, Stencil spent his time till the World War II mostly on inactivity. After the war he would have fallen into slothfulness again, had he not discovered a mysterious letter „V" in his father's journals. Herbert grew curious about what the letter meant. In 1945 he began his quest for „V". which along with Benny's wanderings makes up the plot of the novel. Stencil's search, however, has nothing constructive in it. As he himself admits, the only aim of his hunt is to keep himself going. Aware of the danger of collapse into entropic stillness, lacking any true values to follow, Herbert picks up any mystery, any „sense of pursuit to keep active a borderline metabolism" (*V.*: 362). The possibility that frightens him most is that he may finally discover the meaning of „V". The end of the search would inevitably lead to inertia. That is why his strategy is to „approach and avoid".

While any forward movement may seem anti-entropic, Stencil's quest creates an illusion of progress. Soon it grows into an obsession. Every single action he takes, every conversation he gets involved in, focuses on „V". And an obsession, Pynchon says, is a hothouse — a highly entropic state of mind (cf. Callisto). He totally abandons his personality and becomes a „He Who Looks for V." If „V" stands for the entropic process, then Stencil's pursuit of it acquires new meaning: it becomes a pursuit of annihilation thus making Stencil „the century's child". The main thesis of Pynchon's work seems to be that man in the 20th century seeks destruction. In this sense Herbert really stands for a stencil to be filled by contemporary people who in one way or another run after death.

All characters discussed so far consciously or subconsciously hasten entropy. Even Benny Profane, who with his dislike for the inanimate may seem to offer a positive example, turns out to follow the century's path only at a slower pace. His yo-yoing, emotional isolation, his desire to be an object of mercy are indicative of Benny's tendency to increase his personal entropy. Herbert Stencil's solution of finding an aim — albeit a delusion — and pursuing it in order to avoid entropic collapse, also fails because his obsession adds to his entropy and his quest has destruction (*V.*) as its aim.

These characters together with their minor counterparts dominate the novel. In the literary world presented by Pynchon in *V.* none of the characters takes a really

[2] The notion of yo-yoing occurs also in the work of Joseph Heller. The protagonist of *Catch-22* is called Yossarian; his nickname is „Yo-yo". Contrary to what his name suggests, Yossarian's way of moving around reveals his opposition to the rigidity of military discipline.

constructive attitude towards entropy. A few of them, however, weak and ambivalent figures as they are, carry the „gospel of caring" (Hausdorff 1966) which constitutes the positive though not very optimistic message of the novel.

One of those characters is McClintic Sphere. It is he who formulated the „watchword" for Spenglerian *Abendland*. Being a Negro, McClintic Sphere is, in a sense, outside the system of the entropic western society. He himself has „never gone along all the way with the 'cool' outlook that developed in the postwar years" (*V.*: 272). On the contrary, he has been able to love and to radiate peace in the chaotic world. Yet he discovers that „I love you" is not magic enough to cure humanity. He finds out that „the only way clear of the cool /crazy flip/ flop was obviously slow, frustrating and hard work" (*V.*: 342). Both coolness and craziness give way to entropy (inertia — chaos). The golden mean is to „keep cool, but care". If one cares, one is able to perform the duty of man — to take the pain of reversing the entropic process. McClintic is the clearest equivalent of Meatball Mulligan. Though he is a minor character and the reader does not know much about his life, yet it is apparent that he, like Meatball, has a sense of duty to the human race.

Even those who carry the positive message of the novel do not have enough strength to resist entropy altogether. In her early days, Rachel Owlglass experienced the attraction of the inanimate. It is she whom Benny Profane watches caressing and expressing love to her automobile. Another character, Paola Maijstral, is free from violent passion, but she maintains her humanity. Though „cool", she returns to Pappy to perform her duties as a wife. Paola, however, is a child of the entropic century. This affinity is marked by the ivory comb she inherited from disassembled lady V. and by what one of the characters labels as her „passive look of an object of sadism" (*V.*: 205). Paola's father manages to violate the second law of thermodynamics by reversing his own entropy — a phenomenon which is possible only in the case of man. Yet he is unable to avoid another entropic collapse: his contemporary existence is close to that of Callisto.

The fact that even those who „hold any promise of being [...] human" (*V.*: 336) now and then yield to entropy shows the weakness of mankind on the one hand and the power of the law on the other. That is why Pynchon does not require much from his characters. All they are to do is „a minimum basis for a workable thing" (E: 30). However anaemic a solution „caring" may seem to the reader, Pynchon believes it is the only satisfactory means to counter entropy on a personal scale. Pynchon is undoubtedly pessimistic in that he makes so few of his characters care. Considering that it is with them that the future of the world rests, Pynchon's vision presented in *V.* is not very elevating.

His next novel is even more depressing. One of the themes of *The Crying of Lot 49* is that America, the country „with chances once so good for diversity" (*CL49*: 136) has produced an absolute „symmetry of choices" resulting in total homogeneity and lethargy of its citizens. If *V.* was Pynchon's protest against the reduction of man to the status of a machine, *The Crying of Lot 49* is a bitter cry against it. Though in physical terms fairly conventional, the characters in Pynchon's second novel are, in fact, objects. They are unable or rather unwilling to reach out of the closed systems of

their alienated selves. And this is another theme of Pynchon's novel: the failure of contemporary Americans to establish any meaningful communication, a failure which indicates how desperate the situation in their country is since, as one of the characters observes, „communication is the key" — the only means to make a dead society live again.

