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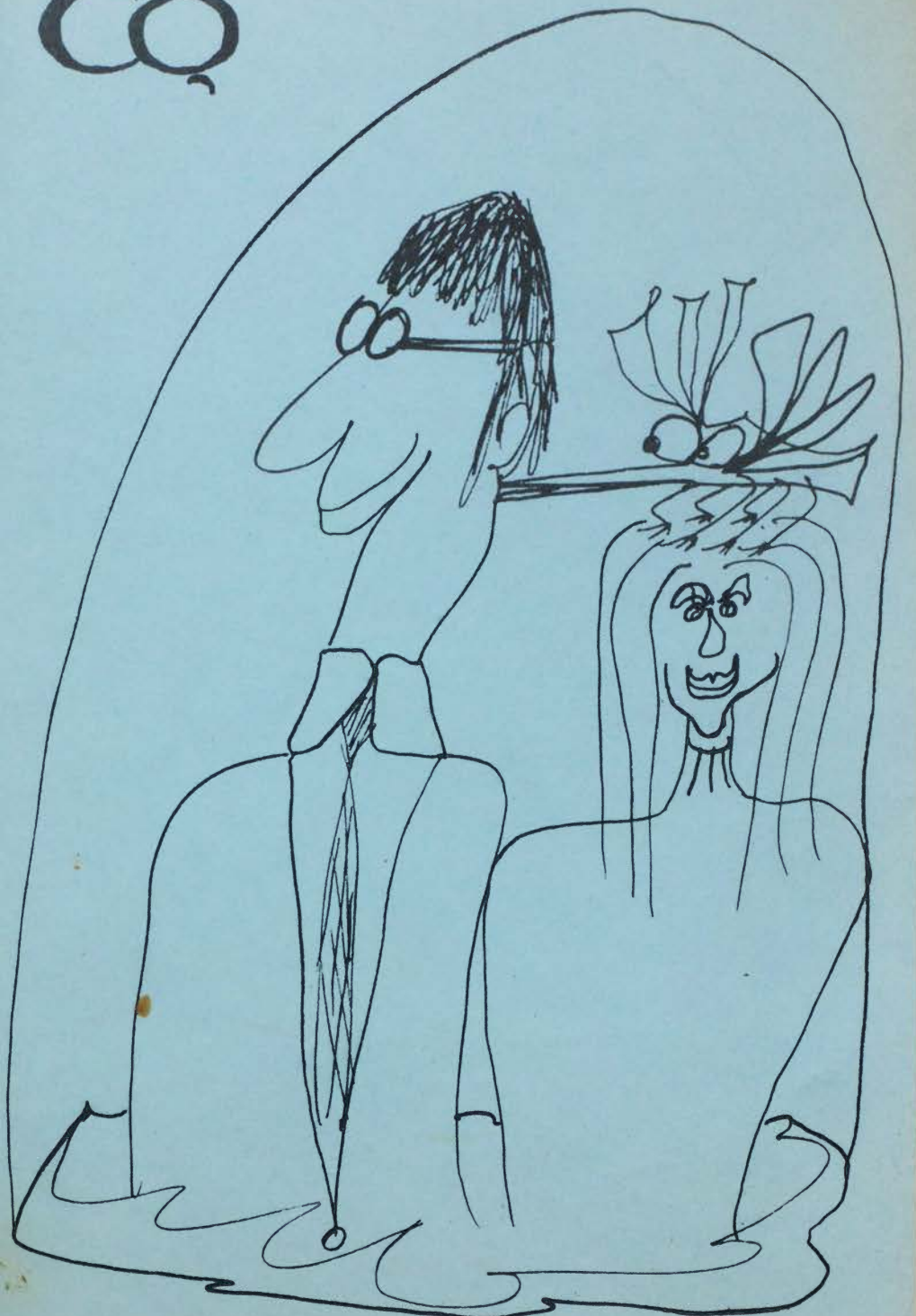

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JONATHAN SWIFT AND E.E. CUMMINGS ON MAN

What could an eighteenth century Anglican cleric possibly have in common with an unorthodox twentieth century poet? Both Jonathan Swift and e.e. cummings can be regarded as satirists--the usual appellation for Swift but also appropriate for cummings. They share a satirical object--man.

Before examining the specific satires of man of Swift and cummings, it is necessary to consider briefly what the universal foundation for satire is. The satirist is the epitome of an idealist. His vision of what should be is grossly contradicted by what is. Satire provides a vehicle for sharply delieating this contradiction.

Therefore, through their satires, Swift and cummings illuminate their visions of man. In essence, Swift emphatically says: Look at what you are--a brutish Yahoo produced by irrationality. Conversely, cummings says: Look at what you can become--an "i" whose incredible potentialities will be realized if you renounce excessive rationality.

To begin with Jonathan Swift, how does he communicate his vision of man as Yahoo? What demonstration does he offer as proof that man is not "animal rationale" but merely "rationis capax"? One possible answer to these queries ensues from examination of Gulliver's Travels.

In part I of Gulliver's Travels, "A Voyage to Lilliput," Swift utilizes a size contrast to reveal man's "littleness" and irrationality through Gulliver's observations of the ridiculous practices of the Lilliputians. For example, governmental positions are awarded on the specious basis of a rope dance:

> When a great office is vacant either by death or disgrace (which often happens) five or six of those candidates petition the Emperor to

> entertain his Majesty and the court with a dance on the rope and whoever jumps the highest without falling succeeds in the office.[1]

Party differences rest upon a tenuos ideological foundation: "...two struggling parties in the empire, under the names of Tramecksan and Slamecksan, from the high and low heels on their shoes."[2] The internecine Big-Endian Wars were caused by the breaking of an egg: "It is computed that eleven thousand persons have at several times suffered death, rather than submit to break their eggs at their smaller end."[3] Finally, after Gulliver negotiates peace with Blefuscu, extinguishes a fire in the palace, and renders many other services to the Lilliputian kingdom, he is charged with treason. His sentence was loss of his eyes, pronounced in a proclamation of mercy:

> It was a custom introduced by this prince and his ministry...that after the court had decreed any cruel execution, either to gratify the monarch's resentment, or the malice of a favourite, the Emperor always made a speech to his whole council, expressing his great lenity and tenderness, as qualities known and confessed by all the world.[4]

Yet Gulliver's observations remain extraneous to him. Although he speaks of "...the most scandalous corruptions into which these people are fallen by the degenerate nature of man..."[5], he does not associate the irrationalities of the Lilliputians with his own initial reaction to them:

> I confess I was often tempted, while they were passing backwards and forwards on my body, to seize forty or fifty of the first that came in my reach, and dash them against the ground.[6]

Thus, in Part I, Swift employs an exemption principle.[7]

In Part II, "A Voyage to Brobdingnag," a reversal of the size contrast is operative. The giant king's observation of Gulliver exposes man's "littleness," irrationality, and inhumanness. Swift utilizes a pointed insect imagery. To illustrate, his initial

reactions to Gulliver prompted the king to remark: "...how contemptible a thing was human grandeur, which could be mimicked by such diminutive insects."[8] After inquiries into the state of Europe, the king concludes with a direct commentary on man:

> ...It doth not appear from all you have said, how any one perfection is required towards the procurement of any one station among you, much less that men are ennobled on account of their virtue... I cannot but conclude the bulk of your natives to be the most pernicious race of little odious vermin that nature ever suffered to crawl upon the surface of the earth.[9]

That Gulliver does not comprehend the king's accusation is exhibited by his attempt to "...ingratiate myself farther into his Majesty's favour..."[10] by offering him the gift of destructive weapons. After relating the capabilities of those terrible engines, Gulliver almost incredulously states:

> The king was struck with horror...He was amazed how so impotent and groveling an insect as I (these were his expressions) could entertain such inhuman ideas, and in so familiar a manner as to appear wholly unmoved at all the scenes of blood and desolation, which I had painted as the common effects of those destructives machines...[11]

Paralleling the situation in Lilliput, Gulliver's vision of himself and mankind in the mirror before him is obscured. Rather, he was preoccupied with the king's "deficiencies": "A strange effect of narrow principles and short views!"[12] Gulliver concludes: ",,,it would be hard indeed, if so remote a prince's notions of virtue and vice were to be offered as a standard for all mankind."[13]

Thus, although his vision of man as irrational animal is asserted more vehemently in Part II, Swift allows the exemption principle from Part I to remain operative. The king's invective was directed at "the bulk of your nation", attenuating its impact by allowing some men who are not "odious vermin" to escape.