The novel is an account of the adventures of Mrs Oedipa Mass. She has been named executrix of the estate of her former lover, Pierce Inverarity, „a California real estate mogul" (*CL49*: 1). In the course of execution of the will Oedipa finds out how complex and ambiguous her task is. Her quest for the substance of the legacy becomes Oedipa's search for communication with others. Unlike Stencil, Oedipa has an important motivation: she wants „to bring to an end her encapsulation in her tower" (*CL49*: 28). She thinks of her past as a period of isolated, Rapunzel-like existence, when she was imprisoned in the tower of her lonely self. Inverarity could not pierce its walls. Her husband, Mucho, is also „no proof against its magic" — their relationship is marked by constant „inabilities to communicate". Oedipa leaves Kinneret (her past) and drives to San Narciso, „Pierce's domicile and headquarters", expecting to find true communion with other people there. Though she really tries to communicate with the citizens of San Narciso, she fails. Like Miriam's in „Entropy", Oedipa's failure is not her fault. It is caused by those who, like Saul, turn themselves into closed systems. She cares, but no-one truly responds to it.

Metzger, the first person whom Oedipa meets in Pierce's city, is a Narcissus figure. Being a lawyer, Metzger is to help Oedipa execute the will. Once, as a child actor, he played the role of Baby Igor in a Hollywood film. Now, as an adult, he cannot adjust to his present situation: he frequently speaks „in his Baby Igor voice", gives a „Baby Igor smile". Narcissism, McLuhan observes, „forbids self-recognition" (1966: 43); Metzger mixes in his mind his past-actor and present-lawyer roles. He is also confused about his age. Metzger freezes himself in his youth, the time of Baby Igor. Suffering from what McLuhan calls „blocking of perception", Metzger refuses to take in information concerning his present identity, which is the cause of his becoming a closed system.

What directly links the worlds presented in *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* is Yoyodyne, a big defence company „with subsidiaries all over the country" (*V*: 138), which is the main source of employment in San Narciso. When Oedipa visits it, she gets lost due to the entropic „order" of the place. „As far as she could see in any direction it was white and pastel: men's shirts, papers, drawing boards" (*CL49*: 60). As Oedipa perceives them, the Yoyodyne employees are faceless and undifferentiated. Their entropic situation is reinforced by other factors, chiefly „teamwork" which suppresses man's power of inventiveness. Every engineer „in signing the Yoyodyne contract, also signed away the patent rights to any invention he might come up with" (*CL49*: 61). In this way their individuality is taken away from them. Yoyodyne then produces not only weapons but also alienated automata.

The destructive effects of such a policy are most clearly seen in the case of a Yoyodyne executive, who was replaced by an IBM 7094 and lost his job. Out of the system of the factory, he is totally incapable of any constructive action of his own. He cannot even decide to commit suicide: „previous training got the better of him: he could not make the decision without first hearing the ideas of a committee" (*CL 49*:83). He is no more a human being than any of lady V. -like people. His soulless existence is devoid of meaning. Like an object, he needs to be manipulated. Otherwise, he is bound to end up in entropic inertia.

Pynchon makes Pierce's estate and people inhabiting it represent America — „San Narciso had no boundaries" (*CL49*: 134); the lethargy of its citizens is a „symptom of the gutlessness of the whole society" (*CL49*: 61); Narcissus is the patron saint of the entire country which is equally „infected". In spite of its early promise, American society has become an entropic system whose elements are dead both intellectually and spiritually.

American society is an encapsulating system as suggested by the metaphor of a printed circuit. Actually, it may seem to be a force acting against people. Yet Pynchon makes it clear that the Americans themselves are the ultimate cause of their tragedy. Factories like Yoyodyne dehumanize man, yet it is man who is responsible for their existence. „Teamwork" makes him lose creativity, but man himself accepts it as „a way to avoid responsibility" (*CL49*: 61). When Winthrop Tremaine tells Oedipa about his plans to sell not only rifles and the swastika armbands but also SS uniforms, she runs away terrified. Later she blames herself: „You're chicken [...] This is America, you live in it, you let it happen. Let it unfurl" (*CL49*: 112). Such an attitude, represented by most of Pynchon's characters, reveals their indifference in vital matters, which enhances the operation of entropy in America.

In her quest for communication, Oedipa has to leave the surface pattern and descend into the underground — The Tristero — where she hopes a number of Americans are „truly communicating" by means of the W.A.S.T.E. system. Her search is significant not only for Oedipa personally; it becomes a crucial matter for the whole society. It will show if there is any alternative to the surface America in which entropy has reached its critical state.

The meaning of The Tristero is never made explicit. Since the reader has no insight into it other than Oedipa's, he shares her uncertainties and is unsure of how to interpret the ambiguous facts about the system. It is not known whether The Tristero is a reality, a joke or Oedipa's hallucination. Hence the variety of opinions among the books's critics. Most of them tend to perceive The Tristero as an anti-entropic promise[3]. To judge the nature of The Tristero, we must first investigate some basic facts about it.