In Part III, "A voyage to Laputa, Balnibarbi, Glubbdubdrib, Luggnagg, and Japan," Swift exhibits man's irrationality in the misuse and misapplication of reason--especially as manifested in mathematics and science. Upon encountering the people of Laputa, Gulliver observes:

> ...the minds of these people are so taken up with intense speculations, that they neither can speak, nor attend to the discourses of others, without being roused by some esternal taction upon the organs of speech and hearing; for which reason those persons who are able to afford it always keep a flapper...[14]

Having channelled all energies into mathematics, the Laputans successfully designed an ingenious flying island. That this concentrated focus has been detrimental to their other faculties is evident from Gulliver's statement:

> Their ideas are perpetually conversant in lines and figures. If they would, for example, praise the beauty of a woman or any other animal, they describe it by rhombs, circles, parallelograms, ellipses, and other geometrical terms...[15]

Excessive involvement in the rational thaought of mathematics and science paradoxically has caused the Laputans to exhibit marked deficiencies in reason:

> And although they are dextrous enough upon a piece of paper in the management of the rule, the pencil, and the divider, yet in the common actions and behavior of life I have not seen a more clumsy, awkward, and unhandy people...They are very bad reasoners, and vehemently given to opposition, unless when they happen to be of the right opinion, which is seldom their case.[16]

Swift emphasizes his point more vehemently in Gulliver's visit to Lagado. First of all, Gulliver is struck by the deplorable conditions in the city of Lagado--strangely built houses in disrepair, people in rags, barren fields. As he says: "I never knew a soil so unahppily

cultivated, houses so ill contrived and so ruinous, or a people whose countenances and habit expressed so much misery and want." [17] In juxtaposition to this situation are the beautiful home and gardens of the Governor of Lagado who had preserved the "the best rules of ancient architecture." [18]

Why did the people live in such squalor? Why did the Governor intend to destroy his home and plantation so as not to incur "...the censure of pride, singularity, affection, ignorance, caprice..." [19]? In response, the Governor related:

> ...certain persons went up to Laputa either upon business or diversion, and after five months continuance came back with a very little smattering in mathematics , but full of volatile spirits...That these persons upon their return began to dislike the management of everything below, and fell into schemes of putting all arts and sciences, language and mechanics upon a new foot. To this end they procured a royal patent for erecting an academy of Projectors..." [20]

Elaborating further, the Governor described the Academy:

> In these colleges, the professors contrive new rules and methods of agriculture and building and new instruments and tools for all trades and manufacture, whereby, as they undertake, one man shall do the work of ten; a palace may be built in a week, of material so durable as to last for ever without repairing. All the fruits of the earth shall come to maturity at whatever season we think fit to choose, and increase an hundred fold more than they do at present, with innumerable other happy proposals. The only inconvenience is, that none of these projects are yet brought to perfection and in the mean time the whole country lies miserably waste..." [21]

Gulliver's visit to the Grand Academy reveals

the scope of the projects. He encounters a gentleman attempting to extract sunbeams from cucumbers, one building houses from the roof down, another endeavoring to soften marble for pillows and pincushions, still another striving to breed naked sheep. Thus, Swift comments on specious pursuits which usurp the title "science". More significant, however, is his demonstration of man's irrationality by the fact that the people of Lagado sacrificed a previous comfortable condition for the promise of a technological panacea for the evils which were probably much more bearable than their present situation.

Some further ramifications of Swift's point in Part III can be seen by application to twentieth century society with its emphasis and reliance upon science and technology. There is little difference between extracting sunbeams from cucumbers and attempting to determine how neighboring molecules affect nuclear energy levels or what lunar rocks indicate about the moon's surface when one considers the question of pure versus applied science. Can scientific inquiry for its own sake be justified? Or is the scientist obligated to apply himself to the specific problems at hand--problems such as housing shortage, overpopulation, pollution, food shortage, etc.? These are questions Swift might ask of Projectors today.

Despite Swift's pointed commentary in Part III, man is still able to elude his grasp. But in PartIV, "A Voyage to the Country of the Houyhnhnms", Swift makes an absolute statement about"...the falsity of that definition animal rationale..." [22] by contrasting Houyhnhnmand Yahoo.

Several instances in the voyage specifically i indicate man's irrationality. Of the Houyhnhnms, Gulliver overtly states,"...the behavior of these animals was so orderly and rational..." [23] The Yahoos were called " the most unteachable of all animals." [24] By perceptively defining speech as a vehicle of understanding, Gulliver's Houyhnhnm master emphasizes the irrationslity of the common human practice of lying. Gulliver's description of England to his Houyhnhnm master accentuates man's deficiency in reason. The most brutal wars, Gulliver'states, are "...those occasioned by difference of opinion, especially if it

be in things indifferent."[25] A soldier is "...a Yahoo hired to kill in cold blood as many of his own species, who have never offended him..."[26] Lawyers are a conglomerate of men trained to prove "...that white is black and black is white..."[27] In response, the Houyhnhnm master concludes that the "...institutions of government and law were plainly owing to our gross defects in reason..."[28]

These illustrations of man's irrationality are similar to those given in Parts I, II, and III. But in Part IV, they are no longer extraneous to Gulliver. He is now personally involved, open, reacting:

> But I must freely confess that the many virtues of those excellent quadrupeds, placed in opposite view to human corruptions, had so far opened my eyes and enlarged my understanding, that I began to view the actions and passions of man in a very different light, and to think the honour of my own kind not worth managing.[29]

The exemption principle breaks down in Houyhnhnm-land. Swift's satiric finger points to all and he demands "...how came you to claim an exception from all Mankind?"[30] The core of his satire is exposed. Gulliver is a Yahoo. Irrational man is a Yahoo. As Gulliver admits:

> When I thought of my family, my friends, my countrymen, or the human race in general, I considered them as they really were, Yahoos in shape and disposition, only a little more civilized and qualified with the gift of speech, but making no other use of reason than to improve and multiply those vices whereof their bretheren in this country had only the store that nature allotted them.[31]

Thus, Part IV is the culminating expression of Swift's vision of man as a deplorable, irrational Yahoo. As this vision was valid and justified in eighteenth century English society, so, too, would be its application to twentieth century society. A contemporary Swift couod point accusingly at governmental offices awarded on the basis of hard-sell politics, wars fought for economy as much as ideology, billions

of dollars poured into the technology of overkill, and poverty and disease in the midst of overprosperity and organ transplants and shout: Look at what you ARE!

A twentieth century poet has observed contemporary society, but punctuates his observations with a very different exhortation than Swift. e.e.cummings triumphantly announces to man: Look at what you can BECOME! What this vision is based upon is the contrast between "i" and "mostpeople".

i is an IS,[32] the expression of total being with unclouded vision, unconditioned emotions and ability to love without fear. He has shattered conventional categories and emerged from the rubble a whole man, alive and responsive. Security, success, comforts, stability have been sacrificed for freedom. In a world of stereotyped death, the individual is life. In contrast, mostpeople, cummings' specific satirical objects, are frozen, sterile, empty shells chained to conventions, ideologies, systems, beliefs. They respond only in terms of categories. Widespread opinion is security. Group acceptance is status. Life for mostpeople isn't.

cummings presents concrete illustrations of his concept of individuality in certain poems. In "one winter afternoon", cummings introduces us to a clown who, in the midst of rush hour, stops to give him a daisy. In the words of the poem, the clown-individual was:

> a mystery for which i've
> no word except alive
>
> --that is completely alert
> and miraculously whole
>
> with not merely a mind and a heart
> but unquestionably a soul--[33]

The poem, "but mr can you maybe listen there's" confronts us with a tramp examining middle class society from the outside. Since he does not conform to taking a job and earning a living, his future is: "touching this crump/led cap mumble some/thing to oh no/body."[34] This is in contrast to mostpeople whose:

...future is toothsome like
(they got
pockets full may take a littl
e nibble now And then
bite) candy[35]

Yet, the destitute tramp-individual concludes by pointing a finger at mostpeople:

who may

you

be
any
how?
down
to
smoking
found
Butts [36]

That he is not to be pitied is the tramp's message. He is alive. Rather pity the conformists who worship "found/Butts"--all the excuses, rationalizations of those caught up in earning a living. They have forgotten how to live.

In "i sing of Olaf glad and big", cummings presents another individual, Olaf:

whose warmest heart recoiled at war:
a conscientious object-or[37]

Olaf was an "or". He stood apart from "(a yearning nation*s blueeyed pride)"[38] for his concept of patriotism did not include being an instrument of torture. Olaf possessed the unique courage to die, not for a country, but because of it. In this, "...he was/more brave than me; more blond than you."[39]

In contradistinction to this celebration of dynamic, alive i, one can observe cummings' merciless satire of sterile, cold mostpeople, "this collective pseudobeast"[40] who does "nothing but preexist."[41] He is not speaking softly when he says:

of Course life being just a Reflex you
know since Everything is Relative or

to sum it All Up god being Dead (not to

mention inTerred)
LONG LIVE that Upwardlooking
serene Illustrious and Beatific
Lord Of Creation,MAN:
at a least crooking
if Whose compassionate digit,earth's most terrific

quadruped swoons into billiardBalls!

mostpeople are entangled in the categories of sense and are ignorant of spontaneous response. They vegetate in a loveless, collective, mechanical, two-dimensional world of nouns, of "if" instead of living in the three-dimensional world of verbs, of "yes". mostpeople, in exchange for security and group approbation, have sacrificed their individuality, their human dignity, thus becoming interchangeable parts: "your Harry's Tom, your Tom is Dick."[43]

Why then does cummings bother to satirize these inert, programmed beings? The effort is rooted in cummings vision of the infinite potential and worth of man which he proclaims as vigorously as he derides the "collective pseudobeast":

what if a much of a which of a wind
gives the truth to summer's lie
bloodies with dizzying leaves the sun
and yanks immortal stars awry?
Blow king to beggar and queen to seem
(blow friend to fiend: blow space to time)
when skies are hanged and oceans drowned
the single secret will still be man[44]

This potential that cummings envisions coming to fruition in the individual is an emergence of a free, alive, spontaneous, "YES" being who responds to his environment without consulting traditional beliefs. i has traded group acceptance for that priceless possession of human dignity.

But how did i escape the fate of mostpeople? Or,

to state the question differently, what makes mostpeople mostpeople? At variance with Swift's answer of irrationality, cummings would respond most emphatically that the cause is the mind, exhorting:

> let's live suddenly without thinking
> under honest trees[45]

This is not anti-intellectualism but rather a derision of excessive emphasis on reason as separated from heart and soul:

> ...when Souls are outlawed,Hearts are sick,
> Hearts being sick,Minds nothing can...[46]

Inversion of the natural order and creation of an artificial world results from this separation. That this is fatal to mostpeople is illustrated by cummings' convidtion that immersion in natural processes is essential to i. Immersion enables him to transcend:

> I will wade out
> till my thighs are steeped in
> burning flowers
> I will take the sun in my mouth
> and leap into the ripe air
> Alive
> with closed eyes
> to dash against darkness[47]

Man's reason is destroying him, entangling him in futile queries, dissecting beauty and causing creativity to shrivel into manufacture. As cummings states:

> when god decided to invent
> everything he took one
> breath bigger than a circustent
> and everything began
>
> when man determined to destroy
> himself he picked the was
> of shall and finding only why
> smashed it into because[48]

Essentially, therefore, cummings' declaration to modern mostpeople man is that "...life is more true than reason will deceive."[49] He is unflinching when he exhorts:

> mind's a coward,lies are laws
> laugh,and make each no thy yes:
> love,and give because the way
>
> --gracious wanderer,be thou gay[50]

And cummings holds up i--all the clowns, tramps, Olafs--as exemplary, as the mirror of what mostpeople can become by relinquishing excessive reason. Therefore, despite their ostracism, i has a responsibility to mostpeople to act as their teacher and guide. cummings illustrates the characteristics of the mostpeople reaction:

> worshipping Sam&
> they squirm and they spawn
> and a world is for them, then; whose
> death's to be born)
>
> his birth is their fear is their blind fear
> --haunts all unsleep
> this cry of one fiend
> a thousand dreams thick[51]

In the face of this withdrawal, this ostracism, this reaction, the individual is undaunted:

> and a hundred joys high are such shoulders
> as cowards will scheme
> to harness:let all
> unfools of unbeing
>
> set traps for his heart
> lay snares for his feet
> (who wanders through only white darkness
> who moves in black light[52]

mostpeople can do nothing to deter i from:

dancing isn'ts on why,digging bridges with mirrors
from whispers to stars;
climbing silence for ifs
diving under because)[53]

Are the efforts of i worthwhile? Does the individual have any chance of success with mostpeople? cummings emphatically says yes. Thus, there is a positive assertion underlying all of cummings' satire, rooted in his conviction that man can be touched by the individual at his very humanness, he envisions the the "collective pseudobeast" once again becoming dignified human individuals, immersed in the natural order, mind tempered with heart and soul. cummings' satire, his vision, is grounded in the triumph of the knife-sharpener-individual who comes quietly, imperceptibly like spring to take up the "very oldest lives" of mostpeople and:

he sharpens is to am
he sharpens say to sing
you'd almost cut your thumb
so right he sharpens wrong

and when their lives are keen
he throws the world a kiss
and slings his wheel upon
his back and off he goes[54]

Is cummings' optimistic vision of man justified in a world which so well fits Swift's vision? I, along with cummings, must answer affirmatively. Although man's irrationality and inhumanness have prompted him to allow Auschwitz, Vietnam, Biafra, H-bombs, and Indian reservations a place in his world, his humanity has made the Peace Corps, the International Red Cross, the hospital ship, HOPE, SANE, and the peace movement a part of his society, too. Although the twentieth century produced a Hitler, it also brought forth a John XXIII. Perhaps this is illustrative of man's essentially paradoxical nature--a point recognized by both Swift and cummings. As Swift states: "...I hate and detest that animal called man, although I heartly love John, Peter, Thomas, and so forth."[55] Logically, it is impossible to hate mankind but love

individuals. But it is possible if man is both Houyhnhnm and Yahoo, both i and mostpeople, because even if collective man exhibits the Yahoo-mostpeople component, individuals are able to project the Houyhnhnm-i dimension. e.e.cummings perhaps best summarizes this paradoxical vision of man:

> Humanity i love you because you
> are perpetually putting the secret of
> life in your pants and forgetting
> it's there and sitting down
>
> on it
> and because you are
> forever making poems in the lap
> of death Humanity
>
> i hate you.[56]

Patricia Holan

Notes

1. Jonathan Swift, Gulliver's Travels and Other Writings, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), p. 31.
2. Ibid., p. 38.
3. Ibid., p. 39.
4. Ibid., p. 58.
5. Ibid., p. 48.
6. Ibid., p. 19.
7. W.B. Carnochan, Lemuel Gulliver's Mirror for Man, (Berkely: University of California Press, 1968), p. 64.
8. Swift, p. 86.
9. Ibid., pp. 106-107.
10. Ibid., p. 108.
11. Ibid., pp. 108-109.
12. Ibid., p. 109.
13. Ibid., p. 108.
14. Ibid., p. 128.
15. Ibid., p. 131.
16. Ibid., p. 131.
17. Ibid., p. 142.
18. Ibid., p. 143.

19. Ibid., p. 143.
20. Ibid., p. 143.
21. Ibid., p. 144.
22. Ibid., p. 494.
23. Ibid., p. 183.
24. Ibid., p. 214.
25. Ibid., p. 198.
26. Ibid., p. 199.
27. Ibid., p. 201.
28. Ibid., p. 209.
29. Ibid., p. 208.
30. Carnochan, p. 85.
31. Swift, p. 225.
32. Richard Wegner, The Poetry and Prose of e.e. cummings. (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1965), p. 77.
33. Ibid., p. 39.
34. e.e.cummings, Poems: 1923-1954. (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1954), p. 226.
35. Ibid., p. 226.
36. Ibid., p. 227
37. Ibid., p. 244.
38. Ibid., p. 244.
39. Ibid., p. 245.
40. Ibid., p. 390.
41. Ibid., p. 390.
42. Ibid., p. 227.
43. Ibid., p. 314.
44. Ibid., p. 401.
45. Ibid., p. 121.
46. Ibid., p. 314.
47. Ibid., p. 139.
48. Ibid., p. 404.
49. Ibid., p. 421.
50. Ibid., p. 457.
51. Ibid., pp. 314-315.
52. Ibid., p. 315.
53. Ibid., p. 315.
54. Ibid., p. 443.
55. Swift, p. 494.
56. cummings, p. 152.

THE IGNORANT HILL PEOPLE

Once upon a time there was a country named Usa. It was a nice country, with a good government, and people generally were happy and satisfied there. But it had a strange custom regarding its roads. They were never built anywhere except on the plains.

This struck the hill people as odd. Certainly they needed roads as much as the plains people, they reasoned. Even more, in fact. They paid a road tax as much as anybody else--a tax which, by the way, was constantly going up. Why, then, didn't the government spend some of the tax money on them too and build roads in the hill as well as on the plains?