The Tristero System was founded many years ago by Hernando Joaquin de Tristero y Calavera who, considering himself disinherited, set up a mail service to rival the

[3] Tanner, although very careful in his judgement, admits that „in contemporary America when the public world seems to be on the side of entropy, the silence of The Tristero starts to appear as something positive, a pregnant withdrawal and waiting which may yet hold hopes of another America" (1971: 178-9). Another critic, Harris, seems to be rather ambivalent in his assessment of the underground. He states that The „Tristero [...] updated by W.A.S.T.E. [...] stands for the entropic process itself". But he contradicts this opinion soon after: „Since successful communication is an anti-entropic process, the members of W.A.S.T.E. form pockets of organization in a slowly decaying social system" (Harris 1971: 96-98).

official one, run by Thurn and Taxis monopoly. The Tristero agents, dressed in black, harassed the Thurn and Taxis couriers and began a series of murders without ever revealing themselves openly. Their symbols were the muted post horn and the dead badger which suggested their expected defeat of the enemy. As the novel progresses, the system comes to be associated with all major political events in Europe. It is connected with any manifestation of chaos.

The agents of The Tristero appeared in America „some time before 1853". There they also organized unofficial mail and forged U.S. stamps. Like Thurn and Taxis, American history presents the early activities of The Tristero as a variety of malign powers causing death and disorder. The nature of The Tristero is much more ambiguous at present. The system, Oedipa learns, „survived today [...] serving as a (secret) channel of communication" (*CL49*: 90). As she gradually discovers, it is the „disinherited" and alienated that make up the contemporary Tristero. Oedipa believes that the „separate, silent, unexpected world" of The Tristero offers a „real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know" (*CL49:* 128). She expects that through the contact with the Tristero members she will be able to destroy the walls of her tower at last.

The underground, however, turns out to be no less entropic than the surface level of American life. At the Scope, a bar frequented by Yoyodyne people, whose name ironically suggests openness and fresh opportunities, Oedipa witnesses that the Tristero mail does not convey any meaningful information. Its members have to send at least one letter a week through it, only to „keep it up to some kind of a reasonable volume" (*CL49*: 35). The letters contain no messages which would deepen contacts between people exchanging them.

The members of The Tristero do not form any genuine community. They either continue to live in isolation (e.g. the sailor), or create absurd societies such as the Inamorati Anonymous. The IA create a system in which nobody „knows anybody else's name; just the (telephone) number in case it gets so bad you can't handle it alone. We're isolates [...] Meetings would destroy the whole point of it" (*CL492*: 83) — the point being to suppress and disrupt love. Paradoxically, the members of the IA use communication to carry out this task.

The Tristero people, dissatisfied as they are with the surface reality, are incapable of constructing any real alternative to it. All they do is wait — „The waiting above all; if not for another set of possibilities [..] then at least, at the very least, waiting for a symmetry of choices to break down, to go skew" (*CL49*: 136). Although what they wait for would be most desirable in American society, the tactics they employ lead nowhere. Pynchon makes it clear both in the story (Callisto) and in *V.* (Profane) that passivity is but a way of succumbing to inertia. This again proves that because of its own entropy The Tristero cannot realize the hopes Oedipa has in it.

Oedipa's tower turns out to be everywhere. At the end of the novel Oedipa is even more alone than at its beginning— she has lost all her men. One night Oedipa teaches herself to breathe in a vacuum. „For this, oh God, was the void. There was nobody in the world who could help her. [...] They were all on something mad, possible enemies, dead" (*CL49*: 128).

Neither the surface pattern nor the hidden one can redeem an alienated man. In both of them „waste" and „death" reign (cf. Callisto's apartment vs. the outside). Then the only way man can cope with reality is „an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia" (*CL49*: 137). When Oedipa tells Hilarius she wants him to talk her out of a fantasy, the psychotherapist, who has gone man himself, gives her advice which seems to be curiously serious: „Cherish it! [...] What else do any of you have? Hold it tightly by its little tentacle, don't let the Freudians coax it away or the pharmacists poison it out of you. Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be" (*CL49*: 103).

Thus imagination and paranoia are the only remedy for lonely people who make up American society. The ultimate message of *The Crying of Lot 49* is more pessimistic than that of *V.* whose „keep cool, but care" assumed at least a minimum of communication among human beings. *The Crying of Lot 49* leaves man solitary in the alienated world of fantasy.

In the three works discussed in the present paper Thomas Pynchon presents his entropic vision of the West and America in particular. He leaves no hope of redemption for modern society at large; The Tristero, which is often understood as his promise of rescue from complete deterioration, proves to be hollow. Yet Pynchon believes that entropy can be reversed on a personal scale. Meatball Mulligan faces perfect chaos and manages to convert it into order. Characters like McClintic Sphere, Rachel or Paola do not surrender to entropy in human relationships because they care. Caring, however, yields desirable results only when responded to. Oedipa, who confronts people representing the whole spectrum of society, fails to establish deep relationship with any of them in spite of her openness to communication. Her failure results from a total lack of response from others. And here is the core of Pynchon's message: modern man prefers to be a closed system of the type postulated by the second law of thermodynamics rather than make any effort to organize his microcosm into a meaningful unit. Although he is the only agent able to take counter-entropic actions and thus postpone the final destruction, man in the 20th century chooses — sometimes in spite of himself — to become subject to the law. He wastes his power by investing too much time and energy into inventing various ways of self-annihilation instead of working against the disintegration of the world — be it his private world or that of the whole society. According to Pynchon, man, though capable of communicating with others, does not want to communicate; though creative, he does not put forward original ideas; though alive, he turns himself into an automaton; his involvement is replaced by indifference; in other words, anti-entropic by nature, man changes himself into an entropic object. As a consequence of his deliberate dehumanization, he is unable to do anything but hasten the growing inertia of the world. Man's failure to slow down the operation of entropy is the real source of evil, Pynchon insists. Pynchon's anti-hero is not a victim of external forces. In Pynchon's world there is no Manichean devil to combat. His characters suspect plots around them either to avoid responsibility for the increasing chaos or to conceal their own weakness. It is man himself, however, who creates conditions for accelerating the decay by simply not preventing it. The devil which has taken hold of the contemporary

world is of Augustinian nature. Professor Wiener said that once the Augustinian devil is uncovered, it is „exorcised". Since Pynchon's fiction attempts to reveal this devil to the readers, his works seem to aspire to drive him out of our reality. In this sense Pynchon, who may be viewed as an a-moral writer, is a moralizer. Any optimism in Pynchon is to be found in the impact of his fiction on the readers and not in the wasteland described.

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ACTA UNIVERSITATIS WRATISLAVIENSIS

No 704

Anglica Wratislaviensia XIII Wrocław 1984

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„IMPROMPTU PHILOSOPHICAL SOPHISTRY" IN THE EARLY FICTION OF JOHN BARTH

The world is a comedy to those who think, a tragedy to those who feel.

H. Walpole

Philosophy has stripped itself of concepts that might furnish modern man's depository of truth. It has reached a position of scepticism where it can no longer provide man with a consistent and stable outlook on life. The most radical negation of the possibility of philosophy is expressed in the final pronouncement of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*: „What we cannot speak we must consign to silence" (after Morrison 1968: 143). The abdication of philosophy means giving up questions the answers to which cannot „be put into words"[1]. These are the Great Questions concerning the nature of human personality, the meaning of life, the question of value and identity, the existence etc. It has been left for literature to entertain the ideas in the fields abandoned by philosophy. As Iris Murdoch writes: „It is here that literature is so important, especially since it has taken over some of the tasks formerly performed by philosophy"[2]. Many writers seem to have accepted this challenge and, more or less successfully, try to find their own way in a labyrinth of problems left unsolved by philosophers.

The first two novels by John Barth, *The Floating Opera* (1956) and *The End of the Road* (1958)[3] are philosophical quests of the young writer verifying different positions assumed by people in the face of absurdity and ideological „dryness". Though preoccupied with contemporary problems and scene, the two novels seem to share certain features of the 18th c. *conte philosophique* where characters impersonate intellectual

[1] „There are, indeed, things that cannot be put into words. They make themselves manifest. They are what is mystical (6.522)", L. Wittgenstein, „Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus", in: Morrison (1968: 139).

[2] I. Murdoch, „Against Dryness. A Polemical Sketch". Reprinted from *Encounter*, January 1961, in: *The Novel Today. Contemporary Writers on Modern Fiction*, ed. by M. Bradbury, Fontana, 1977.

[3] In parenthetical references we shall abbreviate *The Floating Opera* as FO and *The End of the Road* as ER.

ideas rather than fully developed individuals. Barth's heroes often bear resemblance to allegorical figures embodying different attitudes of mind. They move in the world which is a melting pot of often contradictory opinions and, in fact, „the character conflicts of his novels are grounded [...] in philosophical debates of a rather abstruse sort" (Joseph 1970: 6). The narrators — at the same time protagonists — of *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road* are both set on a journey in search for the truth about themselves which escapes them. It is not without significance that a journey was a typical device of the 18th c. philosophical tale. It was also a favourite metaphor of the existentialist novel (e.g. Celine's *Journey to the End of the Night*) where human life was considered a road. Barth's adoption of this pattern pertains to both traditions. Thus Todd Andrews' inquiry into one day in his past when he decided to commit suicide can be seen as a metaphorical travel intended as a self-exploration. Whereas Jake Horner finds himself literally „on the road" in the void of his life, the story described by him being just a loop in his experience upon which he is again left directionless. The plots in both novels are educational in the ironic sense of the word, for the characters' apparent self-discoveries are nothing but jumps from one premise to another or *post fact* rationalizations. They do not represent any consistent philosophical stands but seem to juggle with scrappy formulations, adopting or making up for themselves semi-truths about life based on their own experience. The narrators are far from attributing any objective value to their philosophizing: Todd is ironically aware that his pursuit of explanations is an endless task and his *Inquiries* „tend to become ends in themselves" (*FO*: 215); for „the connoisseur" Jake Horner playing with paradoxes equals „good clean fun" (*ER*: 142). The two novels emanate thus with a spirit of comic nihilism, which is another distant affinity to the 18th c. philosophical tale.

The grotesque vision of the narrators and the ironic import of their „serious" encounters in the battlefield of ideas evoke the feeling that the writer does not want to commit himself to the world disintegrated into fragments. If art is a mirror to the age, then for the young Barth it is also a reflection of philosophy which views this world as „both meaningful and meaningless" (Harris: 32). It seems it was necessary for him to come to terms with the intellectual fervent of the 1950s and examine from his own perspective what had been left by the two most influential trends, namely Existentialists and Linguistic philosophers[4].