The hill people began to raise questions about this. They even used such a nasty word as "discrimination." But others wiser than they assured them it was not that at all. After all, they were told, hill people were free to build their own roads, weren't they? No one was stopping them. The country's Civil Liberties Union put it well:

> We have long supported the right of any hill people to build roads and the right of their children to use such roads. But they must not expect, and they should not seek, support from public funds. If they do so, they are invading the constitutional rights of other citizens. Taxpayers cannot be compelled to give direct or indirect aid to any hill activity.

This seemed a strange answer to the hill people. They were not trying to invade anyone's constitutional rights, it seemed to them. Nor were they asking for benefits without being willing to pay their share. They were simply asking that the money they were forced to pay in taxes for roads be somehow allocated to build roads which they could use.

So they complained that the cost of building and maintaining their own roads was burdensome and that

they were suffering a kind of "double taxation." They even began to write letters to newspapers.

Now, it must be admitted that the hill people were of rather simple stock and unacquainted with the subtleties of the educated mind. So, charitably, the country's leading newspapers (which just happened, so it seems, to be located on the plains) attempted to enlighten them. Were there not enough roads in the hills? Were the costs of building and maintaining them at private initiative growing daily more and more prohibitive? No problem at all. Simply forget about living in the hills and move down to the plains where the government was building lots of roads which were "free and open to all." As the Post, in the nation's capital, editorialized: "The system of road building proposed by the President and approved by the Senate does not discriminate against anyone; the roads on the plains are open without the slightest discrimination to children of every geographical background."

Again, this seemed to the hill people a strange answer. They liked living where they were. They had lived there a long time and had their own traditions and customs. They couldn't understand why, when they were taxed to build roads, some arrangement could 't be worked out whereby roads were built where they could use them, without forcing everyone to pack up and move down to the valley.

Now this was a nice country, as I said, with a good government. Some people, in fact, even inclined to think that the hill people might have a point or two. But fortunately (for I would certainly not want to side with the ignorant in our tale) their case never got much of a hearing. The POAU (Persistent Organizers for Absolute Uniformity), a valiant group, alerted the country to the divisiveness of building roads in the hills. They also pointed out that such roads were against the law.

Indeed they were. A group of distinguished lawyers had made that clear beyond doubt. Said the lawyers: "No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any hill activities or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt." Could anything be clearer than that?

Yet it was not clear to the hill people. (I told

you they were not very bright.) They complained that no matter what the lawyers said, tax money was, as a matter of fact, being used all the time and all over the place to support lots of hill activities. What about all the money the government spent at the military academy for that beautiful building (on a hill, no less!) where it made the cadets go every Sunday morning? What about the men hired by the government to talk to its soldiers, sailors and airmen about hills? What about the men paid by the government to open the Legislature each day with a reference to hills?

If the hill people had been educated or had read the newspapers (the newspapers on the plains, that is) they would have seen right away that such questions were silly. What had roads in the hills to do with sailors, airmen or Sunday mornings? If the learned lawyers said it was against the law to build roads in the hills, that was that. What was wrong with the hill people? Didn't they want to obey the laws? There was no reason to get excited. Just let everyone obey the laws.

Our story could go on, but why bother? It's a tale, the flight of someone's imagination. Nothing like this could happen in real life.

Donald Smythe, S.J.

ALWAYS THIS MIRACLE

Now earth, air, animal and sea
Rejoice, each in its medium.
The grass, all feelers, senses sun,
White heaven puffs to cumulous,
The foetus makes his funny face,
Under the ocean currents mix.
Even memories of snow are gone,
Warm is the soul once caught in cold.
No one need ask in a desperate tone:
Who will remove the ponderous stone?

Charles Zarobila

HOUSMAN'S POETIC SCHNAPPS

A major criterion for judging poetry is the extent to which the artist conveys a meaningful message in an elegant and understandable manner. An outstanding artist is always clear in his message, but leaves a certain amount of work to be done by the audience. In this way, he is not overly didactic or expressionistic, but is still able to convey his feelings to the reader. In "Terence, this is stupid stuff," Alfred Edward Housman is able to present his idea of the nature of poetry and the function of the poet in a casual, clear manner, adding touches of irony and humor when they delight the reader without sacrificing clarity.

The poem is basically divided into two parts, the first consisting in an address to Terence, the persona Housman chooses to portray his own feelings, by one of his peers. The speaker in the first section is scorning Housman for writing poetry which killed the cow, and may even kill his friends. The second section contains Terence's reply, in which Housman presents his philosophy on poetry, its powers and effects, and what he feels should be the office of a poet. Terence speaks primarily in terms of the pomp and power of beer. In doint so, however, he distinguishes between the deluding powers of drink and the truth-seeking powers of poetry.

Housman adheres to the Horation standard that poetry should delight as well as instruct. He feels that in this world man needs something to sober himself into reality when ale will not suffice. His only objection to drinking beer in this situation is that its effects are only temporary. Admitting that his potion (poetry) is not so pleasant as ale, Housman justifies his remedy by saying that man should prepare for a world of evil rather than a world of good, which (except for romantics) there is little chance of experiencing. He grants that his poetry "Is not so brisk a

brew as ale," but insists that it is "The better for the embittered hour."

Housman's message is based upon his belief in the therapeutic effects of poetry, not as a romantic cleanser, but as a means of helping man face life. Housman feels poetry is the safest way of learning to face life, and his poem is an example of how literature does provide pleasure as well as instruction.

In the last section of the poem Housman clarifies what he means when he says poetry is "The better for the embittered hour." He does this by citing Mithridates as an example of one who followed the same theory successfully. Mithridates took poison in increasing portions until he finally became immune to it. Consequently, when other members of the court tried to poison his food and drink, he was not fazed by large dosages.

It is not until the end of the poem that the reader realizes the full extent of Housman's genius. He does not include additional lines explaining the significance of the story of Mithridates, simply because they are not necessary. Housman constructed his story clearly enough throughout the body of the poem that, once he presented a vivid exapmle of what he was trying to say, the attentive reader would be able to draw the relation between his example and his theory.

Housman treats a deep subject with light, understandable fluency. Yet, by allowing the reader to relate his extended allusion to his theme, he maintains a great amount of profundity.

James Wm. Spisak

A MOTHER'S LULLABY

Your face. Place your face in my hands.
The time is old, my son,
and I have not held you in many years.
No words. Let the dark speak itself
without the pale hand of words to lighten it.
Untested walls run deepest;
drop no stones by speaking now.
Rather, let me tune the voiceless eyes of you;
let me drop stones to your wells.
Death is close this night. Rest, child.

Lullabies I sang long ago return:
when hopes and dreams marauded the mind
and swept away the years
before we had the wits to stop and question
"Why" or "where." Those days return.
What huge eternities of man my youth
had planned for you! These knobbed hands
were delicate fantasies to me then.
You were infant bronze, and I, mother-sculptor,
carved you well.

But this heavy head returns with scars
and blemishes the magic of younger fingers
might erase. The years deface a mother's work
as a soft wind levels monuments--
one grain at a time.
Fantasies! I dressed you
a doll in the rags of broken dreams,
wound a key, sent you forth--
and lost control. Now we meet again,
and you are torn, unwound,
and I have lost the key that I had found
when keys were all I had.

I could forget I mothered this head.
It rests large upon these drooping breasts,
troubled eyes searching something dried and gone.
I could wish to rock the danger
from your glance again, or,
with a mother's twist, trick you into dance
to make your father laugh away the fears
and harsh monotonies of growing old.

Sand falls from the trees.
The rocks are dizzy in the garden
under the flowers. Nothing is stable.
Faith sits heavy by the door,
unwelcome as the guest who stayed too long
and watched his hostess weep.

Rock with me awhile, my child.
Look at the sun dipping its dream
behind the mountains. Tomorrow,
it will rise again and we can paint it--
with our fingers for brushes.
We will make it bronze!

David M. La Guardia

ROMANESQUE STYLE:
LITERATURE AND ARCHITECTURE

In attempting to study any period of human history, we are confronted with a bewildering multitude of items upon which our attention could be focused. Yet each item by itself might tell us very little about the period in question. If we wish to draw generalizations with any degree of validity about a given era, it will be helpful to consider more than one field of endeavor. In this study we shall use the fields of both literature and architecture in trying to come to some conclusions about the state of mind of the middle ages. For it is to the state of mind of the period that we must look to find a relation between two disciplines. Starting with the concrete, individual works of art, we will have to search out some general concepts which the works may be seen as expressing.