Among the questions modern philosophy does not address itself to, the most important one concerns the nature of human personality. Discussing „the current philosophical conception of the person", Iris Murdoch traces back to the work of Hume who undermined the certainty not only of causation but even of the self (Murdoch: 23). It is impossible to see „the cause of a human act [...] for as Hume pointed out, causation is never more than an inference" (*FO*: 214). Both Todd and Jake „take no great interest in causes" (*ER*: 35) and accept the fact that people „aren't going to have conscious motives for everything they do" (*ER*: 116). Most of their acts being gratuitous, they regard themselves „free agents" and advocate for inconsistency and irresponsibility (to paraphrase Todd's words: he is consistent with his principle of inconsistency, *FO*: 1). Todd realizes that the tasks he sets for himself — *Inquiry* into the life and death of his father together with *self-Inquiry* — are interminable because his observations will never fill the gap between „what we see and what we can't see" (*FO*: 214). Since it is impossible for him to understand even himself, he is haunted by the idea of imperfect communication[5]. In fact, the narrators of the two novels are isolated microcosms, feeling no commitment to other people and never dedicated to anything. One unquestionable conviction about human nature they have concerns their own and mankind's animality. It has been demonstrated to Todd in his WW I experience with a German soldier; it is also the lesson Jake has learned from his encounter with the Morgans. To cover up the brute, animal truth about himself Todd successively adopts different masks — that of a rake, a saint, a cynic and, finally, a suicide. This mimicry is part of his mastering of the fact with which he lives: the imminence of death due to his sick heart (*FO*: 222). Todd can offer no alternative model of human personality except for a display of masks and intellectual stances covering emotional hollowness and disgust with his body.

In *The End of the Road* the problem of man's identity is put in the centre of philosophical debate. Jake Horner represents a position according to which one cannot be certain of the existence of what is called one's self. His scepticism is genuinely Humian, as the following description of his „weatherless days" indicates: „On these days Jacob Horner, except in a meaningless metabolistic sense, ceased to exist, for I was without personality. Like those microscopic specimens that biologists must dye in order to make them visible at all, I had to be coloured with some mood or other if there was to be a recognizable self to me" (*ER*: 36)[6]. However, Jake is well aware that what manifests itself through moods is only his provisional identity. His real self is beyond his grasp, instead he perceives a sequence of discontinuous selves „linked to one another by the two unstable threads of body and memory" (*ER*: 36). Consequently, it is impossible to specify what the authentic self is and whether it actually exists. Assuming that it is revealed through moods, Jake is still conscious that „the dye is not the specimen" (*ER*: 36). Neither can be man identified with the opinions he represents. This is the view he categorically opposes to in a conversation with Rennie Morgan who accuses him that he practically does not exist having no stable opinion whatever. Jake lacks the sense of integrity, of one's personal unity, and this may account for his inconsistency. He does not believe in the uniqueness of personality, since his own picture of himself is a plurality of selves. Thus, according to him „the individual is not individual after all, any more that the atom is really atomistic: he can be divided further" (*ER*: 142).

[4] Cf. Stromberg. (1975: 1-30).

[5] The metaphorical title of *The Floating Opera* carries such implications both for the protagonist and for the reader.

[6] Here is how Hume speaks of the self: „For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or skade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception" D. Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1, Part 4, Section VI; quot. after Lucas, (1961: 33).

If Jake's vision of man is relative, incoherent and paradoxical, Joe Morgan's ethics offers the opposite alternative. Being a pragmatist and a rationalist, Joe builds up a system of principles and criteria he consistently applies in life. He may be called a „self-made person", in the sense that he has carefully worked out the vision of himself and set up the limits of man's freedom and responsibility („what a man ends up doing is what he has to take responsibility for having wanted to do" — *ER*: 110). In contrast to Jake, he is always the same: predictable, systematic and consistent. Joe's fallacy is that he is trying to make his life into a coherent geometrical pattern based on pure reason and logic. It is perhaps ironic that the protagonists' extremely different attitudes have the same grounds in their nihilistic awareness of the absence of absolutes: Jake falls into inertia and inconsistency, while Joe creates his „private" absolutes out of less than absolute values. What they have in common is their lack of preoccupation with other people — they both experiment on others (e.g. Rennie or Peggy Rankin) to prove their rights or to satisfy their egoistic needs. The results of these experiments bring failure for both of them. As Tony Tanner rightly observes, „what this book does, in the figures of Joe and Jake, is to explore some of the limitations or dangers both in the compulsion to systematize (in the sense of making one coherent version of life), and in the inability to adhere to any fragment of system at all" (Tanner: 237).

Facing a multitude of possible choices and unable to solve the problem of his authenticity, Jake Horner meets the Doctor who prescribes for him a therapy of role playing which he calls Mythotherapy. This is another option for the self: assuming roles and assigning roles to people. To participate in Mythotherapy means to behave like a casting director and to treat „each particular situation in life as an episode in some grand over-all plot" (*ER*: 89). The Doctor repudiates all questions of integrity, to him „a man's integrity consists in being faithful to the script he's written for himself" (*ER*: 90). He gives further instructions to Jake: „the more sharply you can dramatize your situation, and define your own role and everybody else's role, the safer you'll be" (*ER*: 90). Thus man must be able to change masks as necessary and convenient. The conscious manipulation of masks is the problem already encountered in *The Floating Opera*. But in *The End of the Road* the Doctor „transforms into a cure... what had in *The Floating Opera* been the disease itself" (Joseph: 16). Like Joe Morgan's artificial norms of behaviour, the Doctor's masks are also substitutes invented to protect man from an overwhelming sense of disintegration to which he can offer no positive solution.

It is possible to see a prototype of Jake Horner, Barth's „man without properties", in Antoine Roquentin, the protagonist of *Nausea* by Jean Paul Sartre who popularized existentialism in his works. Comparing the two characters, „we may feel ourselves justified in thinking that the hand of Sartre was upon Barth" (Stromberg: 29). The Protean self of Jake finds its counterpart in Roquentin's ego which is gradually dissolving into the world of objects. Jake experiences the moments of self-revulsion which are reminiscent of Roquentin's famous attacks of nausea:

> a week of such selfrevulsion would have brought me to suicide [...] I envied all dead things — the fat earthworms that lay squashed upon the wet sidewalks, the animals whose fried bodied I chewed at mealtimes, people decomposing in muddy cemeteries — but I had at hand no means of self-destruction that I was courageous to use. [*ER*: 107-108]

They both suffer a breakdown of their personalities. Gazing at himself in the mirror, Roquentin can see nothing human in his face which is disintegrating into a geological relief map. He perceives himself as a thing and feels disgusted with his „naked existence". They are solitary introverts and this habitual solitude makes them both agonizingly self-analytical. Jake's disease *cosmopsis*, i.e. the cosmic view, is parallel to Roquentin's malady of estrangement and alienation, which reaches its climax in the symbolic incident on the hill, in Roquentin's loathsome vision of Bouville and its inhabitants. Roquentin's detachment and solipsism characterize his attitude towards other people with whom he can have no really satisfying relationships. Similarly to this, Jake Horner — and earlier Todd Andrews — see others as types and tend to objectify and reduce them to roles and functions.

Even in the way he portrays Joe Morgan, Barth seems to share Sartre's disillusionment with rationalism which is embodied in *Nausea* by the Autodidact. He searches the ultimate, objective knowledge in books he systematically studies in the alphabetical order. But for Roquentin the Autodidact's desire to understand the world is proved futile. Oppressed with the fact of raw, naked existence, he discovers the absurd quality of existing. Nothing can explain life, it is gratuitous and contingent, devoid of any possible meaning. Roquentin realizes that man tries to impose but the illusion of necessity on life in order to deny its absurdity. He has run short of motives and desperately remarks that there is nothing, absolutely no reason for living left.

Sartre's existential reflection on the absurdity of existence may be treated as a source of inspiration for Barth's heroes. In *The Floating Opera* Todd poses the question of suicide as his last and only solution to terminate the ineffectiveness of all his stances. Living with the acute awareness of death, every day he is „renting another day from eternity" (*FO*: 49). Thus all plans and goals are without value to him. All his life is a mere chance — in his case literally so — and as such it is valueless, too. He rationalizes the idea for his *Inquiry*: „All my life I'd been deciding that specific things had no intrinsic value — that things like money, honesty, strength, love, information, wisdom, even life, are not valuable in themselves" (*FO*: 166). The total realization of this fact is formulated in his new premise which is supposed to justify his suicide: „*nothing* has intrinsic value", „there is no ultimate reason for valuing anything, including life", and „there's no final reason for living" (*FO*: 223). In existential terms Todd's final conclusion would be tragic. But here nihilism is carried even further and acquires a comic dimension of arch-nihilism. Sophistries can be multiplied further on, so as to negate the very reasons for suicide, and thus Hamlet's question becomes meaningless. It is in the sphere of paradox (to which Barth's heroes seem especially sensitive) where all inconsistencies and contradictory opinions are qualled and viewed as arbitrary. In Todd this ability to perceive life's paradoxes and arbitrariness creates a distance which is simultaneously comic and cynical.

A dilemma of arbitrariness reappears in *The End of the Road*.Its recognition has a paralyzing effect on Jake Horner. He can sense inherent paradoxes in everything, the objective truth does not exist. He sees even himself as „at the same time giant and

dwarf, plenum and vacuum, and admirable and contemptible" (*ER*: 120). Jake is a victim of his own speculations which make him realize „the fact that when one is faced with such a multitude of desirable choices, no one choice seems satisfactory for very long by comparison with the aggregate desirability of all the rest, though compared to any *one* of the others it would not be found inferior" (*ER*: 3). This sentence epitomizes the story of his life: the awareness of multiple options results in immobility. Like Roquentin, he too „ran out of motives, as a car runs out of gas" (*ER*: 74) and could not find a single reason to do anything. Caught in a genuine physical immobility and unable to choose rationally, Jake is subjected to the Doctor's treatment of paralytics.

It is basically in the figure of the Doctor where Barth's dialogue with Existentialists reveals certain ironic undertones. To annihilate the sense of absurdity of existence Existentialists point to the necessity of choice and action. The Doctor employs the existentialist premises for his therapeutic ends, reducing *ad absurdum* the imperative to choose and act: „choosing is existence: the extent that you don't choose, you don't exist. Now, everything we do must be oriented toward choice and action" (*ER*: 83). The Doctor's „choose and act" dictate sounds like a mockery of existentialism, since he perfidiously proclaims that „it doesn't matter whether you act constructively or even consistently, so long as you act" (*ER*: 83). Decision how to act does not necessarily involve any rational or moral principles. To Jake, who might „get stuck between alternatives", the Doctor cynically recommends the arbitrary principles of „Sinistrality, Antecedence, and Alphabetical Priority" (*ER*: 85). Not by any chance, he advises Jake to read Sartre and become an existentialist for a while. Jake followed the instruction and read Sartre but „had difficulty deciding how to apply him in specific situations" (*ER*: 86). His negative response („How did existentialism help one decide whether to carry one's lunch to work or buy it in the factory cafeteria?") is very characteristic of a clash between existentialism and American pragmatism. Similarly, the Doctor tends to interpret existentialism pragmatically. His Mythotherapy „is based on two assumptions: that human existence precedes human essence, if either of the two terms really signifies anything; and that a man is free not only to choose his own essence but to change it at will" (*ER*: 88). It is irrelevant if any of these premises is false or true as long as he finds them *useful* and *therapeutic*. However, Jake soon realizes a dangerous paradox of Mythotherapy degrading the essence to a resultant of role playing. Life proves the inadequacy of any role in the emotionally intricate situations, like the one Jake finds himself in with the Morgans. His ironic verdict is that „existence not only precedes essence: in the case of human beings it rather defies essence" (*ER*: 128) and, therefore, Mythotherapy falls out of use. Completely uprooted out of all his roles, Jake reaches a „terminal" and finally withdraws from active life. His existential quest comes to a dead-end.