In dealing with the middle ages we must remember that we are really talking about two separate periods. While these periods are closely related, one the obvious and immediate successor to the other, they are sufficiently distinct and to be considered separately. In the language of architecture these periods are referred to as Romanesque and Gothic. In the history of literature, the terms are simply early and late medieval. In the interests of uniformity, let us limit ourselves to the architectural terminology. In this study we shall be concerned exclusively with the Romanesque period and not attempt to apply our conclusions to the later style. For the sake of this paper let us use Romanesque period to refer to any time at which a work was produced according to the Romanesque style. Thus we can avoid the difficulties of trying to enclose a period within a pair of inflexible dates. The advantages of such a definition become evident if we accept the assumption that, at

least at this time, literature and architecture progress at different rates of development, and so the architecture is not contemporaneous with the literature with which it is being compared. The possible circularity of such a definition (e.g. , a Romanesque work is one produced during the Romanesque period) will be avoided if the distinguishing characteristics of the style can be made clear below.

Finding a literary work which expresses the state of mind of an age is by no means an easy task as people seem to have always had a strong inclination to disagree with each other. However, there is one form of literature that is admirably suited to our purposes: the epic. It is by definition the story of a winner. In the epic we are told the national story of a given group of people. The hero of such a story will embody the characteristics most valued by the majority of those people. Intended to reach and express the thoughts of a large audience, the epic is an ideal place to look for the national state of mind. The epic that we shall be dealing with is the Old English Beowulf.

The literary work will be considered along with a work of medieval architecture in pursuit of some common themes which can be expressed in both media. It was in ecclesiastical architecture that the medieval builders did their best work and that the medieval styles reached their fullest development. Just as the size and scope of the epic allowed the writers a full literary expression of the cultural values, the churches were large enough and sufficiently financed for the architects to fully express their ideas in stone. Therefore, the architectural work chosen for this study is the Romanesque church of St. Mary and St. David located in Kilpeck, England.

To avoid the startling conclusion that literature is not architecture, we shall study these works of art not for themselves, but for whatever ideas may be drawn from them.Specifically, they shall be analized accordingto three points: what ethical concepts are expressed? what aesthetic concepts are expressed? what concept of the universe is expressed? These three categories of ethics, aesthetics, amd metaphysics have played an important part in every human culture and

can be expected to have made some mark on every work ever produced. Of course, some media are better suited than others for the expression of a particular concept (e.g., a simple mathematical equation may be translated into logical symbols but a good deal of the simplicity and clarity of the mathematical statement will be lost). So we will not ask of an item more information than its field is capable of delivering.

Beowulf is an epic poem written in Old English some time about the middle of the eighth century, although it may be based on oral tradition going back long before that. Only one manuscript exists, now located in the British Museum. In essence, it tells the story of a European folk tale known as the Bear's Son: a great hero frees a hall of the monsters that have been attacking it. This legend, combined with a few other traditional elements has been re-worked and fused into a unity by a great poet. Part of the artistry of the Beowulf poet is his ability to take his traditional material out of legendary time and place it in a historical context. Several of the persons, places and events mentioned in the poem did actually exist. This gives the story an immediacy and plausibility that no tale set in the long ago and far away could ever have. However, this is no simple chronicle; at all times it is the story of the hero Beowulf that dominates the poem.

It is generally agreed that Beowulf is a poem about a hero of the pre-Christian era written by a Christian. Exactly what the ratio of Christian to pagan elements is and how they contribute to the success of the poem is a matter of some controversy. Dorothy Whitelock says that "an acceptance of the Christian order of things is implicit throughout the poem."[1] However, it can also be pointed out that the emotionally effective parts of the poem (glorious funerals, battles with monsters, the death of the hero, and the very concept of the heroic warrior) are not specifically Christian at all and some are clearly derived from pagan traditions. The over-all impression is one of an incomplete Christianity. It is a Christianity that has not had time entirely to forget the old pagan ways and to develop its own traditions. A fully heroic and throughly Christian character is

not yet conceivable, even by a thoroughly Christian poet.

What ethical concepts would prevail in the society that produces such a poem? The character of Beowulf is guided by a warrior's ethics. This system places great value on personal loyalty and on the creed of unyielding will. This can be seen in Beowulf's devotion to his king and kinsman, Hygelac. When he first presents himself at Heorot, Beowulf intriduces himself as "a nephew of Hygelac and one of his followers."[2] And he proposes to fight Grendel without weapons "as I wish to keep the good opinion of my lord Hygelac (p. 37)." The hero defines himself in terms of his lord. On returning to his homeland, Beowulf makes his report to his king and turns over to him all the treasure he has been given for his exploits because "my whole happiness still depends on you,...King Hygelac (p. 77)." Beowulf's loyalty extended to the support of the royal family and the aristocratic order of society. When Hygelac dies, Beowulf is offered the kingdom and turns it down to support the rightful heir,Heardred, Hygelac's son. It is only after Heardred dies that Beowulf takes his place on the throne according to the traditional order os succession and he "was careful to take revenge for the king's death(p. 83)." This concept of total loyalty to a superior is a necessary element of a warrior's ethic in any culture and survives today in the form of the military chain of command.

More limited and, therefore, perhaps more important for an understanding of medieval society is the extremely high value placed on the unflagging courageous opposition to evil no matter what the odds. Grendel and his mother are not simply obstacles set in the hero's way, they are clearly placed in the moral order of Christianity as descendants of Cain, cursed by God. Grendel is referred to as "God's adversary" and "the enemy of God (p. 45)." And Beowulf prepares to fight him "confident in his great strength and in the favour of God (p. 42)" saying: " God in his wisdom must allot the victory as he sees fit (p. 43)." The monsters that abound in the world are expressions of evil and live in opposition to the divine will. It is the job of a man to set himself against this evil

at all times wherever it may appear. This opposition to evil must be carried out even if it leads to death as it does for Beowulf. From the time that the dragon begins to ravage his land, Beowulf knows that it must be stopped. And he goes to his death without hesitation.

In the concept of unyielding resistance to evil illustrated in Beowulf, the ethos of the pagan warrior has been baptized into a grimly compelling Christian morality. What separates Beowulf from Jack the Giant-Killer or Sigurd the Volsung is that his adventures have been related to a system of cosmic good and evil, giving them a moral value above and beyond the admiration that acts of bravery have always elicited. The implications of such a concept is that as the pagan warrior owed complete loyalty to his sovreign and complete hostilty to his sovreign's enemies, so the Christian (the "Church Militant" ) must be hostile to the enemies of his faith and must always be ready to resist the temptations which surround him.

One of the chief artistic devices employed in Beowulf is a contrast of dark and light. This may be seen as an outgrowth of the antithetical balance of the Old English line. As Professor Tolkien says:[3]

> The lines do not go according to a tune. They are founded on a balance; an opposition between two halves of roughly equivalent phonetic weight and significant content, which are more often rhythmically contrasted than simialar. They are more like masonry than music.

One example of the contrasting lights and darks is in Grendel's attack on Heorot. The monster comes in out of the dark night of the moors and stands in the doorway of the glistening hall with eyes lit by blazing fires. Again in the dark cave at the bottom of the mysterious lake where Grendel's mother lives, Beowulf grapples with her by the "light of a fire, a brilliant flame brightly gleaming (p. 63)." A similar image is found in another cave, where the dragon has kept its treasure-hord. The picture is given of the dark cavern with light flashing from jewels and twisted gold and a gold banner hanging overhead. In this poem and in the

treasures discovered at Sutton Hoo, the Anglo-Saxon aesthetic seems to have been based chiefly on contrasting patterns of light and dark, rather than on shadings of color.

There is a theme of impending doom running through Beowulf which can tell us a lot about the poet's opinion of the universe. It can be seen clearly in the description of Heorot, newly built, a tower of magnificence, "yet it was to endure terrible and leaping flames (pp. 28-29)." Beowulf dies a hero's death but the people he leaves behind are doomed; the Franks and the Frisians and the Swedes will attack, renewing old feuds, as soon as they learn that he is dead. This spirit of doom implies that the dood do not always prosper in this world. God lives elsewhere and he is not about to intervene directly in worldly affairs. The Anglo-Saxon knows that a man succeeds as much by his own effort as by God's will. "For unless he is already doomed, fortune is apt to favour the man who keeps his nerve (p. 40)." And in the battle with Grendel's mother, "Once Beowulf had struggled to his feet, the holy and omniscient ruler of the sky settled the issue in favour of the right. (p. 63)." The divine will is accomplished only through human sweat.

The church of St. Mary and St. David in Kilpeck, Herefordshire, England is an example of Romanesque architecture built about the middle of the twelfth century. It is well preserved and has been altered very little since it was erected. The excellent state of preservation makes this small church important because it enables us to study the richly carved ornamentation as it was planned by the Benedictine builders. Just as the existence of an earlier oral tradition can be argued for Beowulf, this church shows evidence of a tradition of timber construction although no earlier wooden buildings exist in this part of England. This can be seen in the treatment of the hewn stone pilasters of the exterior. They seem to be wooden beams transformed into stone, with cornice taking the place of a tie-beam, something that makes no sense in a stone construction. The timber tradition is also suggested by the monster heads that project from the wallsat the tops of these pilasters. As

Webb points out, they seem to be the stone version of the ornamental ends of wooden wall plates.[4] Although built after the Norman Conquest, St. Mary and St. David includes the Anglo-Saxon building technique of rubble walls.

The ethical opinions of the people who built the church are suggested by the motifs of the sculptural ornamentation, especially that of the south doorway. Here, too, we are presented with the imagery of warriors and monsters. The monsters again can be seen as representations of evil with which the world is fraught (to be discussed more fully below) while the armored warriors show the attitude needed by the Christian to triumph over these evils and attain salvation. They have left the monsters behind and are entwined in the foliage of the Tree of Life. One, his eye fixed on his goal, extends his arm toward the door to the church. The good man is still required to have a fighting man's courage in overcoming the obstacles to his faith. This sculptural program is obviously a good deal more allegorical than Beowulf as it treats of specific warriors at no specific time and cannot be read for the pleasure of its narrative; it is a sermon in stone.

The worshiper who enters the building goes past this representation of the Church Militant to be confronted with the Church Triumphant on the chancel arch. Six three-dimensional carvings of saints flank the sanctuary. They carry the Scripture, the requirements of faith, in their right hands and palm fronds or crosses, the reward of salvation, in their left hands. St. Peter bears the key to the eternal kingdom. Their own sanctity is indicated by their serenity of expression.

The Anglo-Saxon aesthetic principles that we observed in Beowulf can be seen even more clearly in this Romanesque church. The same fascination with grotesquerie that produced Grendel has been lavishly expressed in the sculptural program of the exterior. Monstrous heads emerge from the stone unexpected as Grendel emerging from the darkness of the fens.

The interest in the effect of patterns of contrasting dark and light is also present. This is the

effect of the interlace bodies of the monsters that top the pilasters and of the coiling serpents and intertwining foliage of the south doorway. The thick walls and small windows will produce a dark and mysterious effect inside the small church. The light of the rising sun coming through the central window of the apse must be a dramatic event. Throughout the day, the building itself is a shifting pattern of light and dark. As Rosemary Cramp says:5

> The aesthetic sense shown here linguistically can be paralleled from archeology in the Anglo-Saxon preoccupation with techniques of ornament which produce an effect of light and shade, for instance pierced or interlace work, or the setting of dark garnets against a background of glittering gold or opaque white paste.

A church building may be most conducive to the expression of the concepts of God and the universe held by its builders. As Eliade explains, the church is an imago mundi, a representation of the cosmos.6 This church expresses the Romanesque Christian concept of the universe and sheds some light on the religious beliefs of the people who worshiped there. The corbels which surround the building at the top of the walls depict animals both real and imaginary, wrestlers, dancers, and dragons, all representations of the obstacles provided by the world, the flesh, and the Devil to keep the good Christian away from the salvation of the Chruch. "The whole world of pleasure, passion and sensuality, of demonic temptation and menace, is graphically and unaffectedly set out with the extreme realism which is a recurrent feature of Romanesque churches and cathedrals."7 In the south doorway, the sculptural sermon reaches its climax. Serpents coil about the door jambs while dragons snap at the ends of a series of medalions. The main order of the archivolts, curving over the worshiper*s head as he enters, includes twelve monsters' heads and a dragon rests upon the abacus on each side of the door. A warrior's courage is needed to overcome all these obstacles and attain salvation. The Romanesque Christian universe is fully as hostile as that in which Beowulf lived.

However, in spite of these odds, the possibility of salvation is presented. Amid the monsters of the corbels, it is offered in the figure of a lamb with a cross (Agnus Dei) twice, above the eastern window, through which the divine light enters to illuminate the church/universe, and above the door, through which the faithful pass to seek salvation. The monstrous imagery of the doorway is also balanced by the promise of saving grace. The two middle voussoirs of the main archivolt, flanked by the twelve heads of evil, are carved with an angel harping God's praise and a phoenix, symbol of the Resurrection. Directly above the door, the tympanum is carved with a Tree of Life, the divine order of the Christian cosmos in the midst of all the chaos. Coming to worship in the church, the faithful leave behind the temptations of the serpents and monsters, pass under the Tree of Life and enter into the holy ground of salvation.

It is interesting to not that nowhere on this church is God himself depicted. The Romanesque God, as we saw in Beowulf, is a rather remote one. Salvation is offered to man if he is interested, beyond that he is expected to achieve it on his own and don't expect any miracles. The image of God most popular in Romanesque church carvings, e.g., St. Nicholas in Barfreston, Kent, or Rochester Cathedral, is that of the Pantocrator, the ruler of the universe, a just judge but not the sort that one would establish a close personal relationship with.

So we have seen that a continuity does exist between Romanesque literature and architecture. One field is better equipped to express an ethical insight; the other, a metaphysical; but the two are not disharmonious. It is hoped that these correspondences between the two fields can shed some light upon the culture which produced them.

Tom McGarril

Notes

1. Dorothy Whitelock, The Audience of Beowulf (Oxford, 1951), p. 4.

2. Beowulf, David Wright (trans.) (Harmondsworth, 1957), p. 37. All quotes are taken from this translation.

3. J.R.R. Tolkien, "Beowulf: the Monsters and the Critics," in The Beowulf Poet, Donald K. Fry (ed.) (Englewood Cliffs, 1968), pp. 36-37.

4. Geoffrey Webb, Architecture in Britain: the Middle Ages (Baltimore, 1956), p. 48.

5. Rosemary Cramp, "Beowulf and Archaeology," in Fry, op.cit., p. 124.

6. Mircea Eliade, The Sacred and the Profane (New York, 1959), pp. 47-65.

7. Robert Stoll, Architecture and Sculpture in Early Britain (London, 1967), p. 300.

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FOR THE WEDDING OF ZIKOS

Several fathoms down beneath the water's skin
no rolling engines vie at traffic lights. Within
the cushioned belly of a dogfish lives a hermit
who is waiting for a fluid to digest him. But
the dogfish has been ailing lately, lacking juice
will die of indigestion, turn the hermit loose,
reluctantly to wander from the landed beast
between the bleaching ribs, across the crowded beach.

Kevin Cawley

W.D. SNODGRASS: SOME THOUGHTS
UPON A POET AND HIS POETRY

W.D. Snodgrass is, I think, in many respects the type of poet that all who ever aspired to poetry hoped to be at some time or other during the period of their poetic genesis. Yet what for others may have been of passing interest or, at best, a fond sidelight, half-developed, is nurtured by Snodgrass and honed to perfection in his poetry. Incidents from personal life, however uneventful, have provided subject material and inspiration for innumerable poets throughout history; this in itself is not an expecially surprising or striking observation and, indeed, is quite commonplace. What distinguishes W.D. Snodgrass in this regard is his peculiar intensity as a very personal and human poet: in his works are catalogued the significant people, places, and events that have shaped the course of his life or have altered his outlook upon it. A volume of his poetry reads almost like a chronicle or autobiography of the heart in verse; meaningful characters spring forth from the poet's mind to reenact poignantly the heart-felt dramas and encounters of past experience, interspersed with telling reflections and afterthoughts. Awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1960, it is the rather humble poetry of a rather humble poet and therein, I believe, lies a good deal of its charm and the hauntingly familiar, strangely comfortable nature of its appeal. What is more, the sentiments and ideas embodied and conveyed in Snodgrass's poetry are not the whinings of an egotistical, self-indulgent soul who is wallowing in self-pity and abnegation. They are not personal poems in a narrow, egocentric sense, but rather are sensitive, perceptive accounts of experience, of self and often of others, whose impact and significance are appraised in a quite detached and thoughtful manner. Even in his love poems, laden with churning personal emotions, Snodgrass does not go to the extent

of "wearing his heart on his sleeve"; his poems are simple, honest, straightforward, at times almost stark in the expression of deeply-felt sorrow, affection, or regret. Pretension is something he shuns in his writing--it commands attention and interest, surely, but accomplishes this without having to resort to ostentation in content or style. Such intensely human poetry as his requires no other embellishments; its heart and soul lie in its very humanity and in the universality which this entails. Nothing more is really needed or asked in order to convey his poetic messages. His work mirrors the various locales and environs he has encountered in the course of a very transient, unsettled life up to this point, but particularly do we find characteristics and overtones of his humble residence in Beaver Falls, Pennsylvania, appearing throughout his poetry, lending a subtle sympathy to the sentiments voiced therein. Commenting in the Kenyon Review, John Thompson made an acute observation on the composition of this poet's world, his "universe": "Snodgrass's universe is about as poor a thing as you could find anywhere in America: quonset huts, zoos, an isolated campus, birds that live like vermin in the gullies beside golf courses. It sounds like a small mill town that got missed by out juggernaut of prosperity. But how alive he is there! And how fluently and honestly he writes about it."[1] Far from a stifling atmosphere, it has proven itself to be one which is welcomed and appreciated as an intensifier, a translator, a filter through which thoughts, ideas, and emotions are sifted and in which they are refined. More than one critic (and the poet himself) has pointed out that, in his works, "Snodgrass is walking through the universe."[2]