Sartre is apparently less pessimistic. Roquentin decides to write a book that would enable him to justify and accept himself. Thus Sartre's hero seemingly finds a way to transcend the existence and to achieve salvation through the *literary* act. But he probably never writes his book. The literary act is an act of *verbalization* which is never free from arbitrariness. The protagonist of *Nausea* is obsessed with this problem. The

first entry in Roquentin's Diary reveals that his mind is fixed on „classification" of nuances, facts, objects, as if it were his defence against the collapse of the sense of order in the surrounding world. Even writing his Diary is an attempt to restore order to his own existence, to objectify his experience. However, he discovers very quickly a discrepancy between language and experience. When he tries to penetrate his past, to search his memory, he finds nothing but dead histories materialized into words. Language fossilizes a lively image and adventure. It is impossible to reach the past — through language man is imprisoned in the present. Then comes to him a realization that man fictionalizes his experience while putting it into words. People perpetually tend to reduce their lives into narratives, to turn them into fiction. Roquentin himself tries to live his life as if he were telling a story and enjoys the feeling of being a fictional character. Still, there are no beginnings, climaxes, dénouements in life — it is a continuous flux of existence. There is thus a distinction to be made between living and verbalizing life. Roquentin experiences the crisis of verbalization: existence is incompatible with a narrative, just as objects are alien to words. Roquentin's most startling revelation is that things are divorced from their names.

In this point Barth seems to be very close to Sartre: he asserts the importance of the language dimension for man. In *The End of the Road* Jake Horner is conscious of the power of language in transforming reality. Like Roquentin, he recognizes that „the past, after all, exists only in the minds of those who are thinking about it in the present, and therefore in the interpretations which are put upon it" (*ER*: 112). Thus man has no access to objective facts except through linguistic formulations. However Jake, regarding himself a connoisseur, never confuses „the formulation of reality for reality itself" (Harris: 105). Articulation is a game he indulges in. He engages in disputes with Joe Morgan not in order to establish any philosophical position of his own, but out of „tendency to sport on lexical playfields" (Tanner: 240). The following passage explains what a duel of articulation with Morgan means to him:

> Articulation! There, by Joe, was *my* absolute [...] it is the only thing I can think of about which I ever had the feeling one usually has for one's absolutes. To turn experience into speech — that is, to classify, to syntactify it — is always a betrayal of experience, a falsification of it; but only so betrayed can it be dealt with at all, and only in so dealing with it did I ever feel a man, alive and kicking. [*ER*: 119]

What this statement suggests is that Jake Horner represents the case of existing through verbalization, though he is well aware of the arbitrariness of words and their referents. As he further on observes, „the significances of words are arbitrary conventions" (p. 135) and „assigning names to things is like assigning roles to people: it is necessarily a distortion" (p. 142). Nevertheless, it is precisely through verbalization that Jake's freedom is realized.

The awareness of arbitrariness of any verbal account is shared by Todd Andrews in *The Floating Opera*. Working on his *Inquiry*, he discovers that no explanation can be final and complete. Experience cannot be fully verbalized — there will always remain blank spaces. This idea of incompleteness is reinforced in the novel by a number of metaphors: Todd's unfinished *Inquiry*, his unsuccessful boat-building, a failure of his suicide attempt the Floating Opera itself. Besides, Todd as a lawyer realizes that interpretation of facts is open to an endless succession of possible versions. He is

a master of casuistry and extremely enjoys „impromptu legal sophistry" (*FE*: 90). Everything is a verbal play for him, „a matter of the rearrangement of abstractions" (*FE:* 219). He exercises his linguistc skills throughout, proceeding with the narrative of his story.

What these observations seem to indicate is that the two protagonists of Barth's early novels celebrate, as T. Tanner puts it, "something approaching the autonomy of language" (p. 239). They both find that the world of language is utterly divorced from the world of fact. It is at this point where existentialist philosophy meets with the position assumed by the school of Linguistic Analysis represented by Wittgenstein[7]. According to him, man has access to non-linguistic reality through the language he uses to describe it. It is a logical argument that „the nature of language determines that reality *is* what it can be *said* to be" (Morrison: 128). Thus man is altogether cut off from the world, he only makes nonsensical attempts to transcend the limits of language while at the same time using it[8]. Wittgenstein makes a step towards solipsism, stating that there is no discoverable world outside the world of one's language[9].