Prominent also is the poet's strikingly appropriate use of references to nature (particularly of the Pennsulvania parks and countryside, which have their own peculiar charm, and which make his "universe" a little less "poor") and the changing seasons (for example, emphasis upon spring and concomitant Eastertide, particularly in his first volume, The Heart's Needle, 1960). Snodgrass utilizes these elements in a somewhat romantic sense as backgrounds and settings for scenes of intense human drama and experience. However, it should be noted once again that such

descriptions and images are of immeasurable value in reflecting, amplifying, or contrasting the moods and feelings which are the flesh of the poems themselves. Nature in her familiar manifestations becomes a poetic vehicle herself, playing harmony or counterpoint to th the poet's utterences. This is evident in such poems as April Inventory, The Marsh, and the title poem from Heart's Needle, and in selections like September, Leaving Ithaca, and Green Huntsmen from Snodgrass's second volume, After Experience.

A characteristic theme which pervades a substantial portion of his poetry is a wistful, consuming loneliness and a sense of loss. His bitter estrangement from his first wife; his painful separation from his beloved daughter, Cindy, coupled with his deep longing and affection for her and the life they once knew together; the torturous recollections of a married life without love--all these have combined to infuse much of his poetry with a soulful, piercing sorrow, a sorrow that is plaintive and yet dignified in its bearing and outshaping. Probably as a consequence of his own stormy love-relationships, the theme of love, even when presented in poems seemingly free from any explicit references to personal experience, is colored by this bittersweet sadness. Love is repeatedly seen as something which is never quite attained or requited; lost or frustrated, it appears as an agent of pain and grief, one which continually tempts man with promises it seems to never fulfill or which turn to curses in his blundering hands. The lot of man, and Snodgrass himself, is to remain shackled to striving after an unsatisfying love, a love that ultimately brings no succor but only intense disappointment. Such a dismal outlook finds eloquent expression in the following lines from No Use: "That man the gods have curst/ Can ask and always win/ Love, as castaways get/ Whole seas to cure their thirst." But, in the final reckoning, it is "No use in telling us love's/ No use." Man will struggle after it still, for despite all--@We still care...the heart...still thirsts."

Snodgrass's second complete volume of poetry, After Experience, reflects a type of maturation and development in his poetic outlook and in the content of his work. The development in his poetic outlook

does not represent a change or departure from the graphically human and personal style established in his Pulitzer Prize winning initial volume, Heart's Needle, which appeared in 1960. Rather, it can be regarded as a mellowing, an intensification, an expansion of his consummate style, enabling it to embrace topics and ideas not previously considered in his poetry. In this work, he continues to write poetry from direct experience, but now begins to delve into a more objective realm. The events, people, and experiences involved benefit from a new poetic perspective and insight into their humanity and meaningfulness that results from the adoption of a more objective, detached, but by no means impersonal, viewpoint. Snodgrass has not hindered himself as a poet by incorporating such an approach into his writing, but instead has given a freer literary rein and a broadened scope to a mode of expression that distinctively bears his stamp. Concerning After Experience, which first made its appearance in 1968, William Meredith in the New York Times Book Review stated, "Snodgrass offers us, first, a genuine subject imbued with genuine feeling, and second, a voice that is, at least much of the time, personal and unique."[3] Donald Hall writing in the literary review Epoch, comments that "the poetry of Mr. Snodgrass is a stunning example of the use of skill with a finely-developed tact."[4] These and other plaudits give some indication of the surer, more varied and ambitious turn his poetry took in his second volume--a direction which has produced poems that are even more humanly poignant and terrifying.

The ability to attach deep emotion to circumstance and prune recollections of hampering sentimentality, while retaining their gripping accuracy, remains an outstanding quality of Snodgrass's work in both of his volumes. In exercising this talent to confront and preserve in verse the raw, unadulterated facts of his existence, he inclines strongly toward a poet like Yeats, who was able to successfully incorporate himself, his ancestors, his loves, his enemies and friends into his work.[5] Snodgrass is one of those select poets who have subjected their personal and familial situations to a closer-than-normal scrutiny. In writing largely of himself and his position and setting in

life, the poet is faced with delicate problems of tact and tone, which Ibelieve Snodgrass has met and resolved. He has rendered the pitfalls, bafflements, and fleeting joys of experience, personal, familial, and otherwise, in a manner and style that succeeds in combining just the right quantities of balance,, detachment, and a consistent moral and emotional steadfastness. Snodgrass refuses to shun or gloss over the "hard parts," but rather engages and grapples with them in a fashion both authentic and satisfying. Suffusing his works is a welcome awareness of the whole spectrum of human experience--he never severs the link he established with open, deep-seated emotion, a link that supplies his poetry with its enriching vitality and pathos.

Stylistically speaking, the poetry of William De Witt Snodgrass is pleasantly conventional; M.L. Rosenthal refers to him as "one kind of modern classicist, master of a clearly-defined range of sensibility."[6] He uses conventional meters and rhyme schemes with expertise, adapting his poetic expression to them easily and smoothly. His visual imagery is usually quite precise and original; "if he had no other qualities," proclaims Donald Hall, "we would love him for the best pair of eyes since William Carlos Williams."[7] The scenes evoked in The Marsh, for example, bear out this allegation:

> Swampstrife and spatterdock
> lull in heavy waters;
> some thirty little frogs
> spring with each step you walk;
> a fish's belly glitters
> tangled by rotting logs.

Such well-tooled description continues throughout the poem, acting as a very effective prelude to the insistent, yet somewhat mysterious and perhaps unanswerable, query with which the poem concludes:

> You look up; while you walk
> the sun bobs and is snarled
> in the enclosing weir
> of trees, in their dead stalks.

Stick in the mud, old heart,
what are you doing here?

To conclude this abbreviated introduction to Mr. Snodgrass as a poet, I would like to mention briefly a few additional poems from both of his volumes which I found particularly striking and indicative of his talent. Heart's Needle, the title poem from his first volume of the same name, perhaps embodies in a single work all that is praiseworthy in Snodgrass. It consists of a ten-poem sequence addressed to his three year-old daughter, Cindy, from whom he has been separated by divorce:

You break this year's first crust
of snow
off the runningboard to eat,
We manage, though for days
I crave sweets when you leave
and know
they rot my teeth....

The ten-portion sequence takes us from the child's birth to his divorce, his second marriage, and the subdued, grateful triumph that the pangs of a second winter of separation have been endured--"and you are still my daughter." He chronicles the delight occasioned by her infrequent visits in poetic shapings of the intense joy they shared in seasonal experiences together. Easter, Halloween, the Fourth of July--all bear an especial charm that is quenched by the especial sadness attending her inevitable departure. His obstinate, almost pathetic father-love doggedly persists in its devotion to daughter. Furthermore, the unpretentious heartsickness and misery of a distressed father struggling to create common memories that he can cling to--pushing his daughter on a playground swing, learning to prepare omelettes and pancakes so he can feed her at his home when she visits him, visiting the park and museum together--have great impact. "The only possible answer," the poet tries to convince himself, is that "you had to come here less"; but such an obvious solution is something to which he cannot reconcile himself. His dilemma is stated in a controlled confession that is saturated with feeling:

Of all things, only we
have power to choose that we should die;
nothing else is free
in this world, to refuse it...
Child, I have another wife,
another child. We try to choose our life.

But, "Three months now we have been/ apart/ less than a mile. I cannot fight/ or let you go." Part seven of the ten-part sequence, already mentioned, is the image of it all: he pushes the girl's swing, she goes away and returns, "falling back to me stronger," he must push her away, and again she swings back. The poem's title is taken from an old Irish adage, "an only daughter is the needle of the heart."[8] This is uncommon poetry forged out of an all-too-common tragedy, tenderly insightful as a sequential work cumulative in its effect.

In After Experience, Snodgrass can be seen as an occasional poet of sorts within his own private sphere. Leaving Ithaca and April Inventory are illustrative of this tendency; both poems deal with incidents of significance in the poet's life. Leaving Ithaca, written upon his departure from Cornell University, where he taught English from 1955-1957, is a work dedicated "to my plaster replica of the Aphrodite of Melos" (the "lady" of the poem) in which he addresses a revealing interior monologue to the silent, unresponsive statue, the companion of his many wanderings--"Ten years now we've been transients...How often you've been boxed up, shipped or carried/ From house to house, from one love to another." Snodgrass recalls the contentment and tranquillity of their life in the quaintly beautiful countryside of central New York State. "Still, its been lovelier than I would have dared ask here... lovelier than things will likely be again." But, despite nature's fertile loveliness, which he so compellingly describes in his lines, he concludes that "No doubt it would have spoiled us to remain," for already one can detect the encroachment of a crass, shallow, sterile civilization--"Bulldozed lots where men will spend their lives/ In glossy houses kept by glossy wives/ That have no past or future...They keep it in their pants." Poverty-stricken and expecting another child, troubled by the bitter memories of a broken

marriage and the difficulties of the present one, he wavers between an attempt at courageous affirmation and despairing resignation:

> We'll try to live with evils that we choose,
> Try not to envy someone else's vices,
> But make the most of ours. We picked our crisis;
> We'll lose the things we can afford to lose.

Moving, though, cannot be forestalled in the end; life, however crippled, must continue; "And you, Lady--we're taking you along," just as they must shoulder the burdens of the present and the past. April Inventory, a reflection upon life and the business of life upon reaching the age of thirty, is also an admission of the problems and shortcomings he has encountered generally, as well as a musing upon the scars left by aging and some of life's lessons which he has been compelled to learn over the preceding year. Among others:

> I taught myself to name my name.
> To bark back, loosen love, and crying:
> To ease my woman so she came,
> To ease an old man who is dying.
> I have not learned how often I
> Can win, can love, but choose to die.

Powwow and Flash Flood are other occasional poems of note. Their graphic description and the intriguing nature of their underlying thoughts and sentiments make them brilliant, perfectly-finished pieces.

After Experience also contains several poems noteworthy for their especially bitter, reflective, analytical, or resigned tones, in some cases manifesting an element of stunning grotesqueness. The Platform Man presents a bizarre, gripping portrait of a pitiful amputee-beggar ("Squat, dark as a troll/With a gripped wooden block/In each hand) who repels the poets and whom he disparages somewhat ("Such men better get used to the loss"). Yet the cripple, having gained nothing, cannot possibly lose "Things he was saved from wanting" or ambitions he never possessed in the first place. This last sentiment is connected with the acrid reference in the final stanza to his cruel separation from

his daughter and the suggestion of further misery yet to come. Says the poet:

> I'd travel light: take nothing
> Free and give no quarter.
> The curse is far from done
> When they've taken your daughter;
> They can take your son.

A Flat One shares and accentuates this bitterness of tone, this element of grotesqueness. The poet sardonically reflects upon the "time, drugs, and our minds" that were spent in keeping alive an aged, rapidly failing invalid--"Old Fritz...an old soldier"--who was determined "not that he would live, just not to die." After harsh, almost philosophical reflection, he arrives at the conclusion that "It is mad/ To throw our good lives after bad...How many young men did we rob/To keep you hanging on?" In the final analysis, however, the poet must bow reluctantly to a resented obligation:

> You killed for us, and so we kept
> You, because we need to earn our pay.
> No. We'd still have to help you try. We would
> Have killed for you today.

The description of the medical apparatus, paraphenalia, and procedures ("this Dark Age machinery") and the old man's long, agonizing ordeal is both chilling and pathetic.

A group of similar poems--September, Partial Eclipse, Lying Awake, Takeoff, Green Huntsmen, The First Leaf, Regraduating the Lute, Leaving the Motel, and No Use (already referred to), in particular--are all refined syntheses that reflect the spectres of lonliness, separation, and lost, unfulfilled, or uncomforting love that have constantly tormented him in his personal relationships with a former wife and a cherished, but withheld, daughter. An almost sacrificial resignation, a consuming longing, fervent questioning, piercing memories, emotional turmoil, futile speculations--the gamut of human response finds life and expression in the tense, vibrant, unself-sparing style that is Snodgrass. Such poems carry the poet's

admonition to "take things as they are" (Lying Awake), but we often discover him teetering on the brink of self-abnegation, overwhelmed by his reckless, soul-probing "aloneness"--"I cannot find you. No./I cannot see my face" (Green Huntsmen). Poems of this nature are showcases for his ability to use imagery and description so suggestively that he can delay explicit statement of feeling (when necessary) to brief, telling, strategic occasions, usually near the very end of a poem. This directness of expression is greatly aided by the poet's loose and easy command of contemporary idiom, of "natural," familiar speech.

Few poems are as accurately analytical as Examination, Lobsters In The Window, and The Men's Room In The College Chapel. They are finely-wrought probes into the mysterious workings of the human mind and soul which reveal man to himself, exposing aspects of his nature that are less than pleasant, perhaps,but undeniably real. Hence, we find Snodgrass considering "the subversive human in his cell" who"scribbles of sex and excrement" on the lavatory walls of the college chapel--" the old, lewd defiance of mankind." Modern man, in his own fashion, is merely following suit by succumbing to the human compulsion for expression that moved his predecessors--cavemen and early Christians--ages ago. The poet sees this as "the last cave" where the soul, laid bare, "masterless and twisted...turns in its corner like a beast" (The Men's Room In The College Chapel). Examination and Lobsters In The Wind are equally deft and unique in exploring facets of the human mind and condition manifested in the world around us.

Snodgrass exhibits in this volume evidence of his inclination toward more strictly objective attitude in his work ( a tendency which was alluded to earlier) in a series of poems devoted to various paintings by Vuillard, Matisse, Monet, Manet, snd Van Gogh. These display remarkable perception and imagination as poetic translations of the subjects depicted on canvass and the moods, feelings, thoughts, and impressions evoked by them in the poet's mind. His descriptions are so startlingly lucid and captivating in themselves that only considerable familiarity with the artworks in question could possibly deepen a reader's appreci-

action. One is nearly convinced that Snodgrass rather than Monet, Vuillard, or any of the other painters is the actual creator of these works, so intimate is his communion with what he perceives to be their essence. Also included are several translations of poems by Rilke, Rimbaud, Morike, de Nerval, and others that are find accomplishments in their own right and testify to skill of a high order in that field of endeavor.

In the final estimation, the overriding quality that earmarks all of Snodgrass's poetry is the fact that it surpasses or breaks through any confines of manner or style to discover new meanings in the poetic substance itself. Manner or style is not imposed upon the poetic material, but rather derives from it. For having only produced two volumes of poetry up to this point in his literary career, Snodgrass writes like a man who has already composed several. He has succeeded in establishing a reputation, and everything would seem to indicate more and even better achievements from him in the future.

Mark Norman Fink

Notes

[1]John Thompson, "Two Poets," Kenyon Review, (Summer, 1962), 482-90.

[2]Phillip Booth, "Gunn and Snodgrass," Christian Science Monitor, Magazine Section, 14 May 1959, 14.

[3]William Meredith, "In the 'I' of the Poet," New York Times Book Review, LXIV (26 July 1960), 25-27.

[4]Donald Hall, "True Feeling and Good Eyes," Epoch, XI (Spring, 1960), 254-56.

[5]Louise Bogan, "Verse," New Yorker, XXXV (24 Oct. 1959), 194-96.

[6]M.L. Rosenthal, "Notes from the Future: Two Poets," Nation CLXXXIX (20 October 1959), 257-59.

[7]Donald Hall, "True Feeling and Good Eyes," Epoch, XI (Spring, 1960), 254-56.

[8]Janet Fiscaline, "New Patterns," Commonweal, LXX (14 August 1960), 429-32.

Your love glowed--
the moth-minded
conceived fevers for you
and found relief in the
holocause you offered.
Blazing, their martyred hearts sang fulfillment.
Stoked, you leapt and crackled in joy.

Life brimmed within you--
you gloried in its course and flow.
Those thirsty drank at your
turgid breasts and were renewed;
they all became your infants.

But I
ghoulish one
saprophyte
could not bear your life or light--
I foraged your heart for sorrows
and nosed about your nether-soul
in search of regret or despair...

and died of hunger there.

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