A distant echo of Wittgenstein's concepts can be detected in philosophical speculations of Barth's heroes. His influence may be seen in the exposition of the fact that reality is but the narrator's act of verbalization. Moreover, Todd and Jake believe that it is impossible to reduce the world into the logically simple, which seems to reflect one of the major statements of Wittgenstein about non-linguistic reality: „The world is all that is the case" (almost literally quoted by Barth in *ER*, p. 81). And to Wittgenstein the *case* is always logically complex. Finally, certain nihilistic overtones of the narrators' philosophizings may remind one of Wittgenstein's nihilism expressed in the view that „value and meaning lie outside the world, that any attempt to put them into words is nonsensical" (Morrison: 143).

Perhaps the most significant implication of the philosophical burden underlying Barth's fiction is the raising of fiction itself to an ambiguous status. Philosophy seems to be working in two ways: it constitutes the stuff of the characters' rationalizations and, simultaneously, provides the framework for the author's speculations about his own fiction. The divorce of words from reality is translated into fictional terms, suggesting two levels of interpretation: that of the fictional world itself and that of the author creating it (the latter has been called a meta-fictional level). It is as if Barth were consciously exploring the possibilities of a self-referential function of the narrative. The author-narrator relation remains ambiguous in both novels. Barth's ingenious camouflage is that the narrator's self-consciousness can be easily identified with that of the author creating his work. The narrator of *The Floating Opera* openly admits that he is a novice at story-telling. More than once he discloses his literary methods

[7] For more similarities between the two trends cf. Stromberg, (1975: 21-23).

[8] In his *Tractatus* Wittgenstein gives a parable to clarify the relation of the subject to the world: „You will see that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye. And nothing *in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by an eye" (5.633). After Morrison, (1968: 136).

[9] „The limits of my language mean the limits of my world (5.6)". after Morrison, (1968: 132).

and interweaves meta-fictional remarks into his narrative. All the time he is aware of the presence of the reader and tries to maintain a constant communication with him. The nature of this communication is anticipated in the metaphorical title of the novel: „to fill the gaps" the spectators of the Floating Opera would „have to use their imagination. Most times they wouldn't understand what was going on at all, or they'd think they knew, when actually they didn't" (FO: 7). Even Todd's final intention to blow up the Floating Opera during the show which gathered all the characters at one place may be read as the author's gesture of destruction. He is free to do whatever he wishes with his work: to insert digressions, to complicate the plot, to destroy it finally.

Similarly, *The End of the Road* may be treated as a novel about the emancipation of sign (the formulation of reality) from its designate (reality itself). The first sentence of the novel already conveys the ambiguity: „In a sense, I am Jacob Horner" (p. 1). Considered from the point of view of the fictional world, it reflects the protagonist's characteristic uncertainty about his own self. From the meta-fictional point of view, it points out to the process going in the author's mind. The „I" of this sentence may be either the „I" of a fictional Jake Horner or the „I" of Barth himself („Jake Horner is a character whom *I* create"). Jake Horner, a fictional character, literally exists only in Barth's articulation. The second part of the quotation concerning turning experience into speech reveals both Horner's and Barth's self-awareness:

> but only so betrayed (experience) can be dealt with at all, and only in so dealing with it did I ever feel a man, alive and kicking. It is therefore that, when I had cause to think about it at all, I responded to this precise falsification, this adroit, careful myth-making, with all the upsetting exhilaration of any artist at his work. When my mythoplastic razors were sharply honed, it was unparalleled sport to lay about with them, to have at reality. [*ER*: 119]

A dilemma of arbitrariness refers also to the fiction-making process. The narrator-author of the novel realizes that the rules of fiction-making are arbitrary and that he is free to break them at any moment. Still, he remarks that „you are free to break the rules, but not if you are after intelligibility. If you *do* want intelligibility, then the only way to get „free" of the rules is to master them so thoroughly that they're second nature to you" (*ER*: 136). Indeed, as Gerhard Joseph observes, „Barth's characters are funhouse mirror images of an author-protagonist" (Joseph: 14). If life is a game for the characters, then the novel is becoming such a game for the author.

There seems to be a certain disagreement among the critics in their evaluation of *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*. Many of them tend to classify the early fiction of John Barth in terms of traditional realistic techniques of the novel, from which he radically departs in *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960; revised version 1967) and his following publications[10]. However, the playing with the

[10] Among the critics inclined to ignore the connections between Barth's first two novels and the succeeding ones, see Harris: (1971: 101) „Before *The Sot-Weed Factor*, Barth's reputation as a writer of conventional, if distinctive, novels seemed secure [...] When Barth's second novel, *The End of the Road*, appeared in 1958 displaying the same traditional characteristics as the first, it seemed Barth would remain content working within existing novelistic conventions" Similarly, Hassan (1973: 57) „The first two novels of Barth have a certain wry energy, though their structures still conform to the conventions of fiction". The opposite view is represented by T. Tanner (1971) who sees the continuity of certain problems throughout Barth's work.

philosophical conventions and their relationship with the fictional techniques used in the first two novels distinguishes them from the main stream of realistic tradition. As these philosophical connections suggest, the concept of literature as a verbal play, so characteristic of Barth's later work, is already present in *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road*. Thus they may be said to anticipate further developments of Barth's fiction, in the sense of driving the author's attention toward the problems inherent in the fiction-writing process. They are also symptomatic of Barth's recognition of his creative freedom, the freedom which he will exercise exhaustively in plotting, structuring and mixing literary conventions and traditions in *Giles Goat-Boy* or experimenting with different forms of the author's voice in *Lost in the Funhouse*.

